



DORSET SELF-EVALUATION OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN NEED OF HELP AND PROTECTION AND CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

February 2022

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Foreword

Dorset Council has bold and ambitious plans to ensure the lives of our residents are as good as they can be. To support this, we continually improve the services we deliver, and commission to improve outcomes.

Through this self-evaluation, based on the Ofsted framework, we shine the light on the fantastic work our staff, partnership colleagues and families have delivered in positively impacting on the outcomes of our communities and identify those area we are committed to improving and developing further, to ensure that every child and young person in Dorset has the best childhood possible.

Following our full ILACS inspection in September and October of 2021, we've progressed our partnership improvement plans, working through our Strengthening Services Board. Our Post Ofsted Action Plan is included in our Phase 2 Plan, which we cover in more detail in this self-evaluation.

In 2021 we embedded our fully integrated locality approach which is showing positive impact in school inclusion, Early Help and Social Work practice. We progressed our plans to open our "Dorset Centre of Excellence" welcoming our first cohort of children and young people in early 2022.

We have opened new Children's Homes, enabling us to keep our children and young people in Dorset, closer to their homes, families and friends. We have also delivered a grow-your-own approach to developing social workers and future leaders.

All of which has had a real impact on improving outcomes for our children and young people.

Theresa Leavy, Executive Director Children's Services



1.2 Key strengths

Our **“Thrive” locality model** demonstrates that children receive the help they need at the right time. Families benefit from a broad range of Early Help services, tailored to their needs and in the places where they live. Partnership working is well-developed, offering a range of options that build on families’ strengths and can be provided without delay.

The **Children’s Advice and Duty Service (ChAD)** model ensures families receive the right support at the right time by clarifying the concerns with referrers and activating local solutions whenever possible. The ‘front door’ provides a calm, well-organised service, where timely and appropriate decisions are made about how to protect and support children most effectively. Parental consent is obtained if appropriate, and families are not subjected to statutory intervention unnecessarily. However, when children are, or may be, at risk of significant harm, social workers investigate quickly, with the support of key partners, including the police, when needed.

Our **SEND services** deliver in an integrated way with colleagues from across early help (including our SEND early help offer), children’s and adult’s social care, education psychology, inclusion and education improvement service. This has enabled our services to hold our most vulnerable and disadvantaged children at the heart of our work and maintain ambitious outcomes through a whole system approach in partnership with education settings.

Our integrated multi-professional locality teams provide efficient and effective **Step-up Step-down** between Early Help and Social Care with appropriate and robust management oversight. **Children who enter our care** do so in a planned way and increasingly following a period of Pre-Proceedings planning. 98.5% of children in care for 4 months or more have a completed Permanence plan in place and our numbers of children in care continue to steadily fall.

Our workforce is largely stable and have manageable workloads. The vacancy rate in social work remains low at 5%. We have a funded ‘grow our own’ and apprenticeship programme that will run over the next three years. Multi-agency toolkits and workforce training, learning and development are promoted and undertaken to ensure staff and managers understand and meet the child and families’ needs focusing on impact and outcomes.

1.3 Areas for development

In October 2021 Ofsted identified the requirement to improve oversight of arrangements when care leavers move in and out of emergency or temporary accommodation.

We have reviewed our wider Care Leaver service and have taken further steps to ensure service improvement and delivery plans are focused on impacting on improving outcomes for our Care Leavers. We are progressing these plans through our member led Care Leavers Delivery Group, which reports into our Corporate Parenting Board.

1.4 Progress Since our last Annual Conversation

1.4a Ofsted ILACS inspection 2021

Ofsted full on-site ILACS September-October 2021, published in November 2021

Area	Rating
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children <i>who</i> need help and protection	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

Fig. 1.1 Ofsted findings November 2021

Recommendation

“Oversight of arrangements when care leavers move in and out of emergency or temporary accommodation.”

1.4b Care Leavers

The Care Leaver Delivery Group has adopted a Care Leaver Covenant which has 5 themes:

- Independent Living
- Education and Employment
- Safe and Secure
- Health
- Financial Independence

The “New Belongings” Delivery Plan has already ensured that our Care Leavers have access to the Rees Foundation “Ask Jan” membership which provides access to comprehensive, practical advice, additional benefits and access to a 24-hour counselling helpline and counselling sessions, and young people in prison have access to a debit card. We have improved our housing options for care leavers through the development of a Joint Protocol between Children’s Services and Housing and are increasing capacity for affordable housing through engagement with Private Landlords and Social Housing Providers, supported by a Council Rent Guarantor scheme. The Care Leaver Delivery Group has welcomed feedback from our young people about how the Care Leaver Offer is presented and accessed online. Together we have co-produced a digital publication of the Care Leaver offer that is inviting and accessible which will be published in March 2022. National Care Leavers Week saw the engagement of members of the Care Leaver Delivery Group in events, including a Business Event co-hosted with the Care Leaver Covenant.

1.4c Post Ofsted Action Plan

We submitted our Post Ofsted Action Plan on 26th January 2022. All actions are completed. We have embedded the Post Ofsted Action Plan into our established, partnership-owned Strengthening Services Plan, which we’ve progressed to Phase 2 in January 2022. The Strengthening Services Board, will review and assess the ongoing impact of the completed actions (covered in more detail in section 2.2c.)

1.4d Partnership working

Partnership working across our Strategic Alliance to deliver the Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2020-23 has progressed. Senior representatives from across the partnership have reviewed and monitored the progress and impact of the Plan and will further develop the evolution of a longer-term, generational plan in 2022 to continue improving outcomes for people in our communities. Section 2.3a includes more detail on the Strategic Alliance.

1.4e Rights of children and young people

A notable programme of work, at the heart of our Children, Young People and Families' Plan, is the Rights of the Child. We have collaborated with Realising Rights, York City Council and our West Dorset Local Alliance Group to develop and deliver 8 x 1.5-hour Workshops developing a Rights Based Approach. These workshops have run from January 2022 and will be completed in March 2022. York University will evaluate the impact of the workshops in Dorset and York to inform further development of the programme as we intend to rollout across Dorset in co-production with our children and young people, adhering to our ethos of "Nothing about us without us".

1.4f Public Law Outline (PLO)

In January 2022 we had 48 children subject to pre proceedings with the average time in pre proceedings between 13-15 weeks. We currently have 103 children whose cases are under consideration by the family courts. The average time for cases progressing through the family courts over the last 3 months has been 22 – 24 weeks.

We have updated our pre proceedings policy and flowchart to give clearer guidance on timeliness and senior management oversight. Our aim is to resolve pre proceedings within 13 weeks, however there are times where more time is required to allow for specialist assessments or intervention. Any pre proceedings that require more than 13 weeks intervention will be reviewed at Locality Line of Sight meetings at 12 weeks. All Pre-Proceedings are then tracked using our Pre-Proceedings tracker to ensure robust and timely planning. Monthly Locality PLO tracking meetings are chaired by the Service Managers and attended by Aspire adoption worker and Team Managers. This has supported early identification of specialist assessments, special guardianship assessments, early permanence and adoption planning. The greater oversight of Service Managers has also ensured that any barriers are addressed in timely way and any exceptions are raised with Head of Locality and Strategy

A Monthly Court Performance meeting also take place with Heads of Locality & Strategy, Service Managers, Head of Service for Quality Assurance and Senior Solicitor to report exceptions, identify themes and barriers arising through court and pre proceedings, share good practice any new practice directions. Any themes arising are then shared with the Court and CAFCASS through our bimonthly CAFCASS liaison meeting and the Local Family Justice Board quarterly meetings.

An area of focus from the ILACS inspection raised the quality and consistency of pre proceedings letters. We have recently moved to standardising these letters to enable consistent quality, with the exception of parents who may have additional needs and a good example of this was seen during the inspection. As part of these improvements, we are now measuring the effectiveness and quality through audit by the Quality Assurance team. We then intend to share good practice examples and continue to embed quality of practice in this area through our advanced practitioner.

1.4f Distance travelled

We continue to use data and data dashboards, to inform service improvements as part of our Performance Management Framework. Distance Travelled from April 2019 to December 2021 can be seen on the visual on the next page. It clearly highlights successful de-escalation at source, with more Early Help and whilst there has been an increase in S47 enquiries we are continuing to see a planned, small decrease in CIN, Child Protection Planning and numbers of children in our care.





National Trends

- ▲ **Early Help Assessments in Year**
131% increase 2013 to 2020
- ▲ **Contacts Received in Year**
87% increase 2008 to 2020
- ▲ **Referrals in Year**
19% increase 2008 to 2020
- ▲ **CIN (incl CP and CIC) at 31 March**
3% increase 2010 to 2020
- ▲ **S47 Enquiries in Year**
162% increase 2008 to 2020
- ▲ **CP Plans at 31 March**
76% increase 2008 to 2020
- ▲ **CIC at 31 March**
32% increase 2008 to 2020
- ▲ **Care Leavers (19-21) at 31 March**
19% increase 2015 to 2020

Source: ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Phase 7 February 2021

Early Help Assessments



▲ **119%**
increase between 2019
and 2021

Contacts



▼ **-8%**
decrease between 2019
and 2021

Referrals



▼ **-5%**
decrease between 2019
and 2021

Section 47 Enquiries



▲ **24%**
increase between 2019
and 2021

Children in Need



▼ **-27%**
decrease between 2019
and 2021

CP Plans



▼ **-14%**
decrease between 2019
and 2021

Children in Care



▼ **-3%**
decrease between 2019
and 2021

Care Leavers



▲ **12%**
increase between 2019
and 2021

1.5 Learning from and working with others

We are a learning organisation and have continued to engage and seek the support of sector leaders throughout 2021/22. The following sections identify the participation and impact of our main activities.

Peer Review of Dorset Children's Services

As part of the South West Peer Review programme in May 2021, Somerset Council carried out a review 'the effectiveness of our quality assurance practice in improving outcomes for children and young people of Dorset'. This was a positive learning opportunity with many strengths identified by Somerset:

- Engagement of staff was positive with a clear focus on children and on improvement of the quality of service.
- Employees expressed strongly that they are committed to the improvement journey and to learning from quality assurance
- Stability of the workforce is a significant strength.
- Process for sharing and learning from good practice could be developed further.

In response to the review, we developed an action plan that included:

- Strengthening the voice of children and young people within the audit process
- Supporting our practitioners to understand and be able to articulate confidently the impact that their work and QA activity is having on outcomes for children
- Highlighting our strengths and areas for development to frontline practitioners by sharing good practice and learning in the 'Workforce Wordout' and on the Children's Hub
- Structuring Practice and Performance meetings to focus explicitly on strengths and areas for development,
- Developing a template to help authors of dip samples and reviews better to focus on analysis of quality assurance activity, helping us to identify and share what has been learnt and any action that is required as a result.

Five to Thrive: Attachment, Trauma and Resilience

We have recently invested in the **Five to Thrive: Attachment, Trauma and Resilience**, ambitious training programme for people who work with expectant parents, children, young people, and their families.

This sustainable training programme ensures those working with our families can understand the impact of secure attachments, promote self-regulation, and understand the potential impact of trauma on individuals, and respond appropriately. We are aiming to engage with 1500 people; to date 910 staff and partners have booked their places. A targeted marketing approach has been taken to individual teams for example, locality teams, Fostering and Adoption, residential setting staff etc. 250 Champions will be identified from the initial cohort and then identifying 30 trainers across staff and partners to sustain the delivery model into the future.

Feedback from webinars include:

- *brilliant, enlightening, self-affirming, motivating! This training has taught me so much about the way we think and why. I cannot thank you enough Dorset Council*

- *That was the best training/ webinar I've been on for a long time. Its everything we work towards put together so well. Fascinating stuff makes me wish I'd stuck at Psychology a bit longer at university!*
- *The course has given me more if an insight into the Five to Thrive model and how important it is within early years and the work I am involved in regarding early help. It will be able to approach conversations with practitioners with more confidence*
- *This model will be adapted to use in my daily practice at the residential centre*
- *Brilliant for Engaging parents at child protection conferences who are feeling stressed, angry, defensive etc I will use the five to thrive framework with parents*

Private Law Pathfinder Pilot

Dorset Children's services have been invited to work with the Dorset Family Courts as part of a pilot initiative to reduce parental conflict and the need for separated families to access court intervention. The pilot, Family Pathfinder, arose from the Family Solutions Group's 2022 report 'What about Me?'¹ that looked at ways of improving the experiences of separating families that did not require the involvement of the family court. The pathfinder was also driven by the courts seeing a noticeable increase in family court applications at the start of the pandemic.

Too often for separated or divorced parents the only support or advice available is legal advice. As an alternative, we are developing early help support, including a digital offer, groups and partnership working through the development of our Family Hubs. This will enable us to work with families and communities at a much earlier stage, which we forecast will lead to some reduction in the applications being made to the court. Our Family Hubs will provide a holistic wrap around service for parents, carers and extended family including advice and support to separated families on ways to reduce the impact of parental conflict on children. The implementation of the pilot service will also provide triage for those court applications that have already been made, to see if alternative non-court-based solutions can be used instead. The pilot will be launched on 21 February.

The Mulberry Bush

We are working in partnership with The Mulberry Bush (Oxfordshire), a leading charity delivering outreach alongside their special school. We are collaborating in two key areas: designing and delivering an accredited Level 4 Certificate in Therapeutic Child Care for residential care staff, which is fully mapped against the mandatory Level 3 Diploma and exceeds mandatory requirements, thus meeting the needs of the most vulnerable children in Dorset.

The learning and development programmes will be made available to other professionals, including Foster Carers, Education, Health and Police, thereby strengthening the wider system. We are also working together to develop Dorset Council's approach to inclusion in mainstream settings through our SEND outreach approach and to support the design and pedagogy within our inclusion hubs (resourced provision).

Birth to Settled Adulthood

Children and Adult Services recognise that the current operating model to support young people through the transition to adulthood across Dorset has not been delivering the outstanding service that our community require and we as an organisation aspire to. As part of the Strengthening

¹ *What about Me? Reframing Support for Families following Parental Separation*, Family Solutions Group (a subgroup of the Private Law Working Group), 2020.

Services and Adults Improvement Programme, it was agreed to jointly commission a review that will identify how:

- Services across People and Place are effectively supporting young people in their Preparation for Adulthood as required by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice.
- Young people have their skills, abilities and opportunities maximised and relative strength supported to grow and develop as individuals.

We are fortunate to have secured Mark Rogers as the chair of our Birth to Settled Adulthood Board. Mark will support our workplan whilst bringing scrutiny by way of high support and high challenge to the partnership.

1.6 Sector-led improvement/development work in the pipeline for 2022

The South West ADCS Sector Led Improvement Group will be delivering a range of programmes in 2022. Dorset have three current Heads of Service/Locality undertaking the Aspiring Assistant Directors Programme. Dorset are also leading on developing further programmes of work to continue the succession planning for local government leadership in partnership with The Staff College. Using funding secured from the Covid Recovery Fund Bid, co-ordinated regionally, in 2022-23 The Staff College will design and deliver two cohorts of 45x Service Managers, aspiring to become Heads of Service.

1.7 Horizon Scanning

As part of our Transformation programme, we're developing the Safeguarding Families Together approach. A sector specialist has been brought in to lead, develop and implement a pilot in Chesil.

The main aspect of this project is creating Multi-Disciplinary Teams working together to support children and parents with high level risk by recruiting specialist adult workers to address domestic abuse, parental mental health and substance misuse to improve children's lives.

This is achieved through a more collaborative way of working where we motivate parents to identify the changes needed within their own families. The Safeguarding Families Together approach seeks to change the way social workers engage with parents, working with them to facilitate their own change of behaviour. Adult practitioners will be co-located, with social workers in Chesil. The adult specialists will provide direct help for families and their children.

We are also implementing two new programmes of work the Pause Programme and the Mockingbird project.



2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background and Context

Dorset is a beautiful coastal and rural county situated in the South West region of England. Over half of Dorset is covered by the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation.

The Dorset rural idyll can conceal hidden deprivation, with significant pockets found mostly in urban coastal areas. There is also rural deprivation due to isolation and difficulty accessing housing, transport, and essential services. The DWP estimates that 25% of Dorset Children are living in poverty.

There are eleven areas (out of a total of 219) in Dorset within the top 20% most deprived nationally for multiple deprivation, compared to ten in 2015. Nine of these are in Weymouth and Portland and one is in the former district of West Dorset. 25 of Dorset's neighbourhoods are in the 20% most deprived nationally in relation to education, compared to 20 in 2015.

46% of Dorset's population live in rural areas. Barriers to housing and essential services are significant in Dorset reflecting rurality and isolation. 66 Dorset neighbourhoods fall in the 20% most deprived nationally for this measure: mapped against the former district council areas, 19 of these are in West Dorset and 21 in North Dorset.

Crime is low in Dorset, with domestic abuse, criminal exploitation, and rural crime identified as priorities for our partner agencies.

Earnings are below average and house prices are high with affordability issues for many young people and keyworkers. Dorset has relatively low birth rates and younger people often move away from the area.

The total population of Dorset is 379,791 (2020 mid-year estimate), this includes 74,305 children and young people aged 0-19 representing 20% of the total population (88,942 aged 0-24 years).

We have 159 schools in Dorset - 1 All through School, 36 First Schools, 2 Infant Schools, 2 Junior Schools, 80 Primary Schools, 10 Middle Schools, 15 Secondary Schools, 3 Upper Schools, 4 Pupil Referral Units and 6 Special Schools. Dorset has been designated one of the 55 Education Investment Areas.

There are 80 different languages spoken in Dorset schools. 8% (Jan 2021 school census) of school age children are from black and minority ethnic communities compared to 35.1% nationally.

We have approximately 3,200 children with Special Educational Needs supported through an Educational, Health and Care Plan out of a wider total of 6,500 children and young people identified with SEN Support needs in our schools. (Oct 2021 school census).

At the end of January 2022 there were:

- **1,313** children and young people being supported through early help
- **1,152** Children in Need (excluding Children in Care and children with a Child Protection Plan)
- **271** Children with a Child Protection Plan
- **434** Children in Care
- **276** Care Leavers.²

² Source: Children's Services Analytics Tool (ChAT)

2.2 Leadership and Governance

2.2a Dorset Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People

Our partnership vision is for ‘Dorset to be the best place to be a child; where communities thrive, and families are supported to be the best they can be’.

We have continued to focus on our long-term strategic aims and aspirations in delivering our Children, Young People and Families’ Plan 2020-23. The partnership and governance arrangements, ensuring that our partnership plans progress, are detailed in section 2.3b.

The Plan is led by the Board of the Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People with colleagues from Dorset Council, Public Health Dorset, Dorset 0-19 Voluntary and Community Sector Forum, Dorset Youth Offending Services, Dorset CCG, Dorset Healthcare, Dorset Parent Carer Council, Schools’ representatives and Early Years representatives and other agencies to deliver on our ambitions for our children. The Board is chaired by the Lead Member for Children’s Services and co-chaired by a partner representative.

The following values and principles are shared by all partners:

- Always putting children and families at the heart of everything we do
- No child or family left behind – we will strive for equity of outcomes for our children, young people, and their families
- Focussing on early intervention and prevention aiming to help early in the life of a problem and providing a graduated response to need – the right help, in the right place, at the right time
- Working restoratively, doing things with families instead of to them, for them or doing nothing
- Thinking Family and working together so that children and families receive a joined-up response and good transitions
- Focussing on strengths within families and communities, understanding the lived experience of children
- Staying with families until outcomes are delivered, embedded and change is sustained
- Being inclusive – we want our children and young people to be able to get the help they need in the county that is their home
- Empowering young people and families to use the information we give them to make decisions for themselves
- Delivering best value for money - spending the Dorset £ in Dorset on the things that get the best outcomes for children and families.

The Alliances’ six priorities are:

- **Best Start in Life** – PAUSE Programme embarking to reduce the number of mothers with multiple children being removed from care.
- **Young and Thriving** – Development and delivery of a two-week “Takeover Challenge” where young people were supported to “takeover” roles and responsibilities, including our own Chief Executive role.
- **Good Care Provision** – Development, registration and launch of additional children’s homes and homes for our Care Leavers; Harbour and Kirtleton Avenue and Review of Short-Term Breaks for children with disabilities and a Keeping In Touch service for our children in care and their families

- **Best Education for All** – Development of a new Education Board for Dorset and the ambitious delivery of Dorset’s Centre of Excellence (Coombe House School) to increase local provision for Dorset’s children and young people with SEND.
- **Best Place to Live** – Rollout of “Rights Based Approach” pilot and young people participating in planning events for the Local Plan (Planning and Building Control – Place Services)
- **Delivering Locally** – Local Alliance Groups developing and delivering services across the partnership locally. Increased promotion, access to and take-up of Early Help services.

We progress the actions of the Plan through the priority delivery groups. Our Annual Report 2021 identified progress during the first year of the Plan and includes updates from across the partnership and is included as appendix 2.

As part of the evolution of our existing Plan, in early 2022 we will add a seventh priority to our 2020-23 Plan, “**Feeling Safe at Home and in the Community**”. This new priority will be linked and embedded across our partnerships in the Strengthening Services Board. Our Transformation Board will also review progress and impact the “Safeguarding Families Together” programme makes for our communities.

Local intelligence from young people have identified, through survey and feedback during participation events, that they do not always feel safe in places they frequent or in their communities.

2.2b Our Children’s Services Strategic Partnership Governance

The diagram below sets out key roles and relationships within our strategic partnership.

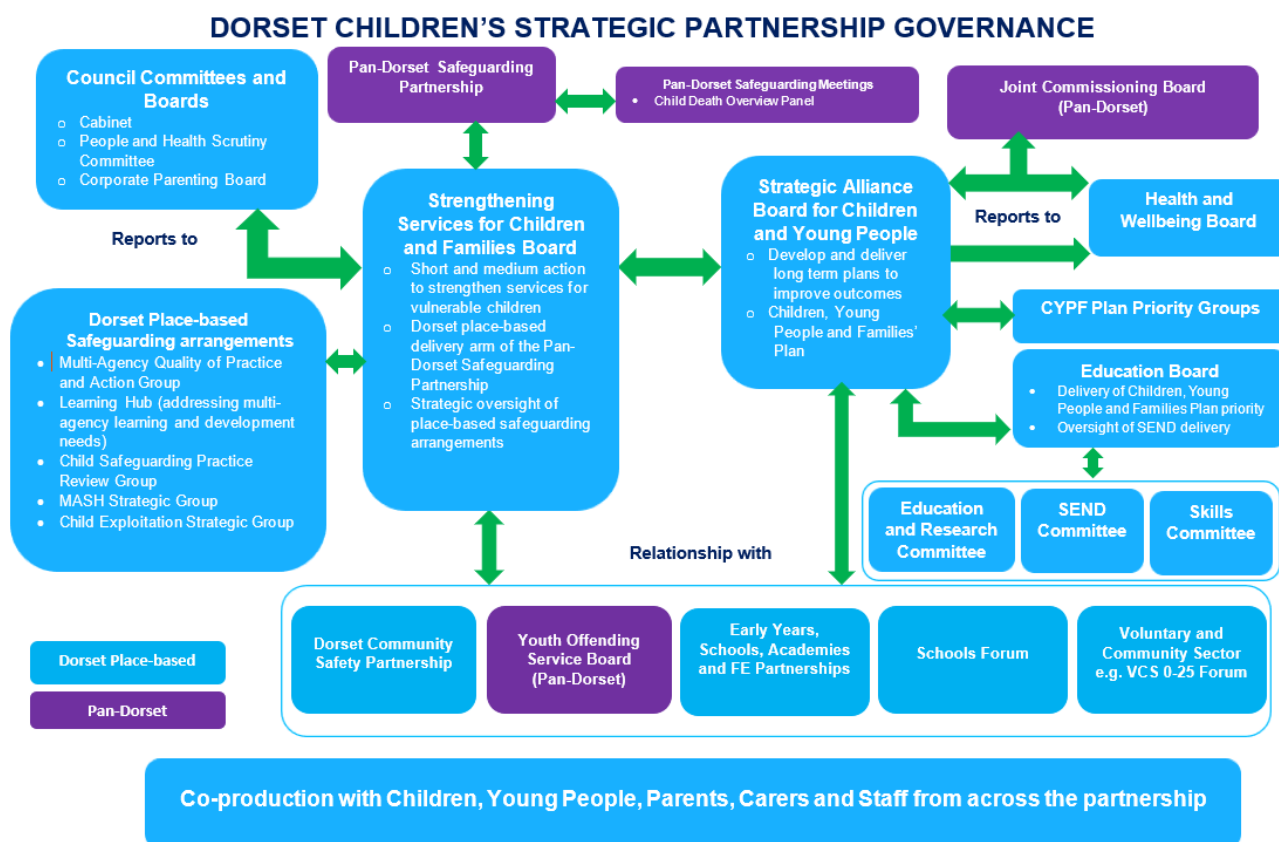


Fig. 2.1 Our Partnership Governance Arrangements

2.2c Strengthening Services Programme

As a partnership we continue to focus on continuous improvement, with rigour and pace and we drive this through our Strengthening Services Programme, it is the delivery arm for both Children's Services and the Dorset Council element of the Pan Dorset Safeguarding Partnership. We have developed and implemented an extensive and comprehensive plan that brings together short and medium-term actions into one Strengthening Services Plan.

The plan is presented in three sections following the continuum of need from early help to services to protect vulnerable children and services for children in care and care leavers, all underpinned by robust leadership, management, and governance.

The Strengthening Services Board meets six-weekly to monitor progress, provide support and challenge and to ensure that improvements are made at pace. Board membership includes both Councillors and senior managers. Work is well underway, and progress is being made on all projects. The work programme for the Board ensures that complex partnership projects receive a 'Deep Dive' enabling Board Members to have a detailed solution-focused discussions. In December 2021 the Strengthening Services Board closed Phase 1 of the Plan and agreed to commence Phase 2 of the Plan in January 2022. Phase 2 of the Plan includes our Post Ofsted Action Plan, submitted to Ofsted on 26th January. Our Post Ofsted Action Plan is included - appendix 1.

2.2d Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership (PDSCP)

The PDSCP meets monthly and holds biannual meetings with its First Tier Pan Dorset Leaders to ensure learning and strategic opportunities are shared and understood. We have reviewed our business unit to ensure it contains suitable capacity for both co-ordination and performance analysis in line with the Wood review. We have refreshed the Quality Assurance subgroup so that it mirrors our new place-based arrangements; it is referred to as the Multi Agency Quality Assurance Group (MAQPAG). This is supported by a learning hub group providing multi agency audit and findings to influence practice changes in our partnership working and build on areas of strengths. We have been working with Dartington Social Research Unit and Collaborate to ensure that our Safeguarding arrangements include the voices of our children and families through understanding how the voices of children and families are currently included, exploring what opportunities there are to deepen and improve this engagement and develop wider principles and models for engagement. These are being delivered through the Board's thematic deep dives, establishing groups for people with a lived experience of the safeguarding system, staff development embedding the principles and developing a more structured way of using existing mechanisms. We have recruited a new, experienced Independent Chair of the PDSCP.

Our Safeguarding Partnership website can be accessed by following this link: [Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) .

The Annual Report for our Safeguarding Partnership can be accessed here: [Annual Reports - Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership](#).

2.3 Financial Position

At quarter 3 2021-22, Children's Services forecast was £74.864m compared with a budget of £72.12m, an overspend of £2.75m (3.81%). There are two main areas of pressure in Children's Services: An increase in external placement costs and a decrease in trading income.

To help address these pressures, the overall budget proposed for Children's Services for 2022-23 is an increase of £2.739m, to £74.481m, an increase of 3.82%.

A key aspect of financial strategy has been to establish budgets that reflect current and planned demand and practice. Achieving this baseline means transformation and tactical service change programmes can be implemented from a stable starting position. £8.96m of additional funding is required to do this.

Children's Services have developed an ambitious evidence-based transformation programme comprising five themes. The transformation programme aims to deliver £14.9m cashable savings over five years, £2.2m in 2022/23. Additionally, there are efficiency savings from reviewing services totalling £2.09m and expected savings from the new Children's home.

2.4 Council Leadership Team

The Chief Executive, Senior Leadership Team and Elected Members play an active role in providing support and challenge to the service and partnership and have a strong line of sight to practice. Regular briefings take place, and both the Chief Executive and Portfolio Holder participate in regular case file audits and practice weeks. Vital signs (KPIs) for children's services are included in the Council's Senior Leadership Team performance dashboard. Through their roles in supporting our strategic partnerships and contributing to our Quality Assurance Framework, the Chief Executive, the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder (alongside senior leaders from across the partnership) have a close line of sight to performance and impact made against our Strengthening Services Plan.

Our Elected Member Development Programme provides supplementary learning and development to enable members to better understand services and examples of our 2021/22 programme as follows:

2021/22 sessions

- Introduction to Children's Services – training for all newly elected councillors
- Safeguarding Children Training – training for all councillors - Induction and Refresher
- Corporate Parenting Board – training for CPB members
- Corporate Parenting Training – training for all councillors – Induction and Refresher
- SEND and Inclusion – training on the SEND early help offer and key statutory duties for all councillors
- Introduction to Children's Services – training for all newly elected councillors
- Fostering Panel – training for panel members

Spotlight sessions – 4 sessions (quarterly)

- Q1 - School Governance and Finance
- Q2 - Young and Thriving – overview
- Q3 – Delivering Locally – overview of CYPFP
- Q4 – Best start in life for under 5's – overview of work being undertaken

2.5 Children's Services Leadership Team

The Senior Leadership Team remains stable. Our Executive Director of Children's Services has been in post since January 2020.

The Corporate Director for Commissioning, Quality and Partnerships took up their post in February 2020 having been covering the role on an acting up position for some time. The position of Corporate Director of Care and Protection was filled on an interim basis in August 2020 by an experienced former Assistant Director; the postholder was appointed permanently on 23 February 2021. They are now progressing their career by taking up the role of Director of Children's Services for Central

Bedfordshire in April 2022. Recruitment is in place for March 2022 for the Corporate Director of Care and Protection to join our outstanding leadership team.

The permanent Corporate Director of Education who commenced their role in September 2019 was seconded to set up a new company to lead the Dorset Centre of Excellence in June 2021. This position has been filled on an interim basis by an experienced former education consultant who has been working alongside our education colleagues on our improvement journey since March 2020.

We have further strengthened our Quality Assurance function across all areas of Children’s Services by recruiting a consultant Senior Quality Assurance Lead and creating a fourth Corporate Director Post with a lead for Quality Assurance., this is presently covered by a highly experienced Interim Leader.

Our extended senior leadership team includes our Heads of Service and portfolio lead Service Managers. Together they take responsibility for leading service improvement alongside the senior leadership team. We have established a culture of continuous improvement through monthly performance Boards, focused on a strengths-based challenge model of performance data and shared learning across the Directorate through our Governance and Meetings and Performance Management Frameworks.

2.6 Dorset Children Thrive

Our established and embedded “Thrive” locality model demonstrates that children receive the help that they need at the right time. Families benefit from a broad range of Early Help services, tailored to their needs and in the places where they live. Partnership working is well-developed, offering a range of options that build on families’ strengths and can be provided without delay.

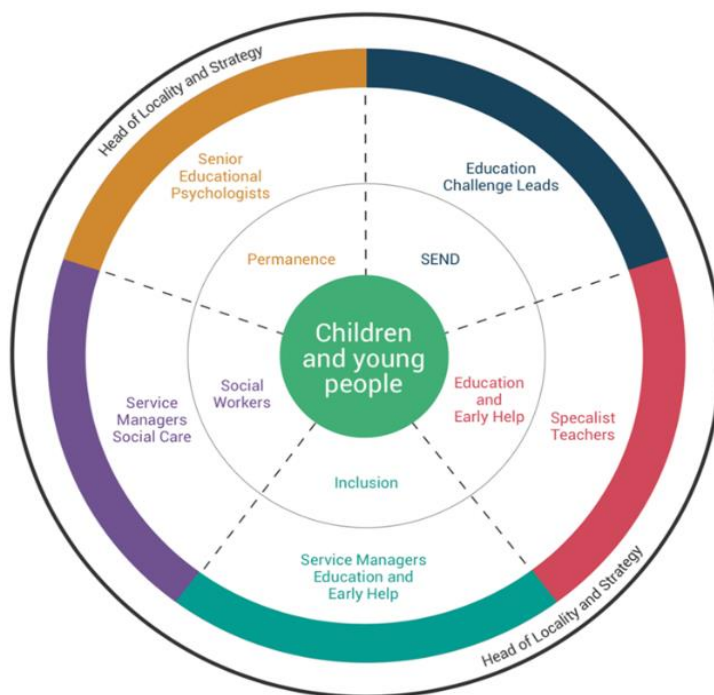


Figure 1.2 Dorset Children Thrive

The locality teams led by a single Head of Locality and Strategy are comprised of colleagues from across Early Help, Children’s Social Care, Educational Psychology, SEND and Inclusion services under

the leadership of Heads of Locality and Strategy that link together with our CCG Primary Care Networks and public health nursing partners.

Matrix management arrangements (where staff report and consult with more than one person) are used so everyone in the team has access to the specialist support they need. Underpinning the model are our design principles that align to the partnership's shared values and principles.

Ofsted identified the strength and impact of our locality model in its 2021 Inspection report “.. the move to a strengths-based locality model of delivery has reaped significant rewards for children and their families. Senior leaders have made rapid and sustainable progress, despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In some cases, the challenges of the pandemic have created fresh opportunities to build trust and cohesion with partners, and this has increased the pace of change. Council leaders had recognised that services needed to change significantly and have given backing, including financial support, to establish the new ways of working.”

2.7 Employee Engagement

Senior leadership engagement with front line colleagues has remained throughout the year, during lockdown and the continuing impact of Covid-19, and we use creative approaches to remain in touch with our employees.

Our regular Diagonal Slice events (Employee Forum) and Employee Symposium events have continued to take place, listening to colleagues about what is important to them, providing feedback and updating on the latest news about progress and how they can help.

Other examples include our Employee Bulletins from the Executive Director, the weekly Workforce Wordout (Practice bulletin) and our 'Thinking Thursday' whole service learning and development sessions.

In addition, regular blogs and twitter feeds are shared by the Executive Director. Senior managers continue to drop into team meetings and visit teams and front-line services for children ensuring a line of sight to practice remains in place. The Corporate Director for Care and Protection and the Principal Social Worker have scheduled quarterly touchdowns with Social Workers.

The Children's Services Hub, our online resource centre, has continued to develop ensuring all employees and managers have access to information about the Directorate. This has included the launch of the In-Focus feature, a simple way of promoting a consistent message regarding an aspect of practice, the Managers Portal and an Induction Programme including invitations to welcome events for all new employees, which are held throughout the year. We have implemented a recognition programme that includes weekly star awards, recognition of development success (apprentices, ASYE, post grad) and an annual awards ceremony.

The Good and Better Conference is held at the end of each quarter and provides an opportunity for front line managers to take stock and review our performance over the previous quarter. The conference brings together information from our activity and performance that we have through our systems, quality of practice and feedback from service users and other professionals. All employees and managers across the service will have a shared understanding of our performance and how we are using our data and quality to continuously improve so our children and their families experience the very best services.

Three employee surveys were launched in 2021 gathering important feedback from the workforce, some of the highlights and our response is outlined below:

Employees said	We did
They want to be managed in a way that supports their wellbeing and to feel more satisfied with their work life balance.	Take care Tuesdays has been introduced (or another time, if Tuesdays aren't a good day for them) were introduced giving some time to use for themselves – using this time to focus on wellbeing or a virtual cuppa and catch up.
They wanted further support from their manager with regular check ins to see how they are doing.	Open door sessions arranged – virtual & in person – so employees can drop in to have a conversation with their manager. - Pilot process in one locality ongoing
They sometimes struggle with the current demands of the role and knowing what support is available.	Wellbeing being included on team meeting agendas so employees can talk about the demands and so they can understand the current wellbeing offer and how to access it.
They wanted to see action as a result of the HIVE surveys.	Team meetings being used to discuss all future HIVE survey results so that action plans can be put in place in a timely manner. 'You Said, We Did' page on the children's hub created
Managers want to feel better equipped with the right skills to support their team's wellbeing. They also want to feel more confident managing teams working in different ways, e.g. some from home, some in an office/workplace, etc.	Managers training on the Dorset Workplace and managing health & wellbeing took place Oct-Dec 2021 to help managers feel more confident and competent.

Fig. 2.3 Employee feedback with outcomes

To support the implementation of our delivery model, Dorset Children Thrive, we have continued to develop The Academy, our in-house resource for supporting and strengthening the quality of our practice.

2.8 Our Workforce

As of 31st January 2022, we have 158 permanent Social Workers (including Advanced Practitioners, Consultant Social Workers, Social Workers and CAMHS Social Workers). Developing a permanent and a stable workforce to ensure our children have stability in their social worker has been a priority for us. We made significant progress throughout 2020/2021 with successful recruitment to social work posts. We have a comprehensive 'grow our own' programme alongside other activities. This included our overseas recruitment partnership, where we recruited 10 experienced social workers who joined us in November 2020 following an extensive induction and team development activity. All 10 of our overseas social workers remain in post today. We have 22 current Social Worker vacancies, 19 are covered temporarily by agency Social Workers. We have recruited a further 7 Social Workers who will be joining over the next 3 months and we are holding a further 6 vacancies for Trainees/ Students who will qualify in 2022 and will start their ASYE programme. This currently leaves 9 social work vacancies that we will continue to recruit to (a vacancy rate of 5.7%).

In line with the national picture the Covid pandemic continues to challenge our workforce and we have seen an increase in overall sickness rates across Children's Services. Based on a 12-month rolling period as at the 31st January 2022 our long-term sickness in social care teams are 11.9 days lost/FTE, which is higher than we would like them to be. We are seeing the longer impact of covid on employee's mental health, workshops were delivered for Managers Oct-Dec 2021 providing

managers with more information and confidence in supporting employee wellbeing. We are however seeing short-term sickness rates improving to 3.5 days lost /FTE. Sickness data is now routinely monitored through our monthly Performance Board and this alongside other HR and employee data is now considered at our Workforce Development Steering Group.

A health & wellbeing focus group which has employee membership from across the service has been established, with a 2-year action plan developed to assist us with providing a positive wellbeing culture. This includes the introduction of the 'Take Care Tuesday' initiative which gives employees time each month to dedicate to their wellbeing. We have worked with our Human Resources and Occupational Health providers to strengthen the support offered to our staff who are experiencing ill health. There is a strong corporate offer of wellbeing support and resources for all our employees, including access to evidence based talking therapies such as cognitive behaviour therapy, mindfulness, and counselling. We continue to promote this to our managers and our teams through regular communication. We have seen an 8% rise in the use of our inhouse occupational health support since 2020, with 13% of the Social Care workforce receiving support in 2021.

The numbers of children being supported by a social worker have remained consistent over the past 6 months for all social workers. The average number of children being supported by a social worker is 14 in December 2021 having reduced from 18.8 in March 2020. Employees now have workloads that enable them to develop and sustain meaningful relationships with our children.

2.9 Workforce Development

Our Workforce Development Steering Group is implementing our Workforce Development and Recruitment and Retention Strategies and developing career pathways and support for our newly qualified social workers in their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment.

Through our Workforce Development Team all practitioners, new and experienced, have access to a broad and comprehensive learning and development offer including access to research tools such as Research in Practice and Community Care Inform. We have developed resources available on the Children's Hub or The Academy (our virtual learning and development platform) to support employees that are working with families, working with parents who use substances and completing parenting assessments.

This includes tool kits such as the Dorset Graded Care Profile, Contextual Safeguarding, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Abuse and Engaging Families. Practice Launch Events are held with Managers and practitioners to launch new practice resources and we also introduced Stop the Clock in February 2021 – reflective sessions within teams which have a set resource on a particular theme identified through our quality assurance processes.

We promote the learning and development offer through our Workforce Wordout and have a robust process in place to evaluate the impact of the learning and development activity

Our practice model is now embedded and reflects the Dorset Children Thrive model and the shared values and principles of the Strategic Alliance.

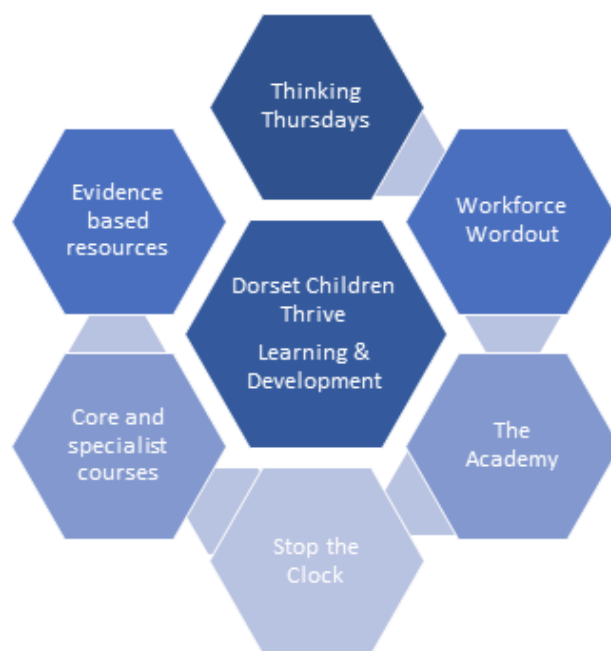


Fig. 2.4 Our Workforce Development Model

3. QUALITY AND IMPACT OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN DORSET

3.1 The Integrated Front Door

3.1a Children's Advice and Duty Service

The Children's Advice and Duty service (ChAD) was launched in October 2019. Professor Thorpe and his team from the University of Lancaster led the implementation of the consultation model for our Front Door. The ChAD is a consent, conversation and consultation-based model, working with our children, their families, individuals, and professionals, to reach a joint decision about the level of need and support required. Our partner agencies have continued to provide positive feedback in respect of the support and advice received from the ChAD Service when they have made contact using the dedicated professionals line. Our aim is to ensure that children and young people receive the right support, first time and from the right person and we have continued to promote this throughout the whole service.

During the whole of 2021 we saw 8107 contacts dealt with by ChAD, of these 2899 led to a referral and were then progressed through our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. 60% of these contacts were received via the telephone. During 2021 78% (95% during December) of the referrals taken and 89% (96% during December) of the contacts were completed within one working day – demonstrating that our vision to provide a needs-led and timely response for our children and young people is becoming a reality.

Whilst there have continued to be challenges due to the impact of Covid-19, the service has embedded and strengthened the model, with Ofsted noting that the 'Front Door provides a calm, well-organised service, where timely and appropriate decisions are made about how to protect and support children most effectively'. Our aim is to continue to develop and strengthen practice,

remain focused and identify exceptions promptly, so we that we can plan and continue to provide a good service to our children, young people and the professionals we engage with.

3.1b Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) commenced in June 2020. This has so far been a virtual MASH due to Covid-19, but the commitment to develop and strengthen our partnership working has continued to be effective, with our partners reporting that they have well-developed and strong relationships with the service.

We have continued to develop information-sharing pathways where they were not in place, such as with our Domestic Abuse services. We continue to review our information-sharing process and decision-making; learning and practice development is a key focus for the Front Door and is achieved through dip-sampling and weekly audit/themes meeting. The themes meeting is attended by ChAD/MASH Team Managers, Police and Health colleagues. A report is completed from this meeting and learning/actions required shared at the MASH Operational Group to take forward as necessary.

Our recent review of the MASH process identified that practice across agencies is strong in respect of multi-agency information sharing. The improvement area we identified is to develop multi-agency decision making opportunities within the MASH. A task & finish group has been set up to progress and develop in this area, which is overseen by the MASH Operational Group and the MASH Strategic Group.

3.1c Early Help Hub

In July 2020, the Early Help Hub (EHH) was implemented as part of ChAD to provide one Front Door for requests for Early Help Assessments alongside the Front Door for children's social care. A dedicated Team Manager leads the EHH to provide consistency in decision-making and support oversight, facilitating conversations between ChAD, social care, locality teams and the EHH. A rota of Family Workers and Family Advisors from localities provides strong connections between the central Early Help Hub and locality teams as well as locality-based community services.

3.1d Number of Contacts and Referrals

We have seen a varying picture in respect of the number of Contacts and Referrals to Children's Social Care this last year. During the last 6 months (taken from ChAT) there were 4056 contacts, with 1450 resulting in a referral.

The third national lockdown in January 2021 saw our referral rates come in line with our Statistical Neighbours with a rate of referrals per 10,000 in January at 364. There was a significant increase in referral rates per 10,000 in March 2021 to 517, when the lockdown was lifted, and children returned to school. We have remained below the all-England average referral rate per 10,000. Where there have been increases, these have been due to the national lockdown lifting and the expected increase when schools return after the summer period.

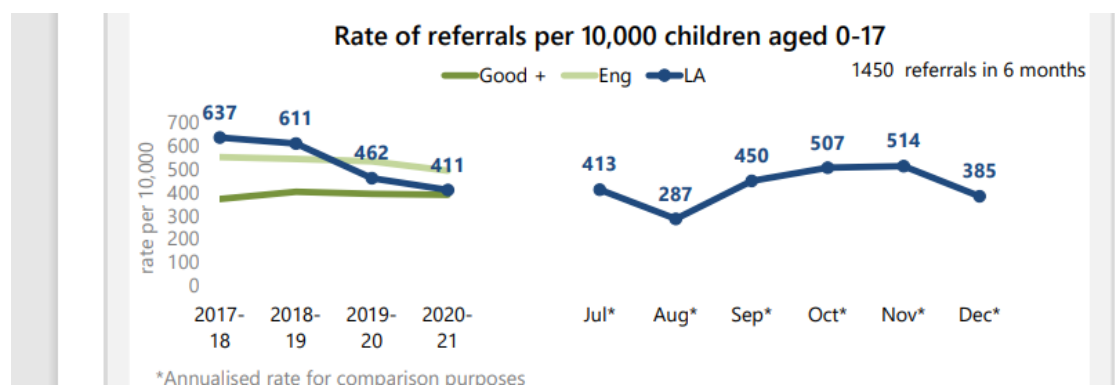


Fig. 3.1 Rate of referrals per 10,000 Jan 2021 – Dec 2021

We have seen a year on year decrease in the rate of Referrals per 10,000 since 2017-18 and we are now in line with our good performing statistical neighbours. This is positive and whilst the trajectory due to the impact of the pandemic on children and families is still not fully known, this data demonstrates that the changes made to the front door in 2019, the introduction of the MASH in June 2020 and the Early Help Hub in July 2020 are working – to reduce the number of referrals being progressed through Children’s Services, promote relationship-based practice through conversation and consent, to work with and to promote young people and their families receiving the right service, first time, and to act preventatively at point of need to avoid escalation into Children’s Social Care, where it is safe to do so.

The MASH information-sharing process has continued to support effective decision-making. During December 2021, we received 632 contacts, of these 217 resulted in a referral and were progressed within the MASH, 147 children were offered a social care assessment, 42 children also had a strategy discussion and assessment take place, 15 children were offered Early Help support and 12 were offered information and advice. We have continued to undertake weekly auditing with Police and Health colleagues which has indicated that most decisions remain well-informed with a timely response from partner agencies.

Our re-referrals rates for 2021 have reduced to an average 19%. We continue to monitor this rate to ensure we are not only making the right decisions at the Front Door, but that support based on level of need and that any changes achieved are sustained.

3.1e Contacts and Referrals from the Police

Dorset Police’s Blue, Red, Amber, Green system (BRAG) rates all Public Protection Notices (PPNs) based on the level of risk present. We have reviewed this system, working with Dorset Police and our neighbouring Local Authority, to ensure a consistency of practice in BRAG rating. We have continued to hold twice daily meetings with the Police to review PPNs; this has continued to promote practice development and we aim to develop this further, so that it becomes a multi-agency decision-making process.

Our Consultant Social Workers have been involved in Vulnerability training for Dorset Police Officers and more recently, Safeguarding training for new recruits in the MASH. We continue to work closely with our MASH partners and contribute to training and development needs in respect of safeguarding and good practice.

Over the last 6 months (01.07.2021 – 31.12.2021) 21% of our contacts and 26 % of referrals were from the Police (total contacts for this period 4056 and total referrals 1450; these figures evidence the effectiveness of our partnership arrangements.

3.1f Contacts and referrals from Health

We have continued to work well with our Health MASH partners, identifying areas of good practice and for development. Health services have made 25% of the contacts recorded (total contacts for this period 4056) and 13% of referrals (total referrals for this period 1450).

We drill down into the data, understand the trend and target our communication and education at specific health services, to ensure that the contacts are received into the right part of the service – Early Help Hub or ChAD - first time, to enable an effective and timely response, whilst ensuring that Social Workers can focus on those referrals where the level of need requires statutory assessment and support.

3.1g Summary and next steps

The aim of the Front Door is to ensure that children and their families are accessing the right support, from the right service at the right time and at the earliest opportunity. The evidence presented in this report shows the progress that we have made. We will continue to evaluate and monitor the data and learning from feedback and audits, as our aim is to continue to strengthen the service:

- to ensure our decision-making remains safe and timely
- to reduce the number of assessments that result in no further action
- a reduction in strategy discussions that do not require s47 Enquiries
- a reduction in s47 Enquiries that do not result in a Child Protection Conference
- and a longer-term trajectory of reducing the number of children and young people under Child Protection plans and the numbers in care

An increase in the number of Early Help assessments, further development of the Team Around the Family approach and all professionals considering who is best placed to meet the current needs of the child and their family is welcome. We will continue to support partner agencies to provide support and intervention where a relationship is already in place, to avoid escalation where we can, and to enable statutory teams to prioritise those children and young people in need of statutory support, care and protection.

We continue to closely monitor the impact of the Front Door, with weekly oversight reports to the senior leadership team and a real time dashboard to support strong management oversight. We dip-sample the decision-making at the Front Door and hold weekly meetings with our MASH statutory partners, we identify any themes across the mash checks and decision-making, we then use these as a focus for further dip samples.

We are committed to staff development and welfare, continuing to develop our staff within the service. For example, Consultant Social Workers have now taken on Practice Lead roles in relation to Children who are Missing, Child Exploitation Champion, training and development of others and Practice Educator.

Finally, we plan to strengthen our Out of Hours offer and OOH service and in turn, build resilience into the ChAD service and MASH. We remain aspirational for our Front Door and will continue to build on our strengths and improve on those areas we identify for development.

3.2 Early Help

3.2a Our approach

Early Help is an intrinsic part of our model 'Thrive'. Our now established locality teams were built on the geographical outline our former Early Help 'zones'. Our approach is inspired by the Harlem Children's Zone, where different professionals came together to help and support children, young people, and their families. The foundations of this approach are:

- its geographical footprint
- An ethos of the least disruptive intervention first
- Strong local partnership responses to local need
- Building on community assets to provide early help

Based in local communities, the services and support vary depending on local priorities that are set by partners in the local governance group, the 'Local Alliance'. Overall governance is provided by our Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People, through which we continuously promote Early Help at the earliest opportunity in universal settings. Although all partners contribute to the Early Help model, Dorset Council employs a range of Early Help staff to facilitate partnership working and effective Early Help, through evidence-based interventions.

Our model has increased the council's capacity for Early Help and SEN support both by increasing the number of frontline practitioners and delivering closer integration of these practitioners to ensure timely assessment and casework for children and their families. This includes specialist SEN Family workers supporting families of children with emerging need or where there is support through SEN support to complement our statutory offer. We have expanded our support to schools and settings through dedicated teams, providing expert contacts for our education colleagues. This enables us to build on our established model of proactive support for children, enabling us to wrap around the communities children are a part of.

Our Early Help Strategy has been refreshed to reflect our operating model and in line with the priorities set out in the Children, Young People and Families' Plan.



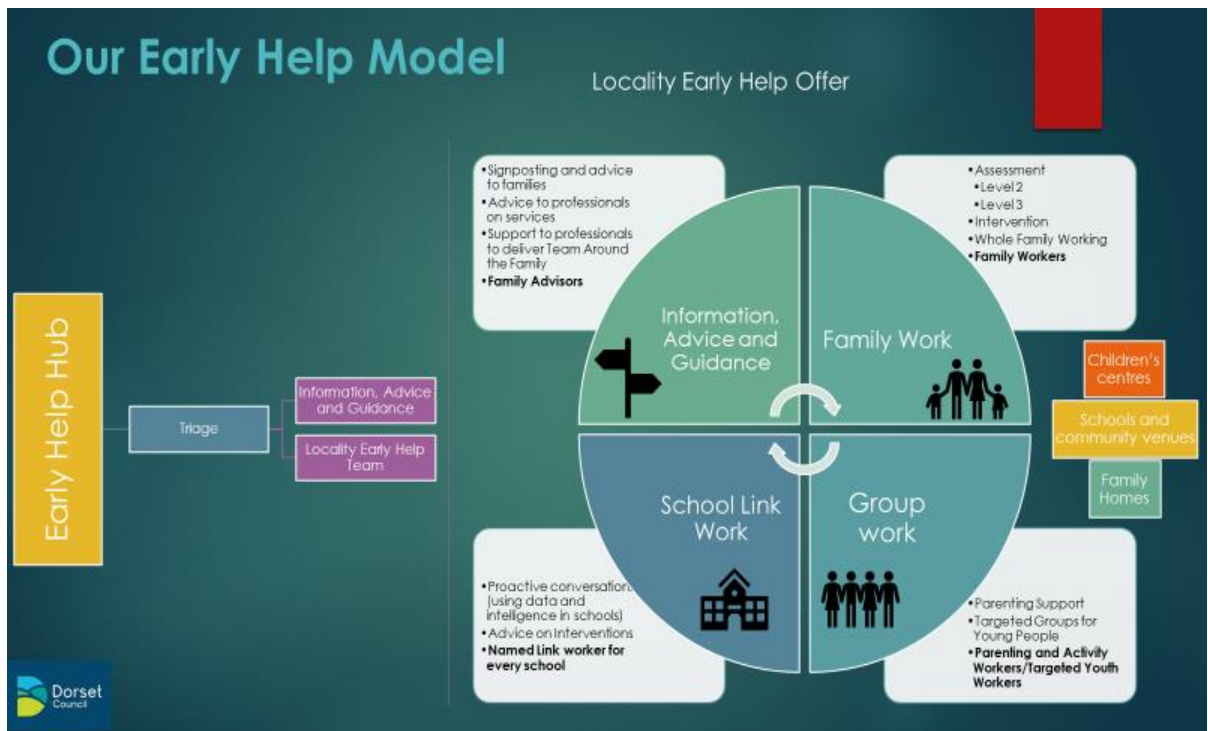


Fig. 3.2 Our Early Help Model

3.2b Direct work with Children and Families

As of 4th January 2022, 1136 children and young people (516 families) are being supported by a Lead Family Worker.

Our Early Help Practice standards guide our work and provide the basis of our workforce development activity, to embed our relationship and strengths-based practice model, a cornerstone of our Early Help Strategy. We have refined our expectations for working with families and community partners with pace and rigour, to ensure:

Families benefit from a broad range of early help services, tailored to their needs and in the places where they live. Partnership working is well developed, offering a range of options that build on family's strengths and which can be provided without delay. (ILACs report, 2021)

We ensure there is consistent, robust management direction when requests for Early Help are received and that assessment, planning and reviews are supported and progressed.

'I cannot fault my family worker; I can always contact even if it feels a silly question. My son has trouble trusting people, but he loves his family worker and really engages with him, it has been positive for him to have a male outside of the family whom he trusts.'

We are currently focused on the time from the Early help Involvement Request to initial visit to ensure help is *early*, alongside attention to frequency of visiting, quality of plan and overall impact of our work. We work with families for as long as the help is needed, whilst sustaining appropriate focus on pace and working towards community-based help and self-reliance for our families.

Our Early Help staff play a key role in working alongside families where children and young people no longer require a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan but need ongoing support at an Early Help level. We know that, when necessary, children and families are effectively stepped ‘up’ or ‘down’, supported by clear practice guidance and procedures and drawing on the locality model whereby social care and early help staff are part of one team.

As a learning organisation, “*The prime focus of audits is maturing from an emphasis on compliance to a more reflective consideration of quality.*” (ILACS 2021). We continue to find imaginative ways to ensure that families are actively involved in our audits and have recently adapted our audit process to strengthen family feedback.

A summary of audit outcomes shows that performance continues to be driven up with managers routinely using the Early Help dashboard to ensure a timely response for families and this is evidenced by the reduction in inadequate gradings overall. Whilst audits were paused in October and November, observations in September provided evidence of strong practice, with strengths in our relationships with children and young people and parenting support through group work supporting good outcomes for children in Early Help plans.

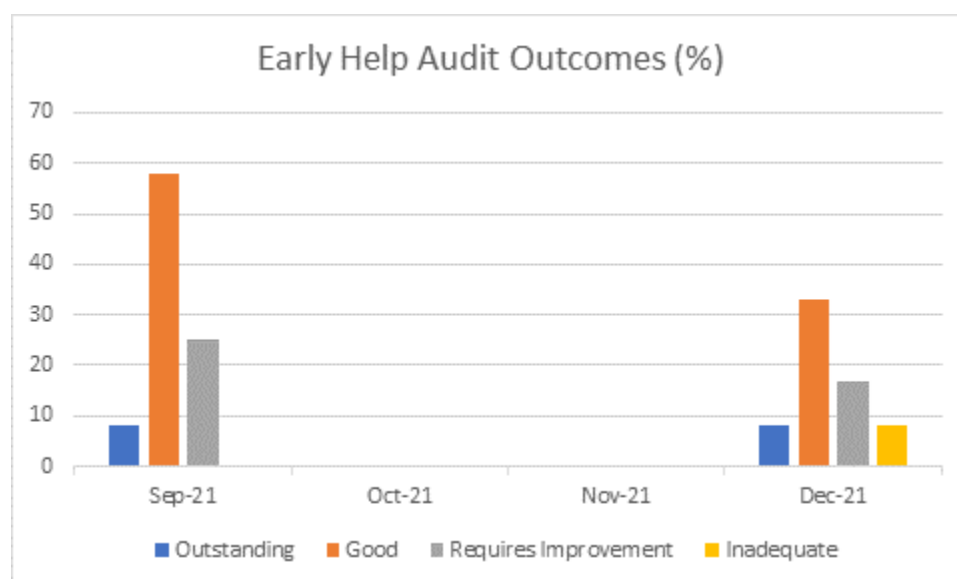


Fig. 3.3 Early Help audit outcomes

Strengths identified in the audits for December 2021 are:

- Timeliness of completing and recording assessments is continuing to improve. Increased management oversight on the timeliness of assessment completion through fortnightly tracking reminders and monthly performance board meetings has supported this.
- There continues to be a strong theme of good engagement and relationships with families by our family workers.
- Family feedback, that we have made a difference, is overwhelmingly positive

From the same audits, the identified area for improvement was:

- Proactive development and sharing of assessments, TAF minutes and plans with families and professionals involved with the family is not consistently evidenced.

To address this, we are working with our frontline managers to enhance oversight, particularly prior to signing off an assessment and we are engaging our family workers to help them understand the importance of developing the Team Around the Family.

3.2c Group work

Our core group work offer includes evidence-based parenting courses, including Incredible Years and Living with Teenagers, Healing Together and parenting support through our locally developed parenting skills and strategies groups, an under 1s group and group work focused on domestic abuse (Freedom and Pattern Changing). Group work is frequently co-delivered with partners; all facilitators of evidence-based parenting programmes attend group supervision.

This ensures fidelity to the programmes and increases the likelihood of positive outcomes for attendees. Group work is usually delivered face to face. However, having learned from the value of online delivery through the pandemic, arrangements have been made to include this as part of our ongoing offer. This has led to improved attendance and engagement of both parents, regardless of where they live, as well as reducing a need for childcare to support attendance. In our practice observation week (October 2021) both online and classroom parenting programmes were observed, with impact and outcomes evident for both cohorts of parent learners.

The table below provides information on participation in group work between January 2021 and December 2021.

Type of group	Number of attendees
Incredible Years	110
Under 1s	802
Parenting Skills and Strategies	27
Living with Teenagers	78
Domestic Abuse (pattern changing/freedom)	83

Fig. 3.4 Participation in group work activities

The report at Fig. 3.5 below sets out the evidence of impact of one of our Parenting Programmes, Living with Teenagers (LWT).

Living with Teenagers
08/06/2021-13/07/2021
Outcome Statements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase understanding of how behaviour is learnt • Increase understanding of why behaviour repeats • Increase understanding of teenager's normal behaviour and typical development • Understand how parents can reduce unwanted behaviour and increase wanted /positive behaviour.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empower parents and boost self-confidence 	
How much did we do?	How well did we do it?
<p>No of sessions held: 6 sessions 5 parents started the course, one only attended one session, one joined in session two and one parent completed 4 sessions. 3 people completed the whole course.</p> <p>These were referrals from the Early Help Hub, from schools or TAF meeting attended by Family Worker. It was felt that they would benefit from support with parenting and understanding their teenager's behaviour.</p> <p>There was a home visit made to one family that was attending LWT to discuss further their concerns outside of the group. There was concern as to whether an allocation of a Family Worker would be more appropriate.</p> <p>Information for further support for LWT PSAS sessions were given and parents encouraged to have follow up sessions.</p>	<p>60% course completion 1 participant didn't complete the course, 1 joined in week 2 with her husband The Outcomes were measured using the Living with Teenagers Pre and Post Group Questionnaire.</p> <p>100% of parents felt more confident as a parent 75% of parents felt that they had an improved relationship with their teenager. 50% of parents had improved communication with their teenager. 50% of parents had a reduction in conflict with their teenager 50% of parents felt supported in their role as a parent.</p>
Is anyone better off?	
<p>Attitude/opinion All attendees said that they would recommend the course to other parents. One parent said on the first week "I came in feeling really stressed and anxious but feel so much better at the end. I feel supported and understood." "Being here with my husband has made it easier to learn. We have got better at working together." All attendees found the group discussion encouraging and supportive. One parent commented "Excellent group facilitators who encouraged debate and concerns to be raised. Honest opinions and advice" Parents all said that liked the fact they were not the only person going through this and liked the support that group gave them.</p> <p>Behaviour Parents felt that the 'chains of behaviour' idea had resonated with them and they understood the difference they could make by adjusting their behaviour. Parents were able to appreciate what is normal teenage behaviour and the changes that they go through that may cause the behaviour. Parents found dealing with conflict and learning how to stay calm useful.</p> <p>Data Sources Living with Teenagers Pre and Post Course Questionnaire and Evaluation of course form.</p> <p>Facilitator Reflection: I feel that the data doesn't truly reflect the changes that parents made through attending the course. I question the initial scoring that the parents recorded and wonder if it reflects their own confidence and expectations as a parent.</p>	

Fig. 3.5 Evaluation of Living with Teenagers

A further example of our group work offer is "Healing Together".

The 'Healing Together' programme was born out of a request from mothers who had started their journey of recovery from domestic abuse and violence in 2016. They expressed that they wanted

similar help and support for their children but could not find anything suitable. Their children were labelled as ‘naughty’, they were at risk of exclusion from school and struggling to access any help. We have a number of accredited facilitators delivering this programme across the county.

SDQ Results		
Measure & possible score	Pre-Programme Average	Post-Programme Average
Emotional Problems (10)	5.4	3.4
Conduct Problems (10)	3.8	3.2
Hyperactivity (10)	8.4	6
Peer Problems (10)	4.4	3.6
Prosocial (10)	7.4	7.4
Externalising Score (conduct + hyperactivity) (20)	12.2	9.2
Internalising Score (emotional + peer problems) (20)	9.8	7
Total Difficulties (40)	22	16.2

Families Feedback on their experiences of the Healing Together Programme.

"This is a great programme for a child that suffers with anxiety. Its great to understand other techniques used to help calm your child down."

"It is a very useful programme, you have learnt some of he strategies before doing it with your child rather than your child is invaluable"

"I would say that it is an amazing and it has opened my eyes into why my daughter struggles and how I can help"

"Very good and informative. Loved that it could be completed with your child"

"It is a good course for children suffering from stress/anxiety. I would recommend to parents with children that had low level/mild stress anxiety."

Fig. 3.6 Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire score changes for Healing Together

3.2d Supporting partners to undertake Early Help

In addition to the delivery of direct work with our families, designated Early Help Link Workers from our locality teams are embedded in schools in their locality. The role of the Link Worker is to support schools and settings to be proactive with and for their vulnerable children. The primary tool we employ is the Vulnerable Children’s Tracker and we have recently revised how we embed this in our practice, to ensure there is strong compliance from our schools and settings as well as effective leadership of the use of the tracker in each locality.

We develop our partners’ capacity to deliver their early help responsibilities, through the delivery of workforce development, advice and guidance. Our “Safeguarding through Early Help: Understanding Your Role” training is available to the whole children’s workforce every month and 108 professionals and parent members of our Dorset Parent Carer Council have benefitted from this since December 2020, all reporting that it has made them more confident about convening Team Around the Family meetings. Agencies represented included:

- schools, including specialist provision
- mental health services
- drug and alcohol services
- Relate
- Dorset Police
- Dorset Healthcare

Our training has been offered virtually since April 2020. Through our training records, we note a correlation between take up and the confidence to initiate early help. We continuously evaluate feedback and adapt the training to meet the needs of practitioners and to track impact.

Impact is evident through:

- The number of level 2 interventions (whereby our workers support other agencies to initiate early help) has steadily increased since September 2021.

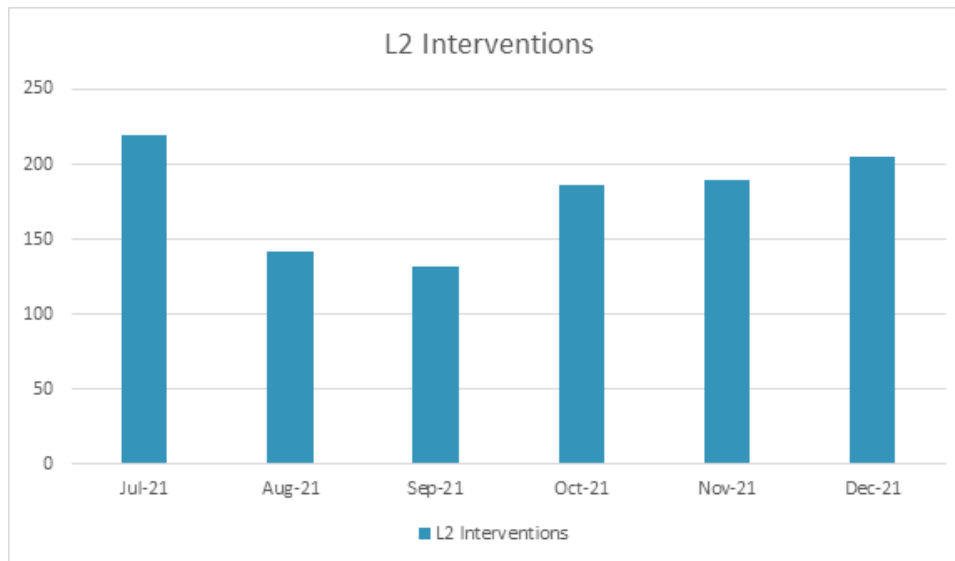


Fig. 3.7 Number of Level 2 Interventions by Dorset Council Early Help Teams (supporting partner agencies)

- The payment by results figures for our strengthening families programme (see below Fig. 3.8)

Through our Children, Young People and Families' Plan our partnership has agreed to measure and identify the type of Early Help support provided by partners so that we can understand the combined impact of effort in our communities and continuously review and refine our offer to ensure great outcomes for our children. This work is being led through our local alliance groups and we anticipate being able to report on outcomes across the partnership from 1st April 2022.

3.2e Focus on Early Years

Since January 2020 when our data analysis highlighted increases in younger children needing support through child protection and coming into our care, we prioritised children aged 0 – 5 years in our early help responses. We have continued to prioritise this age group, recognising the potential Covid-19 impacts of reduced visits to very young children, and potential for reduction in offers at early years settings as well as national messages regarding safe sleeping. We have done this through:

- County wide strategic partnership meetings and locality-based operational meetings focusing on the 0 to 5s (initially weekly, now monthly) to identify and respond to emerging issues and families we were most worried about.
- Routine, proactive conversations and information sharing with health colleagues and settings about children needing early help, in each locality.
- Prioritisation of children aged 0 – 2 in allocation for direct work by family workers and in response to contacts with The Early Help Hub.
- Increasing support to early years settings who are initiating early help through our Early Years Support and Advice Officers.
- Making our Children's Centres available to maternity services to enable expectant mothers to meet their midwife in a non-clinical setting and to enable early identification of need

There has been a steady increase in the numbers of children aged 0-4 supported through Early Help since January 2020 to December 2021, with many of the children attending our group work offer aged under 5.

In the Chesil locality we have piloted the Team Around the Setting (TAS) initiative. This group includes a panel of professionals from the locality team and partner agencies who come together to meet with local early years practitioners. The intended outcomes are:

- To improve the life chances and outcomes for children and families in Chesil through a partnership working approach.
- To provide a 'one team' approach to offer support, information, advice, and guidance to EY providers to:
 - offer CPD opportunities to staff
 - support EY staff in their practice and decision-making
 - improve the quality of provision
 - improve outcomes for children
- To give and receive feedback to:
 - build strong professional relationships between all parties
 - improve communication between all parties
 - create a better understanding of each other's roles and the challenges and dilemmas faced.

As a result of this initiative, 3 TAS meetings have been held attended by a Social Worker EY Champion, The ChAD manager and local HV lead. There is an opportunity for EY practitioners to book a 1:1 meeting with a specific professional to seek advice and enable early intervention to take place. We will look to roll this initiative out across the other localities. Shadowing opportunities have been offered to other locality Team Managers.

3.2f Early Years provision

We are in the process of completing our Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2021-22 with key successes noted as:

- 99% of early years provision in Dorset is judged 'Good' or 'Outstanding' ([Ofsted official statistics, August 2021](#)). Support for early years provision is targeted according to statutory duties and need through a risk assessment process.
- Take up of 2-year-old funding is higher than average compared to statistical neighbours, the South West and nationally at 82% in December 2021. This has dropped from 89% and this is being addressed with locality teams and settings.
- Take up of 3-year-old funding is higher than or equal to statistical neighbours, the South West and nationally at 97% in December 2021
- 85.9% of children in Dorset are at, or above the expected level in all 5 areas of development at their 2-year progress check (England 81.9% 2021/22)
- 100% of early years group childcare provision offer the extended 30 hours early education funded entitlement.

Predictably, Covid-19 still has an impact on our early years provision. Overall, settings report the demand for early years provision continues to be lower due to parents' working situations. However, a survey with parents in December 2021, 73% of respondents told us their use of

childcare has not changed due to the pandemic. 10% told us they use more childcare and only 5% are using friends or family instead of a registered childcare provider.

We continue to have a shortage of wraparound provision for school-age children and inclusive childcare for children with SEND. We are working with national early years SEND organisation 'Dingley's Promise' to improve approaches to inclusion. We will also work with our Family Information Service and EY Workforce Development Officer to increase the amount of childcare provision for primary school age children and promote careers in childcare particularly, registered childminding. In a rural county, we rely on childminders for delivering early education funding entitlements alongside our group provision.

We have continued to survey providers throughout the pandemic to ensure we understand the issues and challenges and are able to offer support. Survey response rates are lower at between 40-50% of the provider base which makes analysing data and identifying themes difficult.

Our business support offer is virtual with new webpages in place to support settings to evaluate their position. The key business risk faced by Early Years setting is that private paid-for hours have reduced dramatically. We have invited settings to apply for financial support to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on their settings; this offer has run from the summer 2021 and will close at the end of March 2022. 25 settings were awarded sustainability support of £126,835.00 in 2021 as a direct result of COVID-19.

We provide core training opportunities free of charge to childcare professionals only charging for non-attendance for a booked place. Over 2400 EY practitioners are registered on our training platform, Dorset Nexus and in 2021, 1635 training places were booked on 159 workshops covering 18 different subjects. In 2022, in addition to Foundation and Multi-agency safeguarding and Role of the EY SENCO, we are also offering Five to Thrive, Incredible Beginnings, Dingley's Promise SEND training, WellComm and locality network briefings.

Early years SEND provision is a key priority area. Our wider Dorset Council SEND strategy explicitly identifies areas for improvement for our youngest children and their families. We link our early years staff e.g. Portage Consultants closely with other SEND staff for workforce development opportunities. In September 2021, we launched the new digital application process for Early SEND Support funding following a lengthy re-design process involving families, EY providers, SEND, EY funding officer and EY Support and Advice Officers.

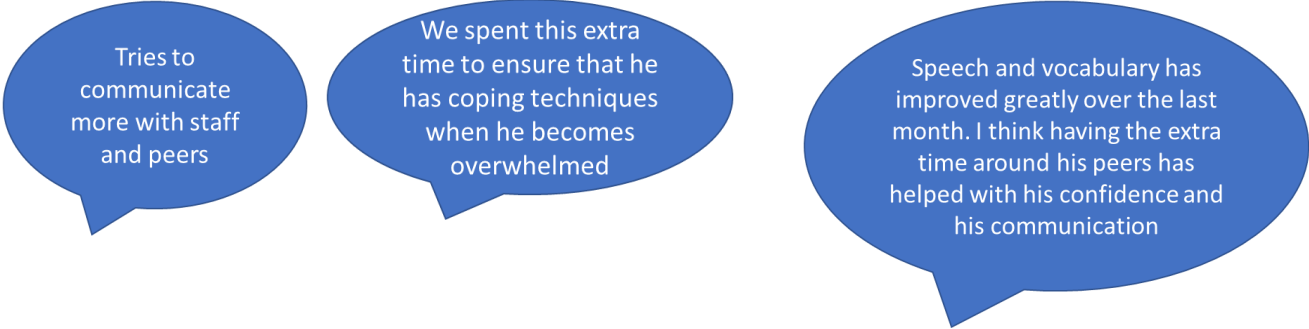
Parents are required to provide digital consent wherever possible although alternative options are available if there are difficulties accessing the digital service. Panel meetings are half-termly involving Portage Consultants and EYSAO's alongside the panel to discuss the application and agree funding. The EY Strategic Lead meets regularly with Dorset Parent Carer Council to review EY SEND progress, plans and published information.

Portage Consultants offer a range of support involving home and pre-school setting visits depending on need. Priority is given to those children starting school in the following September and support ends when the transition meeting has taken place with the school. Our consultants provide early years expertise to our DEAL officers. A rolling training programme is offered to all EY practitioners with priority given to those settings who are currently working with Portage.

Early years practitioners are active members of School's Forum, Strategic Alliance, Best Start in Life and Best Education for All steering groups. We are in the process of re-establishing the Dorset Childcare Voice, a strength-based forum to provide views, experiences, and data to inform genuine

collaboration and co-production. The Best Start in Life development plan clearly involves our EY settings in 7 of the 11 priorities.

In the summer term 2021 and again in spring term 2022 we worked closely with early years providers to offer additional funded 'boost hours' to eligible children to support their development in the prime areas of learning. Almost 10,000 additional early education hours have been funded through Covid outbreak management funding to support those children transitioning to school in the following September. Providers and parents were expected to provide feedback on the impact of funding on the child's development.



Tries to communicate more with staff and peers

We spent this extra time to ensure that he has coping techniques when he becomes overwhelmed

Speech and vocabulary has improved greatly over the last month. I think having the extra time around his peers has helped with his confidence and his communication

Support is provided to early years settings primarily from an Early Years Support and Advice Officer as well as Portage Consultants and other locality officers for example, Educational Psychologists or Specialist Teachers. Through a RAG Rating assessment, priority is placed on those settings:

- judged less than good at their last inspection
- not yet inspected
- interested in setting up a childcare business
- considered a priority for other reasons including, concerns about leadership and management, inclusion, safeguarding or recent allegations or complaints

The approach to RAG rating is discussed between the EYSAO and their locality manager. Moderation of these assessments is discussed at regular intervals with the EY Strategic Lead and the Team Manager.

3.2g Dorset Families Matter (Supporting Families)

Dorset Families Matter provides intensive support for some of our most vulnerable families. Working with the whole family across local services, with a focus on early help, the programme has a proven track record of driving reforms across public services. Our funding is used to tackle complex inter-connected problems including unemployment, poor school attendance, mental health issues, anti-social behaviour, and domestic abuse. By accessing early, practical, coordinated support to transform lives for the better, the demand and dependency on costly reactive public services is reduced. Support is co-ordinated through a range of services to identify and address family issues as early as possible.

In the current year (2021/22) we received attachment funding for another 187 families and could make claims under the Payment by Results Framework for successful outcomes for a further 327 families. By the end of December 2021, we had successfully achieved (audit assured and certified) Payment by Results claims indicating successful outcomes 257 families, which represents 78% of our 327 target. We are on schedule to achieve 100% against target by February 2022.

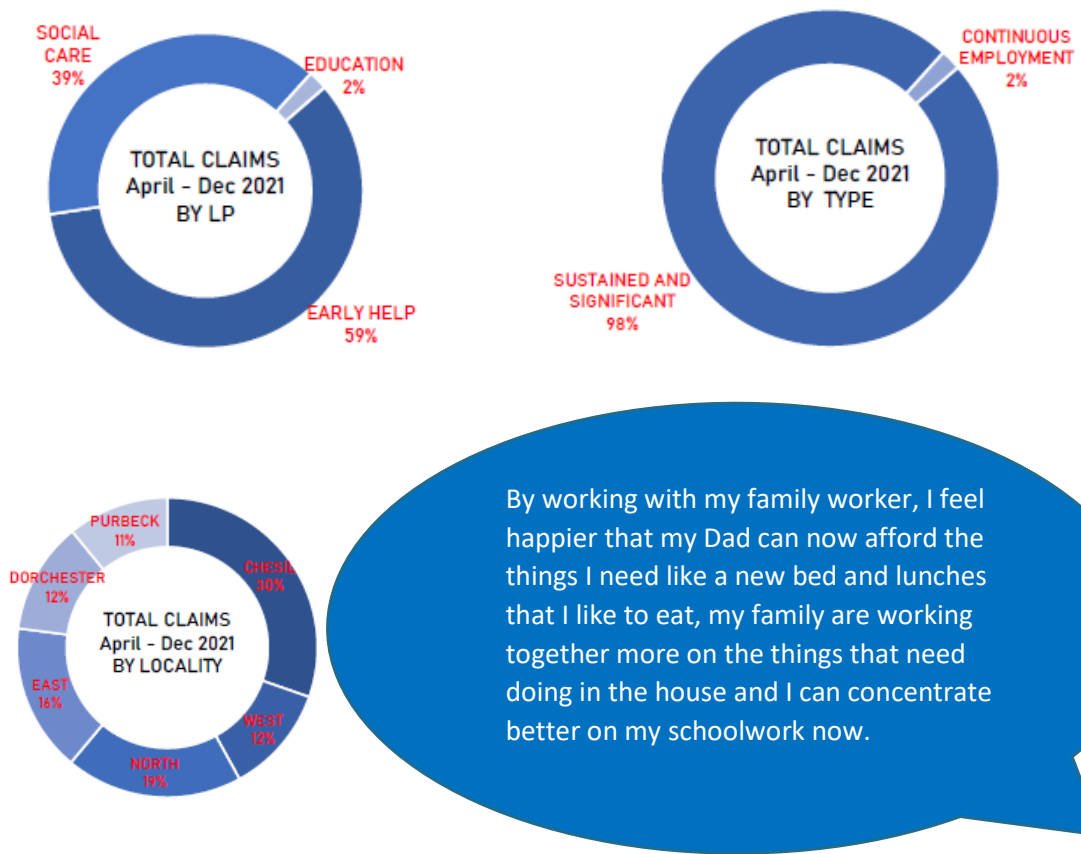


Fig. 3.8 Supporting Families Payment by Results Claims

2021/22 has been another extended year for the programme and again has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic its impacts on family wellbeing, particularly in terms of mental health. However, the experience of the central support team in liaising with our Voluntary and Community Services (VCS) providers and assisting front line practitioners to access additional sources of support from these providers has continued to be an asset. Throughout the year our VCS services have sustained their operations, so our families have been able to continue receiving vital Covid-safe interventions appropriate to their needs, which in turn has extended the reach of our front-line practitioners during this exceedingly challenging time.

The relationship between Dorset Council and our VCS partners has, as a result, been significantly strengthened, our families have been kept safe and our front-line practitioners within our social care, early help and school teams have all felt well-supported.

During the Spending Review in the autumn the government confirmed that a new three-year Supporting Families programme will begin in April 2022. The detail about the shape, and expectations for transformation are yet to be communicated but we feel ready to step up to and deliver whatever service change requirements are placed upon us through this programme

3.3 Children in Need

Our Children in Need and Child Protection social work is delivered by our six locality social work services as part of our Thrive model, enabling closer working with partners and minimising hand-offs between social workers by reducing transfer points. Significantly, it further develops our

understanding of local need through improved relationship-based practice with our families and partners.

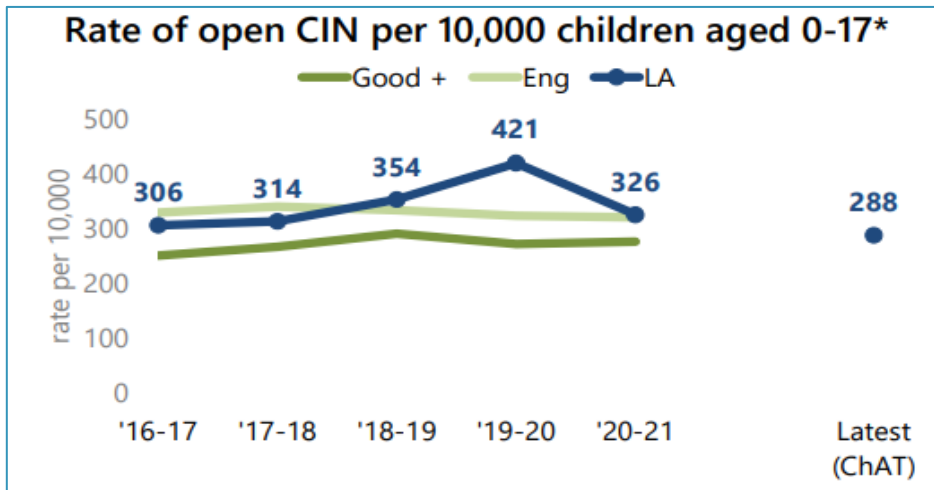


Fig. 3.9 Number of children in need

Our Children in Need (CIN) have decreased during 21/22 and data indicates we are now more in line with Good and Outstanding authorities. The Early Help Hub within our Front Door is now well established and we have seen the number of referrals leading to social work assessments decrease with the rate of completed assessments per 10,000 in the last 6 months reducing from 478 in 20/21 to 433 in January 2022. There has been sustained improvement in timeliness of our social work assessments with 91% of assessments completed within 45 working days (see Fig. 10 below).

Our social workers' direct work and contact with children and families is a high priority for us with 89% of children being seen during assessment and 76% of children in need being seen within 6 weeks. We are focusing on ensuring that where appropriate there is a timely step-down to Early Help which ensures that we are working with the right children in the right part of the system.

3.4 Child Protection

3.4a Section 47 enquiries

Overall, the rate of s47 enquiries per 10,000 has remained steady, with 515 in the last 6 months. In the same period 58% of the s47 investigations did not result in an Initial Child Protection Conference and 77% of Initial Child Protection Conferences in the last 6 months resulted in a Child Protection Plan.

3.4b Child Protection Conferences

Timeliness of our Initial Child Protection Conferences with over 91% being held on time for the last 6 months has remained strong. Due to Covid-19, conferences were initially being held virtually but following feedback from parents and the installation of the digital infrastructure we moved to a hybrid semi-virtual style conference with the social worker and the Quality Assurance and Reviewing officer (QARO) together with the family in a conference room with partner agencies joining via 'Teams'. We continue to ensure that children continue to be seen as QAROs are asked to

visit children if the social worker is unable to do so due to having to self-isolate. We monitor the quoracy to ensure full contributions from partner agencies so that decisions are based on complete and up to date information.

We are working with our commissioned advocacy provider (NYAS from August 2021) to resolve challenges with their capacity to offer an advocate for all children over the age of 8 years old to ensure their voice is heard within the conference process.

3.4c Child Protection Plans

The rate of children subject to a Child Protection Plan in Dorset is 42 per 10,000. The percentage of children who are made the subject of a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time ever, in the last 6 months is 34%. We reviewed the cases of these children and identified that for the majority their previous plan had been at least two years earlier. We further identified that 30% of these returning children were escalated to Child Protection after a very short period of Child in Need intervention; we established that those children could have been supported under Child in Need before requiring escalation. As a result, additional quality assurance has been put in place to support robust decision making. For those child protection cases that were re-opened in less than two years, 65% were re-opened due to previous over-optimism and where we should have intervened earlier. It is likely that due to increased oversight through line of sight we are now responding to risk more effectively and timely.

37% of Child Protection Plans ended in less than 3 months which is higher than England and statistical neighbours. Our analysis shows that 72 children’s plans in 2021 were ended within 3 months and that the majority of these were appropriate with them either reaching the age of 18, moving out of Dorset or coming into care with none of them to date coming back onto a CP plan. A more detailed review is currently taking place to consider whether the decision to put the child onto a CP plan for this cohort of children was appropriate.

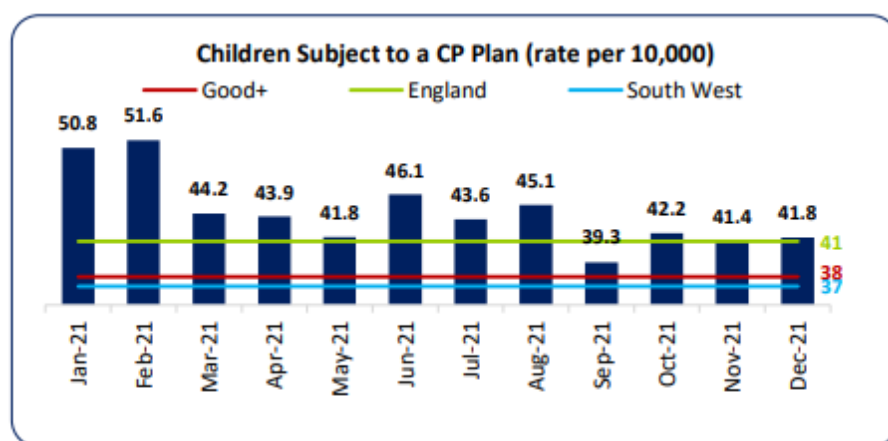


Fig. 3.11 Rate of Child Protection Plans in population

In response to the high number of children being supported through child protection plans in July we implemented a quality assurance step where the Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer (QARO) and the Team manager discusses the outcome of the Section 47 to agree what is the most appropriate way of supporting the child and their family. This is to assure ourselves that we are making the right decisions about which children should be considered at an initial conference.

To further support this for individual children we have developed Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings chaired by a QAROs . This will be for children where there are child protection

concerns that are of a contextual nature as managing these children under a CP Plan is not the most appropriate way of supporting the family to safeguard. This process helps social workers and their managers to think differently about how risk can be managed.

3.4d Child Protection Visits

We continue to give conspicuous care to timeliness of Child Protection visits. At the end of December 94% of children were seen in the previous 4 weeks.

We remain focussed on strengthening our approach to conferencing through the continued development of the Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer role. We have embedded our relationship-based restorative conferencing model with the support of training from Mark Finnis. This helps us to ensure that the right children are on a Child Protection Plan for the right amount of time and that we are achieving the best outcomes for them.

3.5 Children Who are Disabled

3.5a Our approach

We have a dedicated service for children who are disabled, delivered by three social work teams, one Early Help team and an Occupational Therapist team.

As of January 2022, 528 children were receiving a service from the Children Who are Disabled team (CWAD):

- 75 children are allocated to a Family Worker.
- 209 children are allocated to a Social Worker, 30 of whom are also supported by a family worker.
- 201 children are held 'virtually' in the Early Help team (i.e. receiving a short-break support package but not allocated to a lead worker).
- 111 children are allocated to an Occupational Therapist, 65 of whom are also allocated to a social worker or family worker.

Of these:

- 40 are children in care.
- 7 are children supported by a Child Protection plan
- 156 are children supported by a Child in Need plan
- 289 children are accessing short break support via direct payments
- 23 children access residential short breaks

We provide a residential home for children, the Cherries, which is currently judged as 'Good' by Ofsted.

We fund a targeted short-breaks projects in the community, accessed by a cohort of disabled children who are not open to CWAD.

3.5b Birth to Settled Adulthood re-design

Dorset wants to provide a consistently good service for disabled young people and their families, which continues seamlessly from childhood to young adulthood. In 2021 a review of the transition arrangements between children's and adults' social care was undertaken, setting out proposals for improvement and establishing workstreams to deliver this. Collaborative re-design work is underway involving children's and adults' social care, SEND and local health services, under the guidance of a newly-appointed independent Chair of the Birth to Settled Adulthood Board. We're

seeing the immediate benefits of Co-working improving knowledge and understanding across areas. To further improve this, we will continue to develop our model for delivery of support to this cohort of young people. We are consulting with the Dorset Parent Carer Council and will arrange further updates and consultation as the work progresses.

3.5c Short Breaks

We are working to increase the variety and specialism of our short breaks provision. A commissioning needs analysis has been undertaken and a tendering process has brought an additional provider. Work has commenced to develop an integrated multi-disciplinary service working on the principles and values of our Harbour service to provide rapid support to parents and children in the community, a short break offering encompassing foster care and residential options. The work to develop our sufficiency strategy, the creation of the Dorset Centre for Excellence, our SEN Capital strategy, and short breaks offer creates an opportunity to create an integrated and systemic offer for children who are disabled.

Dorset Parent carer Council have been involved in the planning of the new service, and we are clear about gaps in the range of choice available to parents. Work is also taking place to increase the availability of family-based short breaks, improve the range of daytime activities available to parents, and improve the inclusivity of leisure services.

3.6 Domestic Abuse

3.6a Our approach

Dorset Council commissions an Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (IDAS) which is provided by Paragon (rebranded from You First). The service offer consists of community outreach support, accommodation-based support, helpline, and recovery programmes. During the COVID 19 pandemic Paragon worked closely with colleagues in Dorset Council and with partners to monitor the effects of COVID and adapt provision to meet the needs of the community.

Last year we worked with partners and sourced funding from central government to implement the nationally accredited DRIVE perpetrator programme. This included the creation of a Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Panel (DAPP). DAPP/DRIVE have been in operation since March 2021 and feedback from those involved demonstrates it is having a positive impact. DAPP/DRIVE link closely with the High-Risk Domestic Abuse (HRDA) model, where perpetrators are identified at HRDA, and referred to DAPP for consideration to DRIVE. Where DRIVE isn't suitable, partners consider disruptive techniques to reduce the risk and ongoing offending.

We continue to work with partners to take a whole systems approach to how we design and commission services. Last year partners came together to create and agree the Domestic Abuse Commissioning Charter. The Charter sets out a range of key principles and commitments for future design work and helps facilitate co-commissioning opportunities.

3.6b High Risk Domestic Abuse Model (HRDA)

In response to several Domestic Homicide Reviews the arrangements for High-Risk domestic abuse responses were reviewed in 2019/2020. The High-Risk Domestic Abuse (HRDA) model of daily meetings was piloted from February to April 2020. The core principles of the model of working with high-risk victims of domestic abuse are:

- Faster, coordinated, and collaborative response to the whole family affected by domestic abuse, including perpetrators and children
- Support and interventions to manage risk are provided closer to the timing of the incident

- Consistent threshold is applied to high-risk domestic abuse cases
- Specialist domestic abuse worker ensures the voice of the person is represented at the planning stage.

The model has clear measurable outcomes which include:

- A simplified process that enables practitioners to respond to disclosures in timely way and supports defensible decision making
- A model that is efficient, effective, takes advantage of digital solutions and based on evidence of best practice
- Addresses the unique needs of all families with protected characteristics
- Utilises existing resources to provide better outcomes

HRDA meetings take place 4 days per week – Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. There is also a monthly High-Risk Domestic Abuse Plus (HRDAP) meeting where cases in which the risk has not reduced are reviewed. The pilot was reviewed in July 2020 and agreed by partner strategic leads as the preferred local multi-agency information sharing model for high-risk cases of domestic abuse.

Between 1st April 2020 and 31 March 2021, there were 622 high risk cases taken and heard at HRDA, with 66% of these cases involving a child/children. Studying data prior to 2020, the annual cases seen at HRDA reflect a year-on-year increase in high-risk cases going to HRDA (or MARAC previously). That said, the current numbers going to HRDA are now in-line with the SafeLives recommendations.

In October 2021 partners came together to evaluate HRDA. The decision to move from the MARAC to the HRDA model in Dorset was ambitious and required investment across agencies. The results of the evaluation demonstrated that this decision was correct and that the HRDA is meeting many of the original principles of the agreed model. The main successes are that high risk cases of domestic abuse are discussed closer to the timing of the incident enabling information to be shared and risk managed sooner and that the risk management plans put in place as part of the HRDA concentrate on the whole family recognising the impact of each family member on one another. The evaluation identified several recommendations to improve the model. The recommendations are being taken forward by the Quality Assurance Group and Strategy Group's, aligning to their overall work to monitor effectiveness of the model and the impact it has on families.

We have collaborated with our police and education colleagues to implement Operation Encompass that enables schools to have access to information when a domestic incident has occurred between the family. This enables them to support children when they arrive at school and or on return from school holidays.

The Domestic Abuse Act became law in April 2021. The Act places new legal duties on the Council in relation to domestic abuse. This includes setting up a Local Partnership Board (LPB), assessing the need for support for people (and their children) in accommodation-based settings, developing a strategy, and ultimately ensuring there is support available for people experiencing domestic abuse and their children in accommodation-based settings. In Dorset, the Dorset Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has adopted the role of LPB and has supported the Council in creating the [Dorset Domestic Abuse Strategy](#). To support Dorset Councils in meeting its new duties, government has provided New Burden's Funding. Work on proposals to make use of this funding is nearing completion.

Children's Services are working closely with Community Safety partners to ensure children and young people are kept in focus of this work.

3.6c Sexual Violence

STARS Dorset Sexual Trauma and Recovery Service is a pan-Dorset charity that offers one to one support, free of charge, for anyone of any age or gender, who lives works or studies in Dorset and has experienced any form of sexual violence at any time in their lives. The service provides several different types of support including an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor Service, Counselling, a Children and Young People's Service and a Support Line.

STARS have recently been awarded the contract, funded by the Office of the Police Crime Commissioner for Dorset and NHS England, to provide an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) service in the County. The contract begins in April 2021 and runs to 2028. This is a service that our practitioners utilise as part of their planning to support our families.

3.6d Parental Conflict

We recognise that children experiencing frequent, intense and poorly resolved conflict between parents or carers, whether in a relationship or separated are at risk of poor outcomes and research shows that other interventions to support families are likely to fail when conflict is unresolved. We know that there are areas in Dorset where family breakdown exceeds national averages, for example, in Weymouth and Portland and we have taken a leadership role with this issue, alongside the Department for Work and Pensions by overseeing the Happy Families, Happy Futures programme, across the south-west. A programme designed to improve communication and ease tension between parents or carers, supporting a happy environment for their children.

Through practitioner training we are seeing an increase in confidence across the children's services workforce in developing a professional curiosity around the parental relationship. Referrals have been steadily increasing and during Covid-19 the delivery swiftly moved to virtual delivery, both on a 1:1 and group basis, which has facilitated greater take-up by fathers.

Dorset Council is working on a range of interconnected approaches to use the valuable understanding of early identification and appropriate levels of support to inform legacy planning. This includes further embedding of the agenda within Early Help and the development of a complete toolkit that captures the child's and parents voice when assessing and supporting parental conflict.

As a member of the Pathfinder to pilot the implementation of the private law recommendations, we will have the opportunity to explore how our Early Help offers might be involved, particularly at the start but also during and at the end of cases as we triage the support needed to help parents resolve issues and ensure outcomes are sustainable and avoid unnecessary returns to court. We know that ongoing litigation tends to escalate/exacerbate/entrench parental conflict and want work with colleagues to adapt and resource our processes to avoid this harm whenever it is safe to do so.

3.6e Conclusion and next steps

We constantly strive to support our practitioners consistently identify domestic abuse and to build on the range of Domestic Abuse Support services available in our area so that our staff can respond effectively with the right support for children and families. Through our Strengthening Services Plan we are working closely with the Community Safety Partnership on a range of actions to strengthen our partnership approach including the implementation of a Domestic Abuse Toolkit in April/May 2021.

3.7 Pan Dorset Youth Justice Service

3.7a Our approach

The Youth Justice Service is a pan-Dorset partnership comprising Dorset Council, BCP Council, NHS Dorset CCG, Dorset Police, and the National Probation Service Dorset. The Youth Justice Service is a multi-disciplinary team which includes youth justice officers, police officers, probation officers, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service nurses, speech and language therapists, a part-time psychologist, parenting workers and restorative justice practitioners. The Youth Justice Service has two office bases, one in each local authority. The Dorset team is based in Dorchester, co-located with some of Dorset's specialist education services and on the same site as one of Dorset's alternative education provisions.

Designated Youth Justice Service staff have access to the Dorset Council Mosaic system to support integrated working, assisted by strong working relationships with social care and early help colleagues at practitioner and manager levels in the localities. The service is engaged in the development and delivery of 'The Harbour' (Adolescent Residential and Outreach Service). The service is also represented on the Child Exploitation Strategic, Tactical and Champions groups and participates in the locality-based Youth at Risk meetings.

3.7b First Time Entrants to the Youth Justice System

There has been a sustained and significant reduction in the number of children entering the youth justice system. Local data shows a total of 106 'first-time entrants' in the year 2018/19, reducing to 79 in the year 2019/20, to 51 in the year 2020/21 and a projected total of 35 in 2021/22.

Although there are low numbers of 10-13-year-olds entering the justice system (total of 7 in the year 2020/21), these numbers have not reduced as much as the older age groups and are a focus for future work.

Local data does not indicate over-representation of children with diverse ethnic heritage among our first-time entrants.

3.7c Use of Custody

Dorset continues to see low levels of custodial sentences. At the time of writing, at the end of January 2022, no Dorset children have been sentenced to custody in the period from April 2020.

3.7d Youth Justice Service practice developments

The Youth Justice Service prioritises relationship-based work with young people, recognising the evidence that a relationship with a trusted pro-social adult reduces the risk of further offending. The Youth Justice Service Speech and Language Therapists assess the communication needs of each child, with local data showing that 80% of young people in contact with the Youth Justice Service have communication needs. The Youth Justice Service uses the Trauma Recovery Model, recognising that many young people in the youth justice system have experienced trauma in their earlier lives which has delayed their emotional and cognitive development and affects their current behaviour. Understanding the child's communication needs and their trauma history enables the service to take an individual response to each child.

3.7e Developing the service

The Youth Justice Service's current priorities are to:

- Do more to make assessments, plans and interventions accessible, collaborative and shared, involving young people, parents and other professionals and responding to the child’s communication needs, trauma history and experiences of discrimination
- Reduce harm caused by men and boys to women and girls, including violence, harassment and sexual harm
- Develop the service’s activities-based work with young people in order to repair harm, to support constructive activities and to increase employability, linking with community organisations to build young people’s strengths and pro-social identities
- Ensure the right multi-agency support is in place for children aged 10-13 who have come into contact with the youth justice system.

3.8 Children in Care

3.8a Our approach

Children in Care are supported by social workers across locality teams, and by the children who are disabled (CWAD) service. Within the Locality Teams the 4 locality-based Permanence teams support our children in care from 0-18 years of age. The Permanence teams are embedded within our place-based structure which ensures that our Children in Care have a change of social worker at the right time for them ensuring stability whilst maintaining a focus on their needs when permanence has been achieved.

Our Dorset Children Thrive model ensures that workers build and maintain lasting relationships with their children who they support throughout their involvement with children’s social care services.

3.8b Our children in care

We continue to see a reduction in the number of Children in our Care during 2021/22 (437 – Dec 21); this is equivalent to 64.6 per 10,000 which is lower than national comparator data.

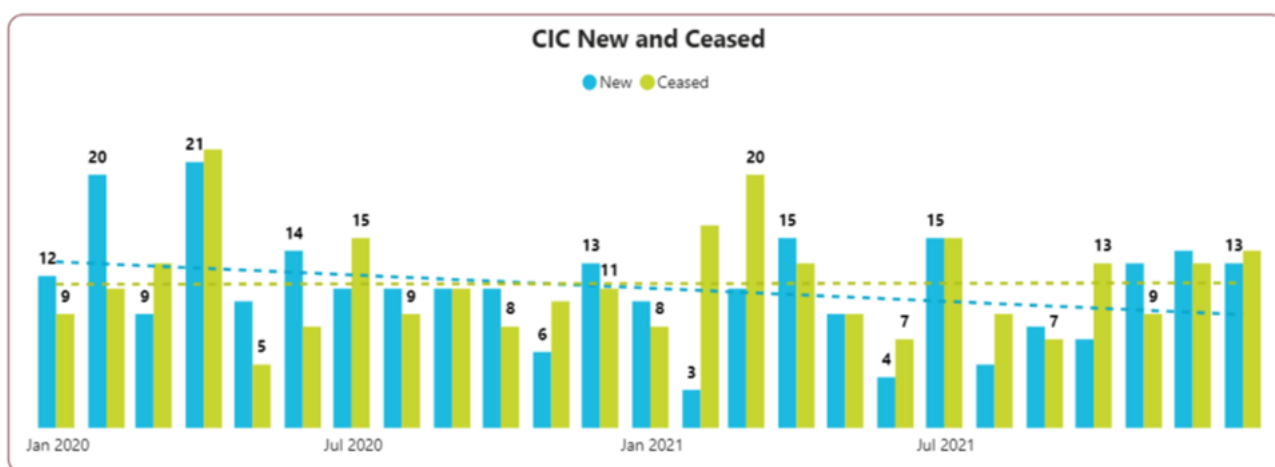


Fig. 3.13 New Entrants to Care (2020 to 2021)

Children continue to enter care in a planned way through the governance of weekly Line of Sight Meeting and Leadership Oversight and via planned court intervention. No children entered care

under Police Protection in December 2021, and only 3 children were subject to Police Protection in the last 6 months.

We continue to maintain face to face contact, with visits to 87% of Children in Care up to date at the end of December 2021. 82% of children have a current care plan and 100% of Children in Care reviews were completed on time (Dec 2021).

3.8c Health Assessments

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

We have strengthened our performance relating to Initial Health Assessments (IHA) for our children in care by working with our families, and strengthening pathways and tracking with social workers, health commissioners and providers. Overall, this has resulted in improvement in the timeliness of written consent and completion of Initial Health Assessments.

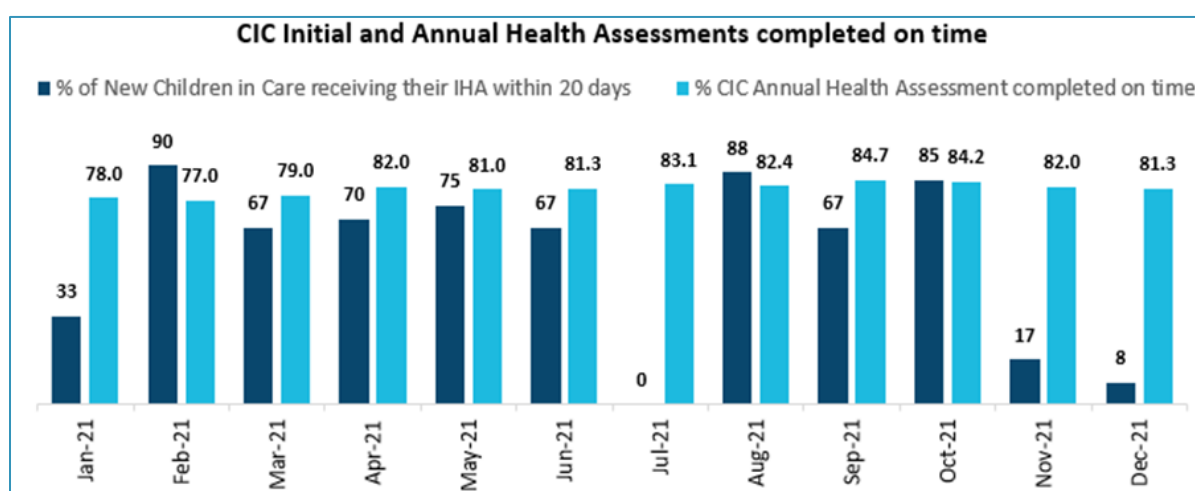


Fig. 3.14 Child in Care Health Assessments completed on time

During July, November and December 2021 we have seen a drop in performance which is due to a number of factors and challenges which include children placed out of area, despite escalation through the CCG, and the impact of the pandemic. We continue to meet and work with health colleagues to improve performance.

The pandemic has also impacted on the number of children who have received a 12-month dental check. Our focus on strengthening performance regarding dental checks is seeing a month-on-month improvement in performance from 30% (Jan 2021) to 57% (Dec 2021) although this is not yet at the pace we would want to see. We recognise the importance of good dental health and continue to work with our foster carers, carers and health colleagues to ensure that timely dental appointments are made for our children. Our Children in Care are a priority for dentistry in the south west which will support further improvement in our performance into 2022.

Senior Managers, our Strengthening Services Board and Corporate Parenting Board continue to give conspicuous care to these areas of performance.

3.8d Emotional wellbeing and mental health

We have improved the completion rate for Strengths and Developments Questionnaires (SDQs), the average SDQ score for our Children in Care aged 4-16 is currently 15.4, this is higher than our

comparator local authorities and is beginning to show a slight rising trend. As a result of this and following an internal review of the needs of the Children in Care that evaluated SDQ scores and the services children received, we are working with CAMHS, Dorset Healthcare Trust and the CCG programme leads to scope a partnership agreement for a virtual team with a multi-disciplinary approach. The aim is to bring a range of services and practitioners together to improve outcomes for our Children in Care by reducing duplication and hand-offs. The Child in Care Clinical Psychologist, the Clinical Psychology service for Adoption and Permanence, the CAMHS social workers and the Emotional Wellbeing Practitioner are some of the services and practitioners we aim to bring together alongside our Virtual School and Educational Psychology service. As part of this development and process a new guidance and procedures process has been co-produced by Dorset Healthcare, CAMHS and Dorset Council that will help frontline practitioners to develop their understanding of emotional wellbeing and mental health using the iThrive Framework. All services will adopt the prompts to improve their understanding of the child and their needs and what may be the best fit intervention.

Due to the rise in the numbers of requests for support, advice, and guidance from foster carers to the Children in Care Psychologists for adoption and permanence we are developing a model of practice that improves the skills of the supervising social workers to provide the direct support to the foster carers. This is consistent with Dorset Council Children's Social Care's restorative practice model. Through consultation and group supervision, support and joint training foster carers will have an improved understanding of the emotional needs of the children in their care and how to respond to these.

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. Digital platforms for the service were developed quickly during the initial phases of the pandemic and the website has been updated with signposting and podcasts. The service now uses a hybrid approach to support. We have established an operational monthly meeting to track children in care open to CAMHS and the Emotional Wellbeing services, both within and beyond Dorset. To date these are the numbers of children and young people open to the services:

- 83 open to Core CAMHS In Dorset 40
- 43 open to CAMHS outside of Dorset
- 12 children and young people are receiving support from the Emotional Wellbeing Practitioner from our Children in Care Nursing Team
- 7 are receiving a service from ID-CAMHS (Intellectual Disability – CAMHS: a service for children with learning disabilities and mental health difficulties)
- 54 children open to CAMHS social workers

To embed the processes and standards for emotional wellbeing and mental health we have planned a training programme for social workers, managers, foster carers, Virtual School staff, teachers, and health care professionals. We are confident that we have the appropriate systems and processes in place now to better understand, record and respond to the emotional health needs of our Children in Care. Our aim is to have developed a new partnership agreement to be implemented in April 2022.

3.8e Achieving Permanence

The number of children who have a Permanence plan has increased and in December 2021, 98.5% of children in care for 4 months or more have a completed Permanence plan. 51% (Dec 21) of children with a Permanence plan for long term fostering have their permanent arrangements

formalised with a certificate and personalised letter. Of the remaining 98 children, 28 children are on track to achieve permanence, 13 are living with a relative or friend and 49 children are settled and have lived with their carers over 10 months in the knowledge of this being their long-term home. We continue to deliver strong performance for those children achieving permanence through Adoption and Special Guardianships. Improved pathways for reunification are being embedded to ensure that children remain in our care only for as long as is necessary.

The Service Manager for Corporate Parenting and Care Leavers and our QAROs (Quality Assurance Reviewing Officers) continue to monitor and support the quality of permanence planning to ensure that planning for our children is current and being progressed in a timely way.

3.8f Finding the right homes for our children

Long term placement stability continues to strengthen further and is reported at 76% in 2020/2021 (ChAT Dec 2021) which puts us above national and good statistical neighbours' averages. We remain ambitious to enable our children to live in settled and stable placements. 8.7% of children in care at the end of December 2021 had experienced 3 +placement moves in the previous 12 months which is better performance than the national average and Good and Outstanding comparator authorities.

We have maintained our focus on regional provider frameworks, giving quality and value from placements. 69% of our Children in Care are living with foster carers, 47% in our own provision and 40% settled in permanent placements. We know that we still have too many children who are placed away from their local area: 43% of children in our care are placed over 20 miles from their home address. We recognise that being placed away from local areas can mean a change in school, friendship groups and community relationships which can be disruptive and impactful on achieving positive outcomes and ability to build attachments. Recruiting local carers for local children is central to our Sufficiency Strategy and we have reviewed our recruitment strategy to improve our profile.

From our work with North Yorkshire, we have established the Harbour service (based on the no wrong door model). We have worked with local providers to develop and register four children's homes offering seven additional places in Dorset under block contracts.

We are moving at pace to address our sufficiency gaps so that more of our children and young people can stay close to their homes and families. We are increasing placement stability through greater placement sufficiency, including expanding in-house residential provision, and implementation of a plan to increase our fostering provision and support to foster carers. This plan is focused on increasing the volume and skill-base of our in-house foster carers to provide greater sufficiency and stability. This includes strengthening our marketing and recruitment processes to improve their commercial appeal and targeting. A focus on peer-support, meaningful engagement, accessible training and the deployment of the Mockingbird model will support the resilience and retention of our existing carers.

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

- Developing our Harbour service by June 2022 to deliver a Hub in Weymouth to provide up to three places for young people with embedded outreach, foster care and supported lodgings, and alongside this a new children's home for up to five young people who need medium term residential care.

- Working with partner organisations to expand the range of residential care in Dorset. We will encourage existing partners to develop this provision, with a further three homes being developed to offer five more places.
- 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 settings and linking the service with dedicated foster carers and short breaks providers to deliver a graduated response.
- Refurbishing existing Dorset Council property to provide a range of accommodation options.
- Developing independent living/respite care for young people 16yrs – 25yrs including outreach

3.8g Voice of our children in care

We have a Children in Care Council and a Care Leavers Forum, supported by our in-house Youth Voice Team. In December 2021 we agreed a development plan for these with the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB). This will ensure there is a broad range of opportunities for Children in Care and Care Leavers to be heard, all aligned to our CPB governance structures including the Governing body of the Virtual School, the Care Leavers Board and our New Belongings work. Opportunities will include surveys, online engagement, workshops and events and continuing our dedicated Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum. The Youth Voice Team are also working closely with our Fostering Service to take a ‘whole family approach’ to engagement, where foster carers, their birth families and the children they foster are able to attend events together, creating an opportunity to engage with foster families at the same time. We are also developing a Virtual School Council made up of our Children in Care.

We commission Advocacy and Independent Visitor services for our Children in Care (and advocacy for Child Protection or for specific issues) through the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS). NYAS is a new provider for Dorset and the contract started in August 2021. We have worked with NYAS to implement the new contract and will explore the potential of using digital workflow to improve their capacity and enable NYAS to raise the profile of advocacy with children, young people, colleagues and our partners. NYAS are also helping us to understand the “distance travelled” by children and young people by monitoring how they use advocacy over time to share their views – this feedback will also be used to inform how we can change the way we work to make it easier for children and young people to share their views as directly as possible.

NYAS have a named advocate linked with The Cherries, our children’s home for children with complex learning difficulties and disabilities. This means that the children at The Cherries have a consistent individual to work with who is getting to know them and their communication preferences in order to best support the children in the home to have their views heard.

3.8h Independent Visitors

In August 2021 NYAS was also commissioned to provide our Independent Visitor service. By the end of September seven of the previous fifteen service volunteers had transferred to the new provider and 8 visits to young people had taken place. Two of the volunteers did not continue with NYAS; the young people being supported have now been matched with new volunteers. NYAS have undertaken a successful campaign to recruit further independent volunteer visitors with eleven new applications and six have started the selection process. This will increase the ability to match the seven young people in care who were on the waiting list inherited by NYAS.

3.8i Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officers

Our Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officers (QAROs, elsewhere known as IROs) provide quality assurance of our children's care plans through a combination of data collection and auditing. The service IRO monitoring form is completed following every child in care review, enabling a range of factors to be reported and the QARO to make a judgement on the quality of the plan. Timeliness of children in care reviews is good and participation of Children in Care is high. Our Quality Assurance Reviewing Officers have worked with our Children in Care Council to develop a letter which is written to the child following the Children in Care review and feedback from children on this is very positive. QAROs upon allocation of a child coming into care also provide a one-page profile of themselves that has been welcomed by our Children in Care who also tell us that they value the relationship with their QARO.

QAROs maintain contact with children between reviews, and we have recently strengthened the evidence for this on the child's case record. We have been focusing on increasing the quality of escalations for Children in Care demonstrating that our Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officers are providing challenge and a critical eye to our children's plans and outcomes so that any issues are addressed in a timely manner. Escalations are now focussing more on the quality of the care plans, pathway plans and impact on the child or young person, with a stronger focus when transitioning into leaving care.

Turning the vision in to better outcomes for young people is entirely down to the hard work of those involved. Great work!
(Police Officer)

John was brilliant. He was the only person who had worked with our child who he got on with and wanted to see. (Parent)

3.9 The Harbour

The Harbour Team has grown steadily under consistent and committed leadership of the Head of Service for Children in Care and Leaving Care and the Responsible Individual. Work has been undertaken to ensure that the right people are in the right roles and within a relatively short period of time it is possible to see that progress is being made towards meeting the intended outcomes.

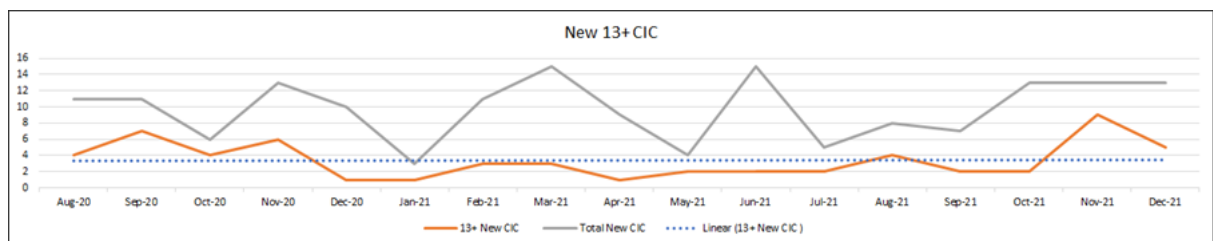


Fig. 3.15 Young People aged 13+ coming into our care 2020-21

In total 79 young people have been supported by The Harbour between December 2020 – December 2021, 76 supported by Outreach and 3 in the care of The Harbour (residential and foster care). The duration and intensity of support has varied according to the needs of young people.

The Harbour continues to support young people to remain safely at home. The graph below shows the number of young people age-13-years and above entering care compared with the total number of new entrants.

During November 2021, we welcomed 3 unaccompanied children, supported a young mother and her baby in a mother and baby placement and a young person to access a Tier 4 provision which impacted on the number of young people aged 13 years-old and above entering care. Through intensive intervention, we were able to support a young person to return home within a week of coming into care, where she has remained settled with the ongoing support provided by her key worker.

We continue to be extremely successful in recruiting talented practitioners to join the integrated, multi-disciplinary team. We are delighted to recruit a highly experienced Psychologist and highly experienced Registered Managers to lead our residential homes. Our detailed induction and ambitious training programme offers a therapeutic qualification for all staff bespoke and specific to residential childcare and supports our recruitment and retention strategy. Our two specialist foster carers also access our training offer and the skills, expertise and support of the team.

Residential Provision

The building of new accommodation via the refurbishment of an Edwardian home in Weymouth is progressing with a completion date in May 2022. We are looking forward to being able to submit our application for registration in February 2022 in readiness for opening in April/May 2022. We have applied to Ofsted to register a single occupancy home on Portland which will complement our provision in providing a quiet space to settle and steady young people. To ensure our homes are homely and take account of the climate emergency we are working with a sustainability company to use second-hand furniture and equipment whenever practicable. We are also co-designing the interior with young people, who are also integral members of our interview panels for recruitment to these new services.

3.10 Missing Children and Children at Risk of or Linked to Exploitation

3.10a Missing children

There has been a reduction in the numbers of our Children in Care having a missing episode in the last 12 months to 12% (previously 14% reported in the Self-Evaluation of February 2021). We have had some fluctuations in the number of missing children over the past 12 months relating to changes in Covid restrictions. Following a peak in July 2021 we have seen a downward trend.

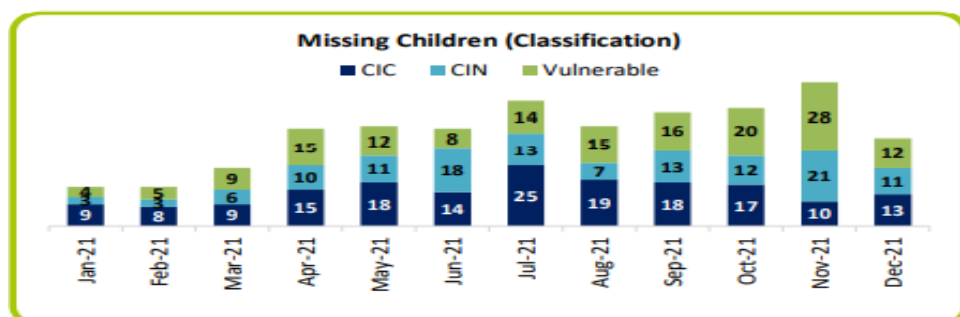


Fig. 3.16 Missing children in Care, in Need or Vulnerable

We are strengthening our work through daily Missing meetings with police who now have a dedicated missing persons team. The daily Missing meeting report's themes and trends to the Child Exploitation (CE) Champions meeting and the Child at Risk of or Linked to Exploitation (CAROLE)

Tactical Group. The learning and actions required are overseen by the CE Strategic Group to inform practice development and multi-agency responses to missing.

3.10b Return Home Interviews (RHIs)

In January 2021 the daily Missing meeting and Missing from Home and Care Practice Guidance was launched which has had a positive impact on the response to missing children and timeliness of RHI's. In December 2021 92.9% of RHI's for Children in Care were completed within 72hrs of their return and 89.5% of RHI's for children missing from home were completed within 72hrs.

We are offering preventative work at the earliest opportunity to reduce the number of missing children and missing episodes. We have strengthened our systems and processes to ensure that the themes arising from return home interviews are captured and shared to consider how we prevent and protect missing children. Return Home Interviews for children who have an allocated Social Worker, including Children in Care placed outside of Dorset are completed by a member of the Harbour team to consider what additional support may be required to reduced risk of further missing episodes including work around stability of care and relationships. Return Home Interviews for all our vulnerable children are being completed by the Targeted Youth Workers within their locality. This ensures that intervention is targeted and supports a contextual safeguarding approach.

We have a Missing and CE dashboard to deliver management oversight and support our understanding of the contexts of our children who go missing. The Dashboard is also shared more widely with our CAROLE tactical group and with the CE Champions to support targeting of resources and strategic planning.

3.10c Children at Risk of or Linked to Exploitation

The Children At Risk Of or Linked to Exploitation (CAROLE) model has been in place since April 2019. The Child Exploitation Action Plan implementation is managed by the CAROLE Tactical Group on a monthly basis and overseen by the Child Exploitation Strategic group which meets quarterly.

Over the last 12 months we have strengthened our approaches to children at risk or linked to exploitation. We have established Child Exploitation Champions roles within each locality area and across central services. The CE Champions meet monthly and drive the co-ordination of themes and intelligence sharing from an individual child level and locality level to ensure cross county awareness of concerns, share learning, good practice and promote consistency and feed into the partnership through the Impact meetings and CAROLE Tactical group.

Our Targeted Youth Workers in each locality team are taking the lead on contextual safeguarding. They facilitate Youth at Risk meetings in each locality involving Police, Health, Reach, Local Schools and Community groups to explore emerging concerns and identify early intervention responses to prevent risks around potential exploitation escalating. This can include supporting schools, Police Safer Schools team or outreach youth work targeting individuals, groups, or locations where concerns are developing.

In April 2021 we launched our contextual safeguarding approach and toolkit based on the Hackney/ University of Bedfordshire model of contextual safeguarding. We have provided contextual safeguarding training across our localities and with our partners, including the voluntary and community sector and local businesses. Our Targeted Youth Workers lead on the multi-agency and community work around contextual safeguarding and offer consultation across locality teams.

In January 2022 we had 78 children identified as at risk of child exploitation, 17 significant risk, 54 moderate risk and 7 emerging risks. Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings take place every 6 weeks where a significant risk is identified and every 12 weeks where moderate risk is identified. To strengthen the safeguarding oversight of MACE meetings for children who are at significant risk these meetings are now chaired by our Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officers (QARO's) to ensure robust planning and timeliness of interventions. Our CE and Missing dashboard also supports management oversight of child exploitation assessments and reviews.

Over the last 6 months we have worked alongside our partners with the Tackling Child Exploitation Project on engaging young people who are at risk of and have experienced child exploitation to understand what has made or would make a difference to them.

We are currently undertaking a multi-agency audit of child exploitation through the Pan Dorset Safeguarding Children's Partnership to review and measure the impact of our work with children who are at risk of or linked to child exploitation. The work with the Tackling Child Exploitation Project is underpinning our approach to this audit and will be the foundation for our next strategic plan for tackling child exploitation.

3.11 Fostering Services

3.11a Fostering Service Overview

The fostering teams currently support:

- 193 Fostering Households
- 133 Mainstream Foster Carers (68.9%)
- 57 Connected Carers
- 3 Foster to adopt families

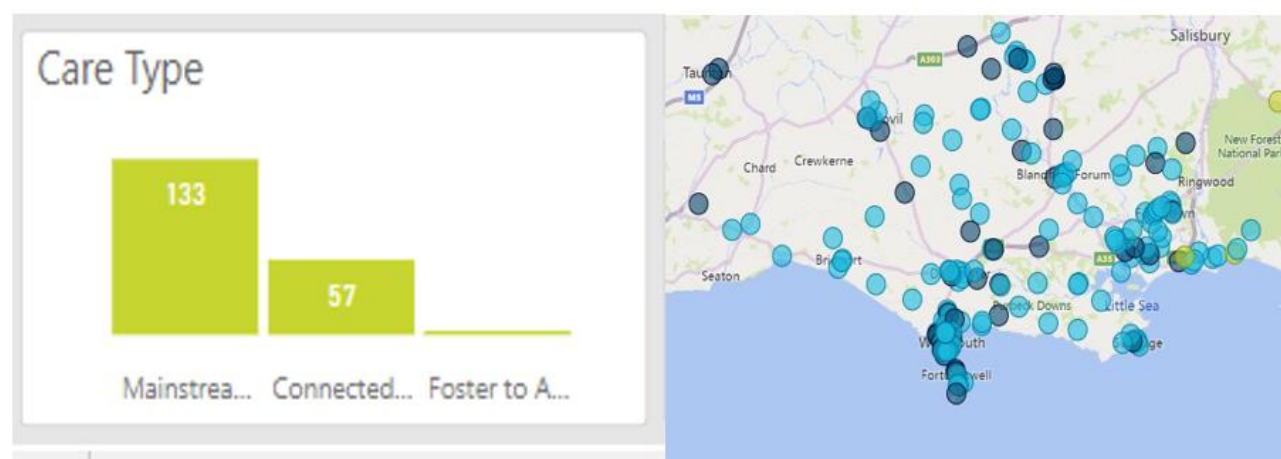


Fig. 3.17 Distribution of Foster Carers in Dorset

The Dorset in-house fostering service consists of three teams:

- Assessment Team – This team undertakes marketing and recruitment, enquiries, and assessment of prospective foster carers both mainstream and connected persons.
- Two Post-Approval Teams. These teams provide day-to-day support, supervision, reviewing and training to connected persons and mainstream foster carers.

Recruitment

- There are currently 36 assessments taking place with 13 of these being for prospective mainstream carers
- There were 238 enquiries in 2021.



Fig. 3.18 Outcomes for fostering applications 2021

To increase the number of enquiries and even more importantly the quality of applicants we have commissioned a marketing agency to work with in-house services to redesign Dorset Council's recruitment strategy. The agency will

- Design a service micro-site with implementation due in February
- Deliver focussed and targeted digital and media campaigns
- Working in conjunction with local businesses and enterprises and the wider council to ensure a greater visualisation of recruitment

We have also reintroduced face-to-face recruitment including attendance at countywide events, regular pitches and pop-up stands.

3.11b Service Improvement and key service developments

- Introduction of the Mockingbird model with a first constellation of foster carers due to be in place by mid-2022.
- a review of our enquiries, recruitment, and induction processes.
- a review of placement stability and foster care resignation procedures
- the introduction of Microsoft 365 accounts for foster carers.
- continuing our partnership with Dorset Foster Care Association.
- review of foster panel processes.
- review and updating of policies, practices, and procedures.
- planning for a therapeutic DDP / PACE led service.
- development of the Business Intelligent Server Dashboard

3.12 Adoption Services

Adoption and Special Guardianship Services have commissioned from Aspire Regional Adoption Agency since 2017. Figures below are correct to the end of Quarter 3 December 2021.

The Ofsted inspectors commended the number and diverse range of adoptive families available for our children. From 1st April 2021 to 31st December 2021, 31 adoptive families have been approved. We currently have 29 families available, 13 of whom will consider early permanence.

If Aspire has not identified a suitable adoptive family by the time an adoption order is made, we immediately instigate a national search to prevent delay for children. There is an additional cost to external placements, but this is mitigated by selling adopters. Currently we sell slightly more adopters than we buy.

Recruitment messages have been amended to reflect demand for adopters for sibling groups, older children and those with complex needs. This has been successful, and we have found families for almost all children with a plan for adoption. We were particularly pleased to find adopters for a non-verbal, autistic 7-year-old with limited mobility who is thriving with his new family and complex siblings. This success is helping drive ambition for children when planning for permanence.

13 children have been adopted to Q3. A further 17 children are living with adopters and should be adopted in the next few months. Five children went to live with their prospective adopters, under a foster care arrangement (Early Permanence) including two straight from hospital which reduced the trauma from placement change and broken attachments. Early Permanence is also being used with older children and siblings.

Last year 2020 – March 2021 the average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family was 333. The England average from the provisional 2016-19 adoption scorecards is 376 days. The Dorset average is likely to be longer this year. Ofsted commended the fact that each child is tracked monthly by operational and senior management. We were able to show that young children are placed very quickly. The relatively small number in the score card is distorted because of our ambition and our refusal to give up on the older more complex children who take longer to place.

Placing complex children requires better lifelong post-adoption support. Post-adoption support services are offered to adopters and Special Guardianship families. Consultation with the Adopter and Special Guardianship Forum highlighted their frustration at the waiting list; a theme that was echoed by our social workers.

This has led to us strengthening our partnership with the Forum; they are now represented on the board and operational management group and are co-designing the post support service with a new philosophy which enables families to dip in and out of services as their needs change.

Key developments for 2022 are:

- Further improve the quality of our Early Permanence work by achieving the Coram Quality Mark and through a regional bid for Early Permanence training,
- Training our teams in Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP)
- Improve assessment and post-adoption support by commissioning virtual services
- Regulatory review using Coram BAAF format
- Developing a systematic approach to engaging service users and informing service development

3.13 Care Leavers

3.13a Our Care Leavers

We currently have 272 young people receiving leaving care services (December 2021), and we know that this number will increase with a further 101 16 and 17 year-old eligible care leavers who currently have secondary allocation to a Personal Adviser.

In addition, we have 173 21 to 25-year-olds with whom we have a duty to keep in touch annually and who can return to receive an active service should they need support. We therefore have a total of 546 eligible, relevant and former relevant care leavers for whom we offer a level of leaving care service.

Most of our care leavers remained in care until their 18th birthday. Whilst the picture is improving, we know not as many of our young people are benefiting from Staying Put arrangements as we would like. 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 into adulthood.

Personal Advisers are secondary allocated as soon as possible after their 16th birthday secondary to provide a smooth transition from their social worker to the Care Leaver service once they are 18. The Personal Adviser works alongside the young person's social worker, building a relationship before they become Care Leavers. This enables us to support young people with the skills they need as they move into adulthood, so they are more ready to leave care. We will continue our focus to ensure that all our young people have current Pathway Plans that are ambitious and support our young people to move towards increased independence creating maximum opportunities for living, loving, learning and working.

3.13b Keeping in touch

We are in touch with almost 97% our care leavers between 18 and 21 years of age.

We also seek to maintain annual contact with our care leavers who are aged 21 – 25 and not actively working with us.

3.13c Finding the right place to live

A high number of our care leavers are in suitable accommodation (93% of 19 to 21-year-olds). We continue to work at pace to ensure that all our care leavers have safe, stable and permanent homes that meet their needs.

We continue work to ensure there are sufficient suitable housing and accommodation options for care leavers ensuring care leavers are provided with their permanent homes at pace. To this end, Dorset Council purchased accommodation in Kirtleton Avenue, Weymouth which will provide 7 affordable homes to meet the needs of our care leavers from July 2022.

Work is also progressing with Adult Services to reconfigure the former young people's supported accommodation contract. This is a former Supporting People budget which we aim to combine with existing spend on care leaver accommodation to increase purchasing power. Dorset Council belongs to a sub-regional framework for supported accommodation for care leavers.

We are also driving work forward to secure affordable long-term housing for care leavers through local authority housing allocation from our Dorset housing providers. This work is being delivered by the Care Leaver Delivery Group which has also overseen the development of The Joint Housing

Protocol for Care Leavers, an agreed guarantor offer and a commitment to continue to build relationships with the Private Landlord Association.

We have developed an EdQuals programme to demonstrate tenancy readiness. This is currently being tested by care leavers before being launched across the service.

16 of our care leavers are living in unsuitable accommodation which includes custody and emergency B&B accommodation.

When a care leaver has been placed in B&B under homelessness legislation, their Personal Adviser and housing officer work with them to help them move on as quickly as possible into secure, affordable and suitable housing. We ensure that written plans are routinely updated when risks or situations change and that the arrangements for a long-term plan are specifically recorded and updated.

We are also developing information for young people (with young people) that explains the enhanced wrap around support offer should they require temporary (and unsuitable accommodation), for example:

- Who to contact if you're worried about anything
- Contact visits
- Help you will get
- What happens next

3.13d Employment, Education and Training

We continue to support our young people to be in education, employment or training, with 70 % of 17/18-year-olds and 54% of 19-21-year-olds accessing education, employment or training. This an area in which we are determined to further strengthen practice and work with our partners to improve our offer for young people leaving our care. This reflects a diverse group of young people whose needs are complex due to several factors including disability, mental health, use of substances which disrupt opportunities in terms of education, employment or training and coming late into care due to family breakdown having already disengaged from formal education.

There are significant service achievements to celebrate. We currently have 31 care leavers at University, 2 of whom are studying at Masters level. Three dedicated Personal Advisers (PAs) work with care leavers who are studying at University to ensure that our undergraduates maintain their places in their education settings. We have a further 10 care leavers who are aspiring to go to University in September 2022. We are delighted in the achievements of our 8 young people who graduated last year (2021) in the following subjects:

- Social Work
- Music Production
- Creative Media
- Musical Theatre
- Criminology & Law
- Product Design
- History
- Politics

We have a protocol in place with two of our Job Centres Plus which will provide:

- co-ordinated support to engage young people into Education, Employment, Apprenticeships, Voluntary Work or Training.
- an early entry system and a smooth transition for those young people leaving care and needing to claim benefits.
- prompt and accurate payment of benefits where these are required.
- young people are empowered and enabled to gain sustainable paid employment through individual route ways.

Dorset Council has underlined its commitment to care leavers through its HR procedures: all Children in Care and care leavers who apply for Dorset Council apprenticeships are guaranteed an interview; we are working with our HR colleagues to extend this commitment to all positions advertised by the council.

Our EET re-engagement team, created in Aug 2020 has a clear focus on supporting children in care and care leavers to participate in education, employment and training. Work by the Care Leaver Service and the team has already had a demonstrable impact, with a reduction in the proportion of Year 12 and 13 care leavers who are NEET from 35.8% in August 2021 to 20% in Jan 2022 and a reduction from 42.2% to 40.8% in care leavers in Year 14 to 21st birthday. The EET re-engagement team has made links with Supporting Housing providers for Young People in Care, piloting regular drop-ins and making contact with young people who are more reluctant to engage with EET Advisers.

3.13e Care Leaver Offer

We are partners with Coram Voice, together with 7 other Local Authorities, to deliver the New Belongings programme. New Belongings aims to better understand what makes life good care leavers and how we can improve our support by co-producing solutions with them. With our New Belongings partners, we have undertaken a self-assessment of our services and developed an action plan for improvement. This is overseen and monitored from our Care Leaver Delivery Group which reports to Corporate Parenting Board. Through New Belongings, we also have opportunities to come together with other Local Authorities for peer and practice learning.

Building on the work already undertaken in Dorset to support our Care Leavers including the development of apprenticeships and council tax exemption, our digital Care Leaver Offer is under further development with contributions from young people. The revised Finance Policy was implemented in April 2021 for all new care leavers and retrospectively applied for all care leavers age 18-21 already supported by us.

Dorset Council has joined the Care Leaver Covenant and has been recognised by the Covenant as Trailblazer Authority. We are working with the Care Leaver Covenant through the Care Leaver Delivery Group to use best practice and as we continuously build on our care leaver offer across the Council and the partnership. This work sets out a clear commitment to our Care Leavers framed around what they can expect from us as they become young adults.

3.13f Summary and Next Steps

We have updated our practice standards to ensure we have a greater focus on the quality and impact of Pathway Plans for those young people in temporary accommodation, their visiting arrangements, offer of practical support and exit plan.

We have strengthened our Care Leaver Business Intelligence Dashboard to provide management information to all managers and senior leaders on key areas of performance including suitability of

accommodation and management oversight in particular of those young people living in temporary or unsuitable accommodation.

In collaboration with our Youth Voice Service and young people, we are co-producing information that explains the wrap around support offer should they require temporary and unsuitable accommodation which includes:

- Who to contact if you're worried about anything
- Contact visits
- Help you will get
- What happens next

Through the positive engagement with our Housing colleagues, we are working at pace to ensure that there is sufficient affordable housing and suitable accommodation options for our care leavers to be provided with their permanent home.

Plans are in place to give assurance of the impact of the actions we have taken to strengthen practice in this area through our performance measures, audit, and feedback from young people.



3.14 Education and Inclusion

3.14a School Performance

76% of Dorset schools and academies are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, 75% of children are in schools that are rated good or better.

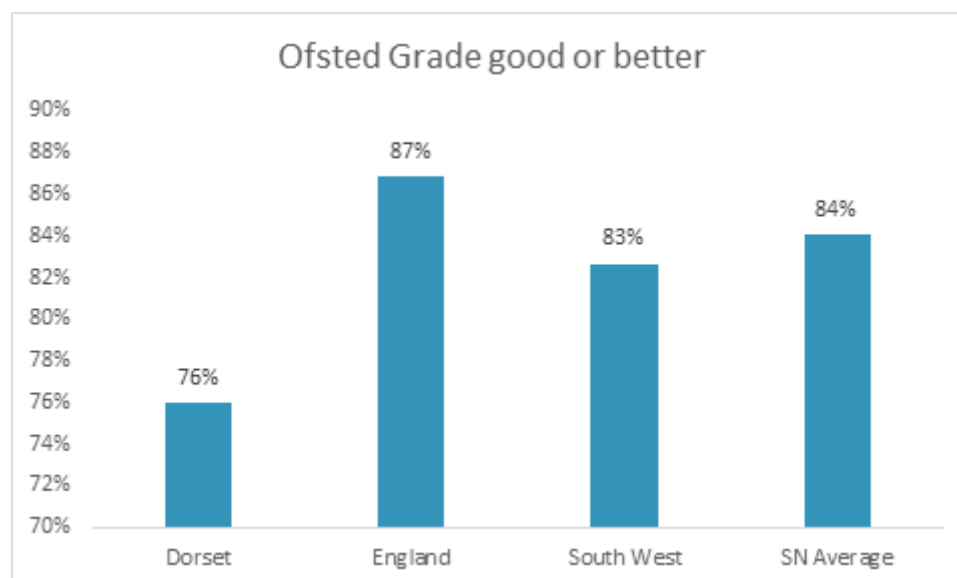


Fig. 3.19 Ofsted Grades in Dorset, with comparators (source: Ofsted, as at 31/12/2021)

The School Improvement Team works together with school leaders and governors in all areas of school improvement including self-evaluation, leadership effectiveness, quality of education and inclusion best practice using evidence-led approaches and leading practice in line with the Ofsted framework. Our approach enables schools to coordinate support, but also build on the strength of the local authority's partnerships with key bodies such as Teaching School Hub, Maths and English hubs, Health, Police, parent forum and the voluntary and community sector to ensure a wider collaborative and community focussed approach to improvement.

Phonics: Phonics assessments have continued during the pandemic, although no comparative data is available. The overall pass rate has improved in Dorset by 2% from 2019 to 83%. EHC pupils have improved by 9% to 22%. However, the free school meals gap has increased from 16% to 18%.

Key Stage 4: Just under three quarters (74%) of children achieved a grade 4 or higher in GCSE English and Maths, above the figures for national and the south west. 51% achieved a grade 5 or higher, slightly below the national and south west. The number of children entering the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects is the same as for national, and attainment in these subjects is broadly in line with national, although Dorset children do not perform as well in languages. Disadvantaged children (eligible for free school meals in the last six years) do not perform as well as their peers – at grade 4 or higher the gap increased from 26% in 2018/19 to 28% in 2019/20 and 2020/21. At the higher grade 5 plus the gap has increased from 23% in 2019/20 to 26% in 2019/20 to 32% in 2020/21. Children with SEND tend to perform below their national counterparts: 6% of EHC pupils achieved a grade 5 or higher in GCSE English & Maths, compared to 8% nationally, whilst 15% achieved a grade 4 or higher, compared to 16% nationally.

Key Stage 5: 97% of Dorset pupils achieved at least 2 substantial level 3 academic qualifications in 2020/21, compared to 94% nationally and across the southwest. However, at A Level, Dorset pupils tend to achieve grades that could be described as 'just enough', 86% of Dorset pupils achieved grade C or higher in A Levels in 2020/21, compared to 87% nationally, but only 63% achieved a

Grade B or higher compared to 67% for the southwest and national. This pattern is repeated for STEM subjects. 22% achieved 3 A*-A grades compared to 25% nationally and 26% in the southwest. For T Levels, entry is increasing, and the average point score (35.7) is above the national (31.7) and the southwest (31.5).

89% of Disadvantaged pupils achieved at least 2 Levels, compared to 83% nationally and 82% in the Southwest, they also achieve higher rates of those achieving at least 2 substantial level 3 academic qualifications (96%). As with the overall cohort though, less achieve the higher grades, for example 8% achieved 3 A* to A compared to 16% nationally and 14% in the southwest.

For EHCP pupils, 91% achieved at least 2 substantial level 3 academic qualifications, compared to 78% nationally. The numbers achieving A levels at graded AAB or better is on a par with national.

Our new Education Board for Dorset will commence in May 2022. The Board will include key educational leaders in Dorset who have passion and expertise across the education ecosystem. It will use local, regional and national evidence and research to inform its foci. The Board will set a clear direction and a positive culture to support partners to deliver ambitious educational outcomes for all children and young people into adulthood.

Children and young people will be engaged in the work of the Board to ensure that the strategies are co-produced.

The Board will focus on the following building blocks:

- To ensure every child is receiving education in an **Ofsted 'Good' or 'Outstanding'** school.
- To close the **disadvantaged attainment and achievement gap** to zero by providing strong inclusive support for our disadvantaged and vulnerable children so they can achieve alongside their peers in their local schools.
- To ensure **that all our children and young people thrive** in their education with the skills they need ready for adulthood.

The culture of the Board will be to create an open and innovative dialogue, where the strength of the partnership offers novel solutions to systemic challenges built on the strong links within the communities where educational settings remain at the heart.

3.14b Inclusion

Our ambition is for all our schools and settings to be inclusive for all our children and young people and that they have the right support at the right time enabling them to have a stable and settled education. Our locality model enables us to mobilise inclusion, SEND and Early Help practitioners to support our children, families and schools at the right time. The theme of our Dorset Education Conference in July 2021 was Inclusion, enabling us to set out a clear set of ambitions and expectations. This will be followed up in July 2022 with a further high-quality conference that will focus on the importance of schools in the hearts of their communities.

We work closely with our schools, utilising Educational Psychology and Specialist Teachers to increase the skill and capacity in schools to meet the needs of their children. We act as system leaders in local inclusion partnerships to help schools work together to find solutions for children at risk of permanent exclusion early. We run a relational practice programme which includes professional development for individual schools and a regular forum to bring those schools together to further their knowledge and share good practice. We have made Dorset STEPs training, a positive therapeutic approach to supporting relationships and behaviour available to all our schools and academies through our Outreach service.

Dorset has reduced its number of permanent exclusions, following a peak of 88 in 2018/19 to 35 in 2020 - 21, and we have set an ambitious target of zero permanent exclusions going forward. Suspensions are also reducing in Dorset. In 2020/21, the suspension rate was 5.2% compared to 6% in 2017/18. In the Autumn term 2020 Dorset had 15 permanent exclusions, for Autumn 2021 the figure was 8.

In 2020 - 21 there were 488 cases of Children Missing Education (CME), of which 88% were closed during the academic year. The majority (416) were CME from Dorset schools, of which 92% were closed. 91% of those with an EHCP were closed (41 out of 45), and 96% of those on SEN support were closed (90 out of 94). 5 out of 7 Children In Need, 5 out of 8 Children on a Child Protection Plan and 11 out of 12 Early Help were all closed due to our high level of focus on these groups.

Our aim is to close CME cases within half a term. In December 2021 we achieved this for 69.6% of those children that are CME. The following is in place to continue improving this rate of return to schools:

- A robust fortnightly Children Missing Out On Education (CMOOE) oversight meeting attended by key members of Children's Services and the Youth Offending Service to ensure that children are returned to school rapidly. The meeting focuses in particular on timeliness and vulnerable groups of children
- Dorset Education Advice Line, a phone line for parents, carers and professionals who support children who may have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This advice line is part of our Local Offer to children, young people and families and will work alongside existing services such as SENDIASS
- Joint Planning with Educational Psychologists and Specialist Teachers linked to each school and involving other professionals where appropriate. This means that schools are well held in relation to children that need support using the graduated approach.
- Link Family Workers and Inclusion Leads for each school that support the school and families in relation to attendance and other inclusion matters
- Dorset Outreach Board support
- STEPs training offer to all Dorset schools, a therapeutic whole school approach to building relationships and promoting positive pro-social behaviour
- Anna Freud Link Programme which will develop Locality School Mental Health Lead networks and a shared pedagogy around the emotional, health and well-being curriculum

3.14c Attendance

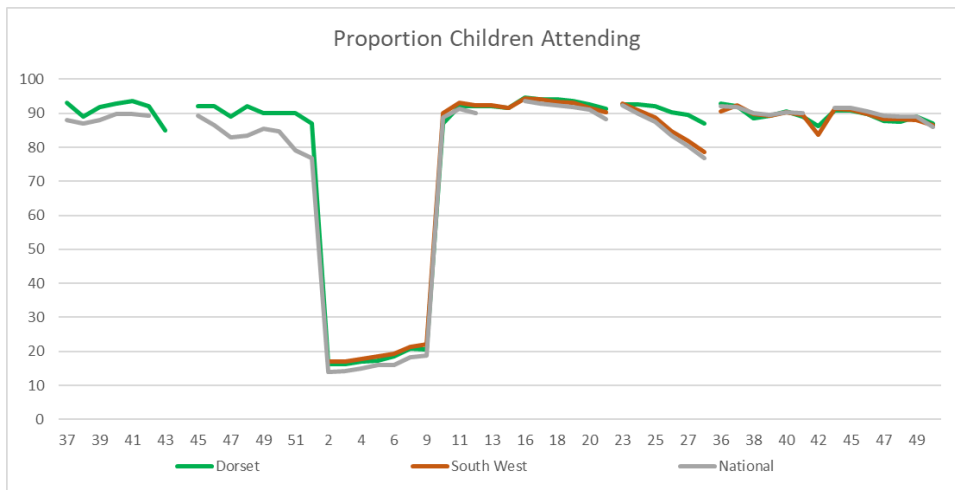
We see supporting good attendance as a key part of our inclusion work and therefore it goes beyond statutory actions and focuses on the whole child and family and what support is needed to help overcome barriers to attendance. We are currently implementing a system to draw attendance data through a live link from our schools on a weekly basis, enabling us to respond more rapidly to our children's needs by mobilising locality practitioners to unpick the barriers to attendance with the school and family.

From a high of 5% in 2017/18 Dorset has reduced the overall absence rate to 4.2%, 0.2% above national absence rates. Our absence percentage for children and young people with SEND support is better than the South West and national averages. We recognise that although our absence and persistent absence for children and young people with an EHCP is broadly in line with the South West, it is above the national average. Absence and persistent absence for children and young people who are eligible for free school meals (pupil premium) is improving and is better than the

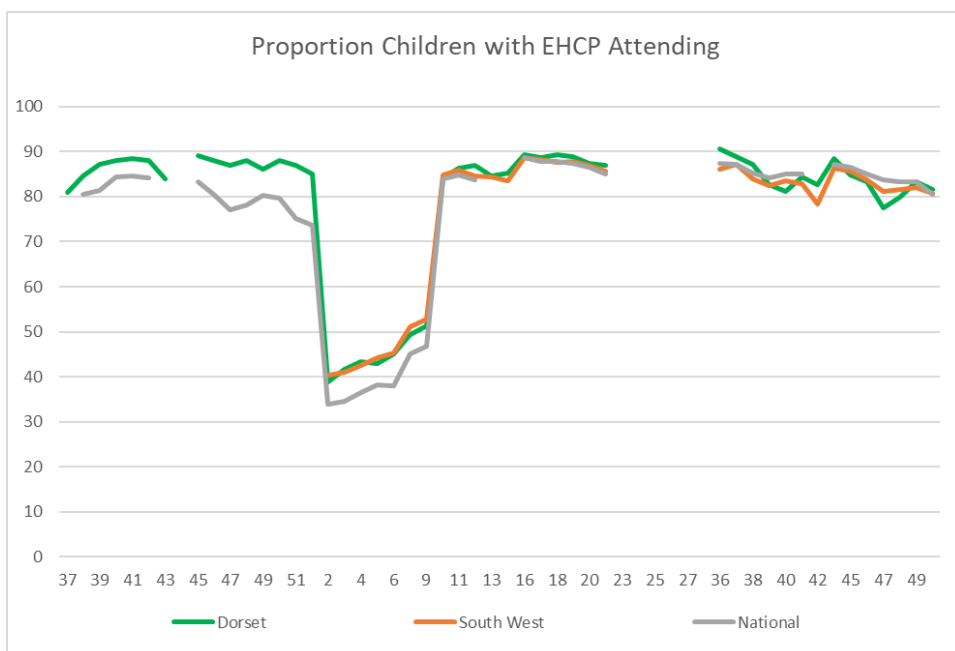
South West; however we acknowledge that it remains below the national average. Due to our multi-agency work to build positive relationships in our communities, absence and persistent absence of children and young people with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage is improving, our absence percentage is better than the South West and national and persistent absence is better than the national average and broadly in line with the South West.

We focused sharply on our vulnerable children during the pandemic, quickly putting in place a vulnerable children tracker which we have continued to use due to the positive feedback we have had from schools, practitioners and the DfE. The impact of the work can be seen in our attendance data during this time:

Overall weekly attendance 10.9.20 – 16.12.21: [OBJ](#)



In general Dorset’s attendance during the pandemic has been above national, with the exceptions in weeks 47 and 48 relating to a higher Covid rate than national at that time. Children with an EHCP also maintained above national attendance, but children eligible for Free School Meals had lower attendance during the Autumn 2021 term.



3.14d Elective Home Education

We have a strong focus on our children who are electively home educated, recognised by Ofsted in November 2021: “Children who are missing from education and those who are home educated are tracked well”. To achieve this, we took the following steps:

In September 2020 we consulted with home educators to inform our work in this area. They told us that they did not feel that the relationship with Dorset Council was a trusting one and they wanted us to know that most home educators do a great job. They wanted us to work with them rather than do to them. We listened carefully to them and asked them to work with us on the changes. Co-production is at the heart of our working with our families. We put building warm, open relationships as a priority for the way the Inclusion Leads work. This led to the co-production of an EHE guide for parents, an EHE policy and the opportunity for our parents to contribute to the CPD for Inclusion Leads. We also support schools to have dialogue with families in a 10-day cooling off period that enables solutions to be sought together and children to be returned to school where families wish to do so.

Although we saw numbers of EHE registrations rise during Covid this was not sustained, as seen in the chart below showing the number of children registered as EHE between September 2020 and December 2021. This was recognised by Ofsted in November 2021: “Dorset saw an increase in children being electively home educated in the context of the pandemic. However, the numbers of children being electively home educated have now returned to pre-pandemic levels. A strong and joined-up approach between schools and children’s social care in this instance keeps children safer.”

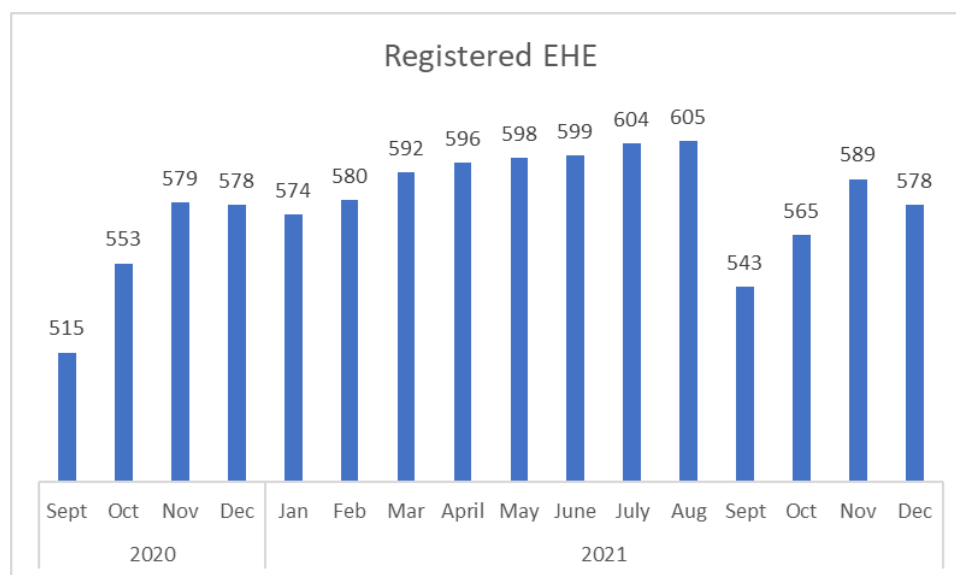


Fig. 3.21 Children registered for Elective Home Education 2020-21

Our Inclusion Leads’ engagement work is enabling families who wish to, to return to school. Inclusion Leads look at the reasons parents give for elective home education, and where it is not for a positive reason, the Inclusion Lead uses the 10-day cooling off period to work with the family, school and other agencies as needed to find solutions and return the child to school. This can be seen in the following data from the same period:

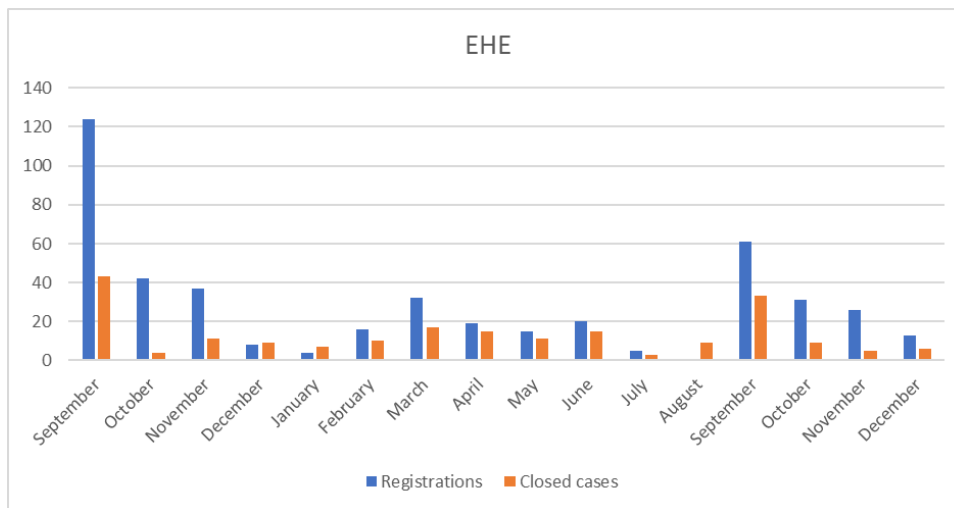


Fig. 3.22 Elective Home Education, registration and case closure by month

3.14e Education, Employment and Training

Our EET re-engagement service was created in August 2021 and is responsible for ensuring we have as many young people in employment, education or training as possible by actively tracking our post 16 population so we know which young people are NEET and reducing our ‘Unknown’s’; providing relationship-based support through a link worker as quickly as possible when a young person does become NEET; working with partners and providers to ensure young people who become NEET receive the right help at the right time. Our approach is to focus on our statutory responsibility of NEET tracking and re-engagement and meeting the September Guarantee offer. The team work collaboratively with our Locality teams to maximise the resource and expertise available for the NEET caseload whilst laying the foundations for preventative earlier work.

This focused work is making a difference:

- We have seen a reduction in NEET prevalence from 3% at end of July 21 to 2.7% currently (Jan 22) accompanied by a reduction in the proportion of young people who are ‘not known’ to the local authority from 2.1% in July 2021 to 1.5% currently. Our NEET data for 2021-22 indicates we are currently (Jan 22) performing well against our statistical neighbours, being below both the mean indicator for both our overall NEET rate and our ‘Not Knowns’. (Statistical Neighbour data for Jan’22 will be available for comparison after 22.2.22).
- We have also seen a reduction in NEET prevalence for children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans since August 21, for children in Year 12 and 13 there has been a reduction from 11.1% to 9.8% and for young people aged 18 to 25 years there has been a reduction from 15.3% to 9.1%.

For the September Offer 2021, 92.8% of Year 11 & 12 young people had an offer. This was down from 94.6% the previous year, mostly due to a rise in those that we were not able to contact to ascertain the offer. We have since benefited from improved data and system access and so anticipate a reduction in the number that we are unable to contact in our figures for the September offer this year .

We are potentially seeing the effects of COVID and the impact on education and exams over the last 18 months, by the increase in Young People engaged in Jobs without Training (2.2% in Jan 2021 to 3.3% in Jan 22) as a trend and will review this trend against statistical neighbour data once this is available later this month. However, the number of young people in Jobs without Training also

reflects that Dorset is a seasonal economy and we will be doing further work with our economic development colleagues to work more closely with employers. We are also monitoring closely our work with young people involved in the criminal justice system, as although numbers are very low we have seen a slight increase in the numbers who are NEET.

We have begun closer working with the SEND Teams within Localities and the Care Leavers Team, reviewing how each other's data quality impacts the other's work, involving IT colleagues to explore potential quick wins. This will allow us to meet our tracking and data return responsibilities more efficiently enabling Advisers to spend more time on direct work with young people.

Next steps include more focused monitoring of those NEET young people in receipt of Universal Credit, to enable some scrutiny of the apparently low numbers who appear to be benefiting from engagement in DWP support schemes e.g. Kickstart. We have begun conversations with Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole's Youth Access Point colleagues to explore reviewing the DWP Care Leavers' SLA to this end.

3.14f Children and young people with SEND

Our vision for SEND is that "we want our children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to be healthy, happy and safe, and able to achieve their potential to lead a fulfilling life."

Currently, we have approximately 3,200 children with Special Educational Needs supported through an Educational, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and 6,700 children and young people identified with SEN Support needs. We work with 242 children and young people who have a Child in Need Plan and 124 Children in Care and 24 Care Leavers that are also supported by an EHCP.

Total SEN	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Dorset	16%	16%	18%	17%	15%	18%
South West	15%	15%	16%	15%	16%	17%
National	14%	14%	15%	15%	15%	16%

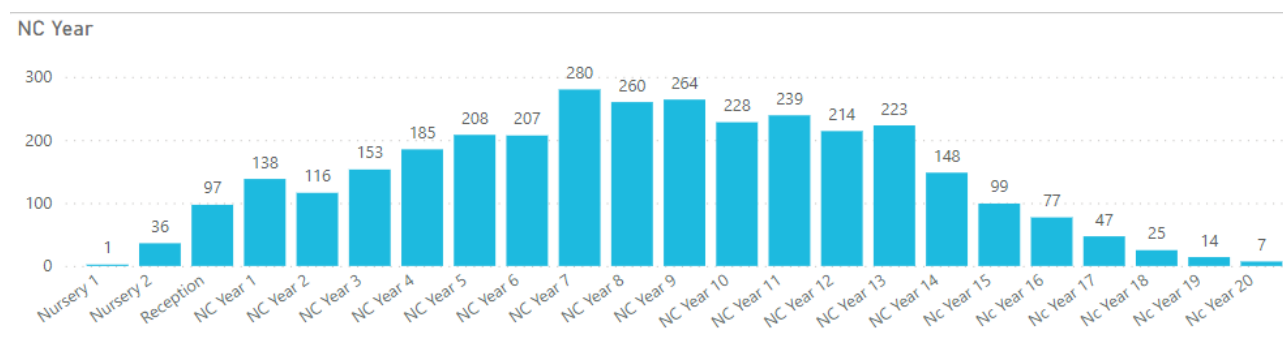


Fig. 3.23 The table below shows our SEND children and young people by school year:

The following table shows Primary Need:

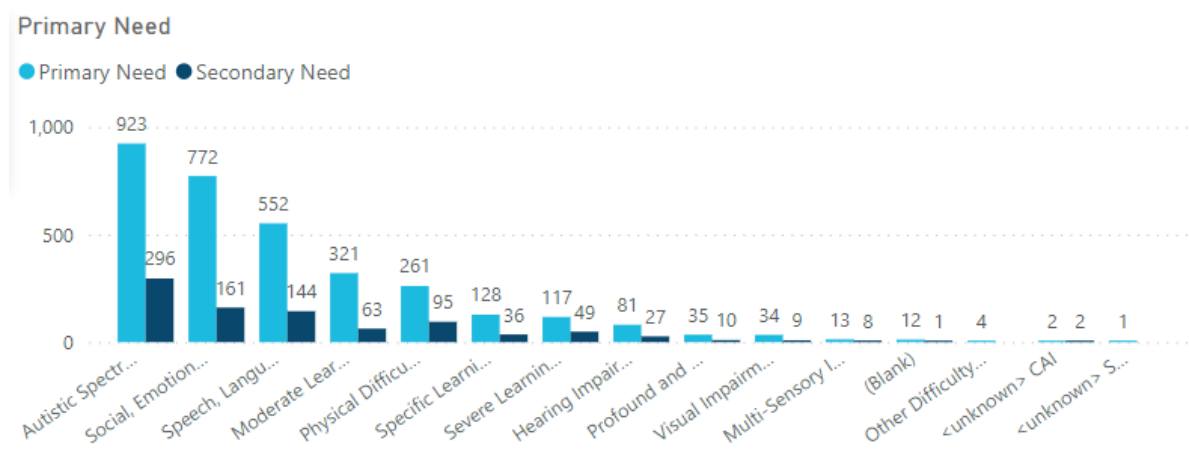


Fig. 3.24 Primary Need

3.14g SEND Strategy

January 2017, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) conducted a joint inspection of the Dorset local area to judge its effectiveness in implementing the special educational needs and disability (SEND) reforms set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. As a result of the findings of the inspection, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) determined that a Written Statement of Action was required to address four areas of significant weakness in the local area's practice.

As part of Ofsted's revisit in February 2019, inspectors were of the opinion that local area had made sufficient progress in two of the four areas identified, however the local area had not made sufficient progress to improve the two remaining areas of weaknesses and sustained the Written Statement of Action.

The Department for Education met with the Local Area the on 11 January 2021 to discuss progress against the Local Area's Accelerated Progress Plan. In response to the progress made by the Local Area, the Department for Education stated that:

"We are reassured that the strength and commitment of current leaders within the LA and CCG will continue improvements across the SEND system throughout Dorset and based on the evidence provided, the Department and NHS England have concluded that you have demonstrated clear and sustained progress. This means that Dorset no longer requires formal monitoring of its SEND system."

Following the significant progress already made and to respond to feedback from the Dorset wide Parent Carer Survey for our SEND families a new SEND Strategy was produced setting a path for the next three years. Our 2021- 2024 Local Area SEND strategy was ratified at Cabinet in November 2021.

The Dorset SEND Strategy has six clear priority areas for attention and each priority has associated supporting actions, these actions, in the first instance, are focused on the first year of delivery and will be reviewed each quarter through the Dorset Education Board.

The six strategic priorities are:

1. **Early Identification and Support:** we will ensure that children's needs are identified, assessed and supported both early in life and when issues arise.
2. **Inclusion:** we will ensure that across Dorset there is a commitment to deliver inclusive services and support for and with children, young people and adults with SEND. Dorset is committed to inclusion in mainstream settings and we firmly believe every teacher is a teacher of special needs. Therefore, building the capabilities of our mainstream schools to support more children and young people with SEND will ensure more children can attend a local school. Strengthening the capacity of our maintained school system to support more children in mainstream and meeting need at the lowest level is at the core of our strategy.
3. **SEND Pathway:** we will ensure that children and young people with SEND and their families can access the right support from services – easily and quickly.
4. **SEND Sufficiency and Provision:** to ensure that the Education provision for all children and young people with SEND is increased so that our children can stay in Dorset and thrive in their local communities. This includes access to health services, early years, post-16 and adults with learning disabilities (LD).
5. **Transitions:** we will ensure that transitions between phases of education or changes in provision and support across all ages and smooth and supportive. Preparation for Adulthood: We expect that young people with SEND should have equal life chances as they move into adulthood. This includes employment and higher education, housing options and independent living, good health, friends, relationships, community inclusion and choice and control over their lives and support.
6. **Managing Money and Resources:** to ensure the effective and efficient management of the SEN funding available through the Dedicated Schools Grant, to maximise the impact of the available resource and the best outcomes for our children and young people.

Achieving Best Outcomes in SEND Plan

The plan groups activity against key operational themes for the SEND teams:

- Improving our Services to Children and Families
- Systems and Data – ensuring that all key information is contained within the Synergy system and that all necessary data is up to date and drives meaningful performance management information
- Process – Dorset has clear documented processes that drive first class services for our SEND children and families
- Workforce – Dorset is committed to ensuring that all staff are supported to be the best they can be and achieve the best outcomes for our SEND children and families

The Plan is reviewed each month at the Education Project Board and updated by accountable owners.

We also made a significant Investment in our operational SEND teams in the summer of 2021 to increase capacity on the front line.

3.14h Data and Business Intelligence Insights

Work has been ongoing throughout 2021 to develop high-quality dashboards that give managers and officers insights into performance. Our approach to performance is centred on ensuring that children, young people and families receive the services they need in a timely and responsive manner.

Performance over the last 6 months has shown stable improvement; 20-week timeliness in the Autumn term was 76% and there is focus and attention on performance given by SEND Team Managers and Service Managers on a weekly basis. An updated Power BI dashboard was launched in January 2022 to ensure that Team and Service Managers have a wider range of performance data available to them which has enabled us to maintain progress.

The SEND service has seen stable demand for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment Requests (EHNCA's) with approximately 50 per month on average. This average has been consistent through the pandemic demonstrating the improved support to families early through our approach to inclusion and the application of the graduated approach

through the pandemic demonstrating the improved support to families early through our approach to inclusion and the application of the graduated approach.

3.14i Working together in partnership as a local area

The Dorset Parent Carer Council (DPCC) was formed in June 2009 and has over 700 members across Dorset. The membership is made up of parents and carers of children who have a variety of special needs from complex medical to challenging behaviour to learning or physical difficulties and more.

DPCC has a positive and active role in supporting the development of services that affect children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They are represented on the Corporate Parenting Board, Best Education for All Board, Strengthening Services Board, and the Strategic Alliance Board. The DPCC take a professional and considered approach that strikes a good balance of challenge and support to the council and its plans.

The partnership with our Clinical Commissioning Groups, Healthcare Trusts and Primary Care networks has continued to improve. There is cross-sector representation at panels and events for parents and carers.

February 2022 has seen the completion of the Local Area Partnership Agreement – this provides a framework across the Dorset Council area for all key strategic partners to collaboratively work to achieve the best outcomes for Children and Young People. The mission of the partnership is

- To deliver the best education for all our children and young people,
- To prepare our young people for independence and adulthood, and
- For our children and young people to experience the best possible health and wellbeing.

In January 2022, Dorset Council, Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group and Dorset Parent Carer Council enshrined our partnership working as a local area in a Partnership Agreement. This agreement seeks to provide a framework across the Dorset Council area for all key strategic partners to collaboratively work to achieve the best outcomes for Children and Young People.

Our partnership working will ensure that children, young people and their families have equal opportunity to meaningfully participate in the decisions that affect them at individual, operational and strategic levels.

3.14j You said we did

Following the Parent Carer Survey in 2021, we produced a 'You Said We did' section on the Local Offer addressing the queries and concerns raised. We continue to engage with our parents and carers through termly 'Let's Talk' events which have returned to face to face events following the pandemic. These provide an opportunity for parents and carers to meet with professionals to discuss key areas for development. Previous topics have included SEN Transport, Short Breaks and an introduction to the new Locality model in Children's Services. These events are hosted by the Senior Educational Psychologist and SEND Team Manager in each locality and are arranged at appropriate times both during and outside the usual working day and in locations that parents and carers feel comfortable in. These events are supported by the Parent Carer Council.

In February 2022, we held online live Q&A events in collaboration with Dorset Parent Care Council for families of children with SEND to update them on key progress in our strategy and allow them time to ask us anything. The events were very successful and attended by 50 families in total across two events. The outcomes will support our work through our ongoing continuous improvement work in SEND in partnership with our parent carer forum.

3.14k High Needs Block

The Council completed its High Needs Block Management Strategy in September 2021 which was approved by Schools Forum and then subsequently Dorset Council Cabinet.

Schools' forum established a High Needs Block Strategy Group that is monitoring the implementation of the plan and maintain communications with school leaders.

The working group is a school-led Board giving leadership and oversight to the budget. In collaboration with the working group, the group have already delivered savings and provide oversight and challenge to the delivery of the Capital Strategy.

Headteachers briefings with our primary, middle and secondary schools were held in January 2021 to inform them of the strategy and drive toward inclusion.

3.14l Capital Strategy

To achieve our ambitious vision, we need to ensure that our children and young people are educated at an appropriate setting to meet their needs and therefore we have set out a capital strategy supported by £40m of local authority investment for the creation of new specialist provision. This is linked to our high needs management strategy which will support the revenue funding streams for the new provision and our SEND strategy which sets out how we will work with young people, parents and health professionals to support young people with SEND. To date we have:

- Purchased a new special school in the north of the County and are creating 280 special places for children and young people which will open to new cohorts by April 2022
- Converted a recently replaced primary school into a special college for post 16 education attached to a maintained special school to create 75 more places
- Supporting the opening of a new free special school built on the site of a closed mainstream middle school which will be opened in the summer of 2022 for 160 young people with communication needs and separately social emotional and mental health needs.
- Working to create additional specialist communication inclusion hubs in mainstream schools across the county which will create approximately 100 more places over time

3.14m School age children and young people – SEND Profile statistic (July 2021)

The profile of SEND and educational outcomes in Dorset shows that 4% of our children in Dorset Schools have an EHC Plan with a further 14% accessing SEN support. These figures are in line with the National Profile for EHC Plans at 4%. The SEN support national average is 12% meaning that Dorset is slightly higher in this regard and therefore showing an increase in support early without the need for statutory intervention in line with the strategy.

3.14n Early Years children with SEND

From the school census data 2020/21, the most common primary need for children under 5 is speech, language and communication needs followed by social, emotional and mental health. Most of these children receive support through SEN Support and through the graduated approach.

For early years children with emerging need, support is available through our early years SEND inclusion fund which targets early intervention through the graduated approach with support from our early years team.

In the January 2021 early years census, 78 children under 5 were able to access further support through Disability Access Funding in their local setting. A total of 5,945 children access 2,3 and 4-year old early education funding.

In 2020-21, 205 children were supported to access early education and childcare through their early years setting applying for Early SEND Support funding. 29% of this cohort are boys who have communication and language needs and 7% are girls. 5% of the cohort are boys with PSED and 2.5% are girls.

3.14o Early advice and support

We know that that early advice and support is essential when a parent or carer first begins to understand their child's special educational needs.

Respondents to Dorset's Parent/Carer survey in 2021 described a system that was difficult to understand and navigate and how discussions with schools were sometimes complex and confusing, as it was not always clear what support should be ordinarily available without an EHCP.

We are determined to support our parents and children and improve access to SEND support; to this end we have introduced **Dorset's Education Advice Line (DEAL)** as a key enabler for improvements for the families we serve.

- The Advice Line started in October 2021 and has received calls from parents, carers, young people and professionals. The main themes that have emerged are:
 - First steps – early identification of emerging SEND needs, where to go for support and who can help
 - Next steps – SEND has been identified but family/setting needs help in understanding the Graduated Approach and what can be put in place right now;
 - How to request an EHCP – for those families where there is a diagnosis and support in the child or young person's setting has been unable to meet need, and
 - Exclusions – where a child or young person has been excluded either for a fixed term or may be at risk of a permanent exclusion, advice around managed moves and steps that can be taken to prevent exclusion
 - We anticipate that as the Advice Line becomes more established, we will see a reduction in the number of parental requests for Needs Assessments.

3.14p SEND Family Work

Parents have told us that we have real strength in our SEND services for our youngest children. They have praised our existing Early Help service links to schools in the localities and our Team Around the Family approach.



“My SEND family worker helped my Mum and Step-Dad to make me feel safer at home, by supporting them to make me a special sensory room where I can go when I need to feel calm instead of getting cross and breaking things

We are building on this approach by focusing the time of our SEND Family Workers to work with families and settings at key decision-making points in the statutory process – for example, if we do not agree to a Needs Assessment request, the family worker can come alongside the family and setting to explore the information already provided. We know that for some families who have complicated lives, the input from a Family Worker over can bring consistency and help to build positive relationships both within and beyond families.

Our improved EHCP forms, templates and review paperwork were developed in partnership with a wide range of parents, partners and settings, with information and training events for parents and stakeholders. We are committed to ensuring that SEND improvement work continues to be developed in partnership with families and young people and is communicated effectively. We have robust quality assurance processes within our SEND statutory work and in conjunction with partner services and parents. We have appointed a SEND Quality Assurance Manager who will begin on 1st March 2022 as part of our commitment to ongoing quality reviews of our SEND work and practice development.

We are working with health colleagues to support young people in managing their mental health. We have a mental health in schools project running in three areas and plan to roll this out across the county.

3.14q SEND practice development

We want to ensure our staff are appropriately qualified and confident in their practice. We conducted a Training Needs Analysis of our front line SEND teams (SEN Family Workers, SEND Case Workers, SEND Provision Leads, SEND Team Managers and Service Managers) and are developing a bespoke Workforce Development Plan.

Practitioners are involved in the development of the programme so that this is practitioner led and focuses on the specific needs for each individual. We hold termly Practice Development Days (INSET days) for SEND and Inclusion staff. These focus on areas that we need to develop across the workforce such as Inclusion practice, person-centred approaches and so on.

We hold half-termly Practitioner Improvement Forums. Representatives from every locality across the SEND workforce participate in these sessions with Senior Leaders. These have been established to ensure there is a regular opportunity for senior managers and the Corporate Director for Education and Learning to understand workforce demands, for key corporate messages to be shared and for solution-focused approaches to current themes arising from complaints and tribunals.

3.14r SEND governance

As part of our Scheme of Delegation for SEND, we have established Panels to enable consistent decision making. Each Locality has a weekly panel, facilitated by the SEND Team Manager and includes a local health representative and the Senior Educational Psychologist.

These panels consider requests for EHC Assessments, decisions after assessments have concluded and complex case work discussions.

A bi-weekly SEND and Alternative Provision Panel supports decision making around funding for packages of support including exceptional top up, funding above banding levels and for provision not exceeding £44,999 as a total annual value. This panel also considers requests for Alternative Provision from any team within Children's Services (such as social care or inclusion) as well as SEND. Membership includes representatives from education, educational psychology, the CCG, children's social care and brokerage.

A multi-agency resource panel (MARP) supports decision making where there is significant involvement from multiple agencies (such as health and children's or adults social care) or for funding packages that exceed £45,000 as a total annual value. Membership includes representatives from education, education psychology, CCG, children's and adult's social care and commissioning.

3.14 s Educational Psychology

Educational Psychologists are embedded within each locality and sit within the SEND teams alongside SEND provision leads, SEN family support workers and are line managed by the SEND team managers. They work in collaboration with the specialist teachers.

Each school has a link educational psychologist and specialist teacher and they are provided with termly joint planning meetings which takes the form of a solution focused problem-solving approach.

The planning meetings enable schools to bring children and young people to the attention of the educational psychologist and specialist teacher as well as identifying whole school areas for development.

Educational psychologists lead on Relational Practice, I Can Problem Solve, Academic Resilience Approach, Wellbeing for education recovery and Emotional Literacy Support. In the schools that have engaged in these interventions we have seen a reduction in fixed term exclusions, an increased engagement in learning and improvements on behavioural measures such as the SDQ.

Within each locality a senior educational psychologist provides professional supervision for the educational psychologists. We have introduced a quality assurance framework of educational

psychology advice for education, health, and care needs assessments which is led by the senior educational psychologists. The senior educational psychologists are members of the locality SEND decision making process and attend the locality panels.

3.14t Outreach Support Offer

Dorset has established a three-year partnership agreement to strengthen inclusion by developing and extending the outreach offer from the Teaching Alliance of Dorset special schools (TADDS).

As part of this offer TADSS are providing Dorset STEPS training to all schools. Dorset Steps is whole school training that takes a therapeutic functional assessment approach to understanding children and young people's behaviours and responding to them using specific approaches as part of a behaviour support plan. 43% of Dorset schools have been trained to date.

Impact has been a reduction in physical interventions in Dorset maintained special schools, other measures are being implemented and will be part of action research these will include exclusions of children with SEND, reduction in use of part-time timetables and attendance of children with SEND.

Feedback from schools shows that the whole school approach has had an impact on the language used within the school and has resulted in schools changing their behaviour policies with an emphasis on relationships and rewards. Performance and progress of the partnership is reported to the half-termly Outreach Board. The membership of this board includes head teacher representatives, education, health and early help representatives.

3.14u The Virtual School Dorset Virtual School equips our children for success and happiness by delivering highly effective support for their education, including their academic outcomes and their engagement in experiences that will help them towards adulthood. This has been a year of continuous improvement and agility for the Virtual School as we remain responsive to the needs of our children and of partnership working with our schools through a challenging period. We have focused on best practice in the monitoring of our children's attendance, progress and attainment and ensuring we have strong quality assurance.

Some of the key strengths this year have been:

- strong systems and processes, with effective multi-agency working: "A particular strength is the impact of more aligned working in the six localities; headteachers, designated teachers and staff at the virtual school work together to secure creative and beneficial outcomes for children" Ofsted November 2021
- accurate use of pupil premium funding clearly linked to planned outcomes: "The pupil premium, linked to personal education plans, is used creatively." Ofsted November 2021
- GCSE grade 4+ English and Maths remained above the published 2020 national, South West and statistical neighbours for the second year in a row
- a significant improvement in the number of children remaining in education or training post 16 (70% compared to 51% in 2020)
- a reduction in the number of children missing education
- an effective quality assurance process for Personal Education Plans (PEPs), showing an increase in the number of PEPs rated as good or better: "They have an accurate analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of educational provision for children in care and care leavers." Ofsted November 2021
- we are celebrating our children's successes more than ever before

The overall impact of the service improvements and determination of the Virtual School staff to do the absolute best for our children can be seen in the recent Ofsted (ILACS) Inspection report, November 2021: “The virtual school is highly ambitious for children in care, wherever they live.”

We will continue to focus on:

- Reducing the number of pupils who are persistent absentees or have unauthorised absence. This is being achieved through a focus on unpicking the barriers behind the absence term ‘refusal’, together with an assumption that all of our children want to be in school. Absence will be reviewed on a weekly basis in order to enable rapid response and support to be put in place.
- Further reducing suspensions. This will be achieved by running a series of cpd workshops for the schools that suspend our children, alongside a language and communication checklist being completed following any suspension that will ensure that underlying need has been identified and addressed.
- Ensuring that if a school move is required, the transition is achieved as quickly as possible, particularly for those children with an EHCP. This is being achieved through problem-solving at a system level, including the way in which Dorset works with other Local Authorities’ SEND teams to achieve the right education for our children.
- Ensuring that all PEPs are child-centred including an increase in the number of children attending their PEP meeting. This is being achieved through CPD for practitioners and Designated Teachers.

Children are in the Virtual School from the age of 3 to the end of the academic year following their 18th birthday. The Virtual School bridges the transition from Social Worker to Personal Adviser (PA) and maintains advice and guidance about education from a position of best knowledge of the young person as they move into adulthood.

Virtual School Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are part of the Children’s Services monthly performance reporting cycle and reported at the Performance Board. This ensures that there is a clear line of sight to the Virtual School by the Children’s Services Leadership Team. Performance is also reported monthly to the Corporate Parenting Board. The Virtual School governing body has a schedule of monitoring activity linked to the priorities on the School Development Plan. These are reported to full governing body meetings on a termly basis.

The Virtual School uses Welfare Call analytical dashboards and reports regarding our children’s education, which inform the work of the Virtual School team. The Virtual School uses termly attainment and progress data from Welfare Call to track each child. This information is used as part of the decision-making about termly Personal Education Plan (PEP) targets and is used to inform monthly pupil progress meetings.

The Virtual School runs termly training for Designated Teachers (DTs) and training for any DTs that are new to role as part of their induction. There are also opportunities throughout the academic year to attend training on key themed topics such as language and communication needs, and emotion coaching.

The Virtual School undertakes daily attendance monitoring through Welfare Call’s live dashboard. This robust system provides data at a cohort, group and individual level to give an accurate view of attendance, reasons for absence and patterns of absence. This has enabled the Virtual School to

monitor, analyse and respond to attendance concerns rapidly and remains a key area for improvement.

The statutory expectation is to hold two PEP meetings per year. Dorset Virtual School follows the good practice model of a PEP meeting per term. Holding the PEP on Welfare Call has enabled the Virtual School to ensure that the PEP template used is strong and includes all recommended content, termly PEP completion rates are monitored, key professionals can access the PEP at any time and updates are seen concurrently by all and the PEP QA process and decisions are transparent to all involved.

PEP completion for the spring term 2021 was 98% and improved to 99% in the summer term and 100% in autumn term 2021. This is a good position and one that the Virtual School intends to maintain. 100% of PEPs for children new into care were held within 20 days enabling the first PEP to inform the first Child In Care Review meeting. The Virtual School challenges where academic expectations are too low and celebrates successes, including overcoming barriers. As a result, the academic outcomes for our children are very positive:

- GCSE grade 4+ English and Maths remained above the published 2020 national (24.4%), South West (24.2%) and statistical neighbour (25.9%) average for the last two years (2021: 28.6%, 12 young people; 2020 33.3%, 15 young people). There were also some excellent overall results which has led to 74.7% of pupils moving into post 16 education in September 2021.
- The impact of the Virtual School support of post-16 students in 2020 - 21 is that there has been a zero drop-out rate from level 3 courses as students move from Year 12 into Year 13. The support also impacted extremely positively on the post-16 Education, Employment and Training (EET) figures, with an improvement in 2021 to 66% post-16 EET compared to 51% the previous year. Current post-16 EET rates for the 2021 – 22 year so far stand at 70%.
- There are positive signs of the level of ambition that the Virtual School and Care Leaver team have for our young people:
 - 9 students graduated in 2021, including 2 post graduates
 - 8 students achieved a university place for this September
 - 27 students at university September 2021

The Virtual School uses a PEP quality assurance (QA) process for all PEPs. The Virtual School Team has been trained in the use of the PEP quality assurance criteria. Training has also been delivered to Designated Teachers and there is a strong focus on the PEP in the Virtual School Handbook. Top tips for PEPs are a feature of Designated Teacher Newsletters. All PEPs are peer Quality Assurance (QA) reviewed. The QA outcome appears on the PEP so that all involved in the PEP can see the grading and any feedback given. The QA process grades a PEP red (inadequate), amber (requires improvement) green (good) or gold (outstanding). Themed audits of PEPs review specific aspects of the school development plan, such as the quality of the use of the child's voice through person-centred planning, are a central part of link governor monitoring. QA outcomes are fed back to the Full Governing Body for oversight.

The impact of the work to strengthen the PEP process, including the Designated Teacher training can be seen in the PEP QA results: 83.8% of PEPs were found to be good or better.

Wider learning from the PEP QA process has been:

- having a pre-planned structure to the meeting is beneficial to consistency.
- the meeting itself should concentrate on celebrating the child and identifying the right targets for them.

- the relationship with Designated Teachers is important and once established aids the PEP process
- pupil voice needs to be featured further in future DT newsletters and training sessions, and there is a need to increase the number of children who attend their PEP meeting

Where the child has either co-created their targets or in a small number of cases lead the PEP meeting it is very powerful and this is a model for PEPs going forward.

The Virtual School has a strong focus on celebrating child successes and sharing these widely including with the extended Children's Services leadership team to ensure that our children's lived experience is in everyone's minds in a positive, strengths-based way and also to celebrate good practice from teams working with our children. Children's successes are celebrated weekly within the team, with each identified child receiving a £20 book voucher. The positive acknowledgement of children's successes in the PEP meetings was recognised in governor monitoring as a strength of the PEPs. There is an annual awards event called Dorset EPIC Awards (Exceptional People In Care), the most recent of which took place on 22nd July 2021 and celebrated 93 children and young people. Going forward the Virtual School will be developing further opportunities for our children which will incorporate celebration of their work, attitude and engagement.

Our ambition is for effective inclusive practice in our schools which leads to zero fixed term or permanent exclusions of children in care. Steps taken thus far to reduce exclusions are:

- the Virtual School Team are alerted to exclusions via Welfare Call. They then attend the reintegration meeting and where needed hold a professionals meeting. In all cases the Virtual School team focus on underlying causes and what the school and wider professionals need to put in place to ensure that there are no further exclusions.
- there is a focus on every child who has been excluded in Virtual School monthly pupil progress meetings, giving oversight and priority to these children, and ensuring that Virtual School staff actions are robust
- there is a wider local authority focus on inclusion with strategic support for schools to follow relational practice methods and employ the graduated approach to ensure that early intervention addresses need
- training for schools has been delivered by Specialist Teachers on Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)
- training has been provided for schools on emotion coaching

The impact of this is that 38 children received exclusions in the 2020 - 21 academic year (11.48% of the cohort, which is in line with the national average). However, reducing exclusions remains a focus for improvement of the development plan. More children at schools within our authority are excluded than those in schools out of authority, and it is essential that this is a focus of our work in future.

The Virtual School was also successful in rescinding a permanent exclusion of a child by working with the governors to detail steps the school needed to take before they could justify an exclusion. The child is now happy and successful at another setting and without a permanent exclusion blighting their education record.

A relational practice group has worked with 30 schools this year, led by the Educational Psychology Service. Training is offered by school link Educational Psychologists working with Specialist Teachers and encouraging commitment to ongoing training and policy changes. To continue supporting the 30 schools that were part of the initial pilot, they are invited to attend Network meetings each

month. The purpose is to encourage a refocusing on attachment and trauma-informed principles, allowing opportunities for schools to raise questions or seek support, an opportunity to celebrate all the examples of good practice in schools, and to facilitate the opportunity for schools to work together and support each other. The long-term ambition is to encourage locality-based meetings and peer support involving use of an audit tool.

A fortnightly Children in Care CMOOE meeting chaired by the Director of Education focuses on actions being taken to re-engage identified children and young people in education (or training and employment if relevant post-16). Attendees include a Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer, SEND, Social Care and Heads of Locality. The meeting gives clear oversight of these children and ensures that robust actions are in place to secure suitable full-time education.

The impact of the Virtual School's work to ensure education placements for our children means that 276 out of our 291 of our school age children are settled in 158 schools across 36 local authorities. In most cases if a school move is required it happens efficiently. 70% of our 110 post-16 young people are in education or training across 35 schools or colleges in 20 local authorities.

In the autumn term 2021, 28 children were closed to the CIC CMOOE tracker: 10 CME, 9 post-16 who were NEET, 6 post-16 CMOOE, 3 part-time timetables. Of the 28, 10 closed within half a term. A further 5 closed within a term. Further work is now being completed to ensure that our and other local authorities' systems enable children in care with an EHCP who move placements can have an efficient school move also.

3.15 Young People at Risk of Homelessness

We have engaged with Homeless Advice and Support Team DLUHC with the focus on prevention of homelessness for care leavers, 16/17-year-old young people and other vulnerable 18 to 25-year-olds. As an outcome from the review, it was identified that officers across services, departments and partnerships are committed to supporting young people and to working together to improve outcomes. Strengths also included our priority response for referrals of homeless 16 to 17-year-olds and The Harbour Steady and Settled Pathway. We will continue to optimise our close partnership working with housing colleagues within place-based settings and intend to strengthen our practice further through a joint training plan and a refresh of our Homeless Prevention Protocol for 16 to 17-year-olds.

The Front Door to Children's Services works with our Housing colleagues and have recently introduced a system where we are notified of those children, young people and their families who are in unsettled accommodation, such as bed & breakfast accommodation. With consent, we will contact and offer support at an earlier stage. We also work in partnership with Housing as part of our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) process, whereby with consent, information will be shared to support decision-making, act preventatively for our young people to reduce the risk of homelessness and be alerted when there are risks of eviction/homelessness and young people are involved. The aim is to ensure we can be pro-active and identify the right support, first time for our young people.

The Front Door will also process referrals and utilise the Harbour Steady & Settled Pathway to reduce the risk of homelessness and when the level of need is identified process referrals, when a joint Housing assessment is required for young people.

We are also working with Housing in respect of our out of hours provision to young people, there is further work required in extending the referral timings for Night Stop, we also work closely with Harbour, when a crisis occurs and a young person is at risk of homelessness during the evenings or

weekends, to provide wraparound preventative support to reduce the risk and support the young person to remain at home.

3.16 Private Fostering

Private fostering assessments are undertaken by Social Workers within our Locality Teams. We also have a contract with Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole (BCP) Council who identify, assess and support private fostering arrangements made through language schools in the Dorset area. The contract was established in November 2016 and will continue to remain in place. BCP remain proactive in publicising the need to notify private fostering arrangements and undertaking appropriate checks and assessments.

In January 2022 we had 7 children assessed and supported in private fostering placements in Dorset based within our Locality Teams and an additional 7 children in private fostering placements at language schools managed by BCP council on our behalf. The numbers within language schools have remained low over the last 2 years due to the impact of the Covid pandemic and changes following Brexit.

We have a lead for Private Fostering who is responsible for the private fostering action plan, annual report, awareness raising and promoting understanding of private fostering, the performance and quality of the work undertaken both within Localities and the work commissioned from BCP council private fostering team. We continue to promote awareness and understanding across Dorset to encourage identification, notification and assessment of private fostering arrangements

3.17 Local Authority Designated Officer

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) role sits within our Quality Assurance and Partnerships Service. We have continued to undertake improvement activity as part of our Strengthening Services Plan. We have embedded the new practice standards. Work is being undertaken to develop a data dashboard and to streamline the monitoring and tracking including being able to access historical information in one place (MOSAIC). We continue to strengthen our communication with partners to raise the profile of the LADO in Dorset and have created posters and information leaflets to support this. During 2021 our permanent LADO retired in August and this role was covered by agency staff. We have now recruited to this role permanently. As part of the induction, they will be visiting all the locality teams to raise awareness of the role.

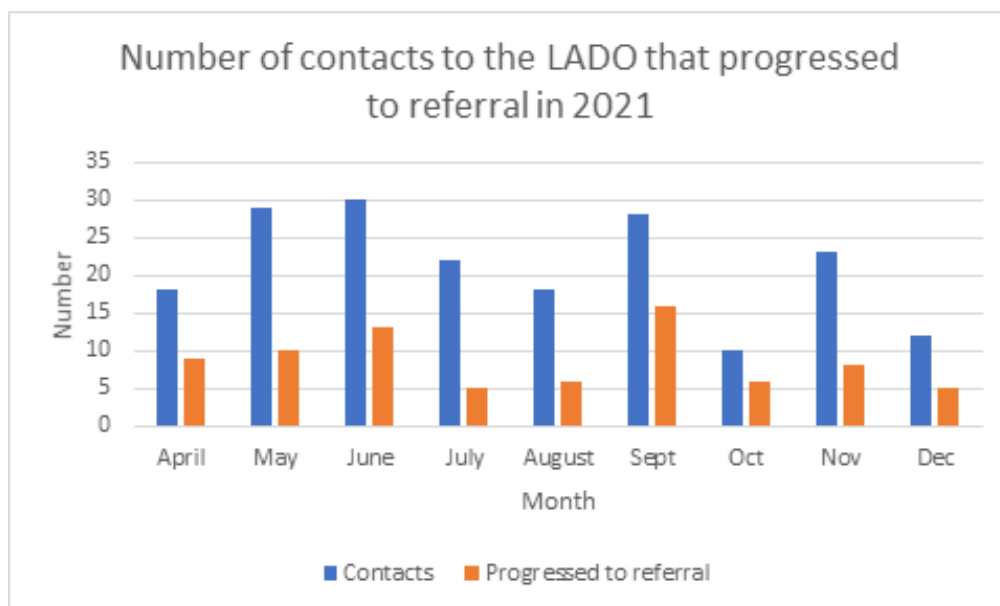


Fig. 3.22 LADO contacts and referrals, 2021

Since April 2021 there has been a total of 190 contacts which is reduction of 39 in the volume overall since the previous year (229). Of these Contacts 78 (41%) progressed to referral and involvement by the Designated Officer, leading to an Initial Evaluation Meeting.

We continue to provide a quarterly LADO Highlight Report setting out activity and learning which feeds into our Quality of Practice and Action Group. This has also been strengthened to enable key themes to be highlighted and enable any targeted support from the LADO.



4. HOW DO WE KNOW

4.1 Performance Management

We have an excellent suite of performance data and dashboards available and accessible to managers and all staff through our intranet pages and through MOSAIC, our electronic social care record. Children's Services Monthly Performance Report is published and shared with all managers to inform performance conversations.

We also publish a Corporate Parenting Dataset and the Performance and Impact Report to enable our Strengthening Services Board to monitor progress of our Strengthening Services Plan. Our Monthly Report has developed to cover the whole Service including Early Help, Social Care, Education, Workforce and Finance. We have a number of thematic dashboards that are co-designed with managers and work schedules to continue with development. These are used extensively by managers to manage and monitor performance. Dashboards are in place for MASH, SEND, the Virtual School and Missing and Child Exploitation, Children In Care, Care Leavers and Fostering, with even more under development.

We continuously improve and refine how we use our data and intelligence and through the Performance Management Framework (PMF) that sits alongside our Quality Assurance Framework managers systematically review performance of their respective services through monthly service level Performance and Practice meetings. Exceptions are then reported to the monthly Performance Board attended by the Extended Children's Services Leadership Team and Business Partners and chaired by the Executive Director. The Performance Board focuses on three critical questions for all aspects of our performance: What's going well? What are we worried about? and importantly, what we are doing about it.

The Board is restorative in approach – high support and high challenge, and solution-focused. Managers across the service are feeding back the impact of the meetings in developing a deep and shared understanding of our performance and how it can be used to drive continuous improvement.

Key messages from our Performance Board, alongside a dashboard of key indicators, are reported on a monthly basis to the Corporate Senior Leadership Team and the Elected Members Performance Board and scrutiny panel to ensure a strong line of sight to performance.

We have implemented a quarterly whole service Quality Assurance and Performance Management Conference providing the opportunity for all managers (Team Managers and above) to come together to triangulate the information from our quality assurance and performance monitoring activity, reflect on learning and to focus on our continuous improvement.

4.2 Quality Assurance Framework

Our Quality Assurance Framework is fully embedded and has received positive external validation through a peer review undertaken in July 2021. The collaborative audit approach undertaken by the operational managers within the service alongside practitioners has facilitated improvements in the quality of practice. This is further strengthened by a moderation system that reviews the audits with the auditor providing assurance that we know what good looks like. A proportion of those audits are also moderated by the QA service to provide independent assurance and identify good practice examples to share the learning.

To ensure we obtain an accurate representation of the quality of practice; audits are selected at random and thematic audit is scheduled as part of testing the impact of improvements or where data and audit highlight the need for dip sampling to determine if a detailed thematic review is required. This enables us to quickly identify any areas of concern. The collaborative approach enables a reflective conversation with the practitioner to support holding the child at the forefront of our practice and review what is working well or what we are concerned about. Feedback from children and families is an important part of our audit process and we are working to increase the take up both within audit and as a wider service. We are therefore developing a separate quarterly feedback report that will enable us to focus on what our children and families experience and how this will be utilised to shape further service improvements and build on positive areas of practice. Audit learning reports are produced bi-monthly and shared at a Quality of Practice and Action Group with Service Managers, Heads of Locality and Corporate Directors who are all involved in agreeing either localised action plans or strategic practice improvements for the service to facilitate closing of the learning loop. The headlines are reported to the monthly performance board chaired by our Executive Director. Learning and findings from both audit and family feedback are shared in our QA newsletter to the wider workforce.

An audit dashboard allows us to review findings and learning from audit and facilitates effective tracking and completion of all audit actions. We also re-audit any cases deemed inadequate to ensure the child's circumstances have improved and actions completed. QA is embedding as part of our everyday practice within the teams, and our advanced practitioners (APs) work alongside our staff to support practice improvement through focused reflective discussions and thematic auditing. The Principal Social Worker supports the AP's to work alongside staff to deliver focused improvements from QA activity such as new practice or procedure changes. The thematic auditing is vital in ensuring we identify the right learning and the root cause of any practice challenges to facilitate consistent quality of practice across the service. This is supplemented with scheduled dip sampling aligned to our strengthening services plan so that improvements can be evidenced as having been embedded.

Our Quality Assurance and Audit system has played a decisive role in two key service improvements during the past year:

- The number of children with Permanence Plans has increased
- The number of children who have been subject to a Child Protection Plan for 18 months or more has decreased

Our Principal Social Worker is driving quality of practice and keeping front line practice at the forefront of strategic improvements. One of the key areas of focus has been embedding our restorative Dorset Children Thrive Practice Framework utilising strength-based approaches, this has been part of our next steps from our reinvigorating social work practice. The impact of our framework is monitored at QPAG through our dedicated performance indicators aligned to set outcomes for children.

4.3 Audit Outcomes

The monthly collaborative audits continue to take place with audit compliance remaining strong although there was a short auditing break in October and November due to the Ofsted visit. The chart below shows a decline in the number of Good or Outstanding audits during 2021. This reflects a change of focus, and not a step backwards; during the lead-in to October's Ofsted visit, we re-focused our auditing around areas of known deficit, and this inevitably produced lower scores. Our auditing has now resumed as set out in the framework with deficit auditing undertaken separately to avoid confusion over the overall quality of practice.

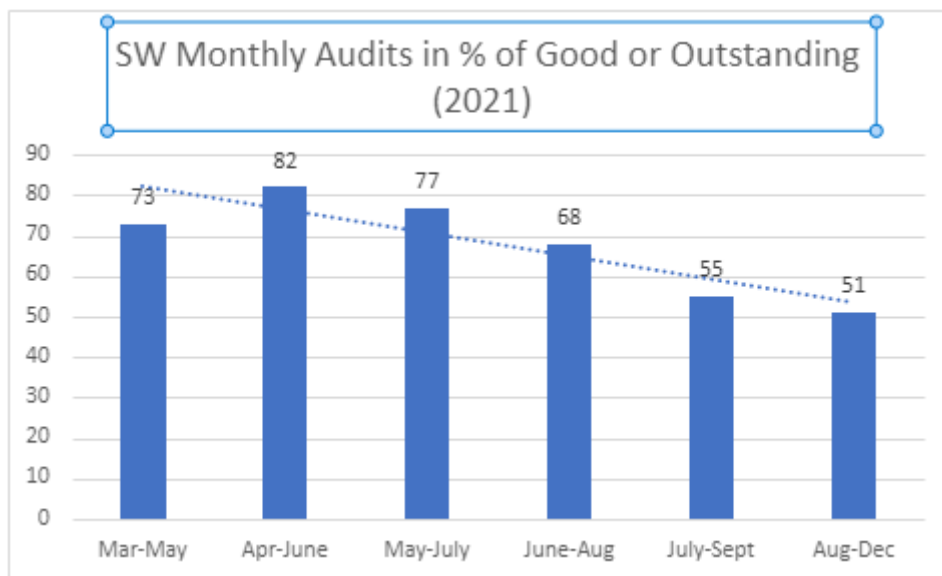


Fig. 4.1 Percentage of Good or Outstanding Audits 2021

Our audit findings for the majority of our social work practice tell us that:

- Our Social workers know their children and families well and can talk about the work that they are undertaking
- Direct work is child centred and increasingly being informed by the voice of the child
- There is clear management oversight
- Partner engagement has improved over time
- Where children are entering our care more of them are entering our care in a planned way
- Completion of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire has improved considerably

The principal areas identified to strengthen our practice in:

- Consistency in the quality of supervision and in ensuring our management oversight is driving forward our planning for children
- Continuing to strengthen our use of chronologies and summaries
- Ensuring that the child's voice is always reflected in our recording and informing our planning

4.4 Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

We continue to learn from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. In 2021 one Child Safeguarding Practice review was published (Dec) and two are currently underway and there have been three Rapid Reviews completed.

This section contains exempt information and is therefore withheld under paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972

4.5 Compliments and complaints

Our Compliments and Complaints Team ensure a consistent approach to complaints management and challenge Children's Services for learnings and actions so the complaint has as much value as possible and organisational lessons can be learned. The Compliments and Complaints team report into our performance management framework to ensure staff across children's services understand the process and importance of transparency and timeliness.

As in previous years, we resolve most complaints informally. Dorset Council has found that this approach builds the best possible relationships between the Council and families with concerns without obstructing statutory process.

We continue to have a low volume of complaints progress through statutory process and clear evidence that the Ombudsman is not troubled by Social Care complaints, further indicating that Dorset Council's proactive approach to outcomes-based resolutions to complaints is proving beneficial for families. It also demonstrates that we are genuinely listening rather than processing. The 5 Social Care complaints to be formally investigated by the Ombudsman 2 were upheld and 3 were not upheld.

We continue to embed learning from complaints, feeding into our wider governance process where appropriate and communicating to staff and partners through our established communications channels. Importantly, we are seeing an increase in compliments in social care each quarter, rising from 11 in quarter 1 of 2021 to 16 in quarter 2 and 20 in quarter 3.

4.6 Feedback from our children, young people, and families

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.

We are continuing to strengthen the feedback system within our audit process to evolve and learn from our practice.

Additionally, the Children in Care Council conduct an annual survey of all children in care. This comprehensive survey gives insight across several areas including:

- Perceptions of social workers, IROs, 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

The report is considered by CSLT, relevant service areas and explored through workshops across the workforce. A response with recommendations and action plan are presented to the Children in Care Council.

5. WHAT'S NEXT FOR DORSET....

In 2022 we continue to grow on our ambitious programme of change:

- We will ensure that the actions we have put in place to improve outcomes for our Care Leavers continues to be reviewed to ensure long term impact, reporting into the Corporate Parenting Board.
- We will increase the number of children and young people that benefit from outstanding support through our Dorset Centre of Excellence and other school build programmes as part of our approach to offer outstanding provision for our learners with SEND.
- We will improve our care sufficiency through the opening of internal residential provision and a greater level of foster carer recruitment and retention.
- We continue to improve services across the partnership through our embedded Strengthening Services Plan. Our multi-agency partnership will undertake new programmes to tackle emerging themes affecting our communities. Themes such as male violence against women and girls, child sexual exploitation and the role of county lines on substance misuse.
- We will continue to evolve our Children, Young People and Families' Plan, to include local and national priorities, whilst continuing to report to our partnership and communities on the impact its delivery is making.

We remain ambitious for children and more than ever, our children need to us be bold, tenacious, and resolute in ensuring they have a bright future.

We recognise the impact our improvement journey has made for our communities and for our staff. We are leading the South West ADCS programme of work on Leadership Development and are working to support other Local Authority areas.

Our extended leadership team continue their commitment and dedication to each other, their commitment to working with partners and most importantly with our communities. These qualities have once again, shone through during another challenging year. we have made significant improvements across all areas of our services and will build upon these in 2022 to deliver the Outstanding service we aspire to.

Our Front-line staff have been extraordinary throughout the pandemic and their commitment alongside a truly integrated strengths-based approach to working with families is showing strong evidence of making a positive impact on families lives.

We fully intend to continue our pace of delivery, and are confident in our strong corporate, political and partnership support.

We are continuing to build something special that will last.

We are determined that in Dorset, all our Children Thrive.