



DORSET COUNCIL – CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELF-ASSESSMENT JANUARY 2023

V1.0 January 2023

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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.

This self-evaluation, based on the Ofsted framework, shines a light on the fantastic work our staff, partnership colleagues and families have delivered in positively impacting on the outcomes of our communities. We identify those areas 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 Good with Outstanding Leadership **ILACS inspection outcome in October 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.

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 Strategic Alliance will be publishing an updated Plan in April 2023.

We continue to develop our fully integrated locality approach, with evidence of positive impact in school inclusion, early help and social work practice. We delivered our plans to open our 'Dorset Centre of Excellence', welcoming our first cohort of children and young people to Coombe House in the spring of 2022, keeping more of our children and young people closer to home and their communities. To support more of our children to stay locally, we have invested in, developed and opened new children's homes. We have also delivered a grow-your-own approach to developing social workers and future leaders.

In May 2022, we participated in Ofsted's Pilot SEND Inspection. Learning from the inspection has been built into the delivery of our SEND strategy. In Autumn 2022, we welcomed inspectors assessing our Joint Youth Justice Service with BCP Council. The inspection report was published in January 2023 with a Good Judgement overall. We're already building on the good work in place, to ensure our young people receive the right help at the right time to keep them out of the Youth Justice System.

Our Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership continues to develop, and we added additional capacity in the summer of 2022, reflecting our learning following the Wood Review.

We continue to deliver on our aspiration to ensure that Dorset is the best place to be a child; where communities thrive, and families are supported to be the best they can be.



Cllr. Andrew Parry Portfolio Holder for Children, Education, Skills and Early Help.

Theresa Leavy, Executive Director Children's Services

1.2 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, 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 two 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 Our Areas for Continuous Improvement

1.3a Continue to improve services for Care Leavers

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 offer and have taken further steps to ensure service improvement and delivery plans are focused 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.

Following a 60% response from young people in the New Belonging survey we have rich information which supports us in service development and delivery for our Care Leavers. Our young people have highlighted that young people had a trusted relationship with their PA’s and 97% found it easy to get in touch. However, fewer than 66% felt that where they lived was right for them. Therefore, we are delighted to have been successful in being awarded a grant for Staying Close as this supports us in delivering our priorities and those identified by our young people. Building work for our care leaver accommodation in Weymouth concluded in January 2023 which will increase availability of good

accommodation and a Care Leaver Hub with the Leaving Care Team and partners having a shared space on the ground floor.

We have also identified the need to develop two senior Personal Advisor roles in the Leaving Care Service, one to lead delivery of Staying Close and the other to lead employer engagement. These lead areas correlate with those identified by young people through the New Belongings Survey and also offer a career development pathway in the Leaving Care Team.

See update 1.4 and Care Leavers section 3.13

1.3b Integrated Commissioning

We have made real progress in increasing sufficiency locally through our sufficiency strategy and have a wide range of services that are effectively monitored and quality assured. However, we have more to do to ensure that we are making the best use of our collective resources for all our children and young people. The Integrated Care Board (ICB) offers opportunities to work differently and to integrate commissioning activity that can better meet individual and population needs.

We have agreed several joint commissioning priorities and programmes of work for the coming years:

- **Implementation of the Balanced System:** a framework for commissioning and service provision to meet the needs of children and young people with a range of needs including speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). All partners have agreed increased funding contribution to this approach and Dorset Council is leading on the contract management arrangements on behalf of the system
- **Implementation of the Pause Project:** As part of the Children, Young People and Families Plan, partners have agreed to invest in and jointly commission a local Pause Practice. A tender has been awarded and recruitment of practitioners is now underway. Public Health Dorset are leading the contract management arrangements on behalf of the system
- **Improving our responses to Sexually Harmful Behaviour:** Partners recognised that our service offer for responding to sexually harmful behaviour is fragmented. We are working on a new service pathway, including training of practitioners and are now undertaking detailed work to develop a specialist service offer. NHS Dorset are leading this work on behalf of the system.
- **All Age Autism Review:** Partners are working together on the implementation of findings following a review of autism service and co-production. This has resulted in updated information provision and includes the implementation of the NHS Key worker pilot. NHS Dorset are leading this work on behalf of the system.
- **Mental Health Support:** Post-Covid-19 we are seeing an increase in demand for mental health support at all levels across our localities and partnerships. There is an acute pressure on capacity for Tier 4 beds for young people with eating disorders. We are working with our partner colleagues in NHS Dorset to ensure capacity within the system can meet the need while exploring early intervention channels and strategies to embed within our localities. There has been agreed investment in the building of a new Psychiatric Intensive care mental health unit in Bournemouth which will increase local capacity.

Increasing capacity to ensure all children and young people receive the right support at the right time is a priority for Dorset Council and will require wider partner and system leadership.

1.3c Quality of Educational Provision and narrowing the gap

Dorset has fewer children and young people in Good or Outstanding schools than our neighbours and the educational outcomes for our children and young people is lower than would be expected for a county with our demographics. The number of Good and Outstanding schools has risen from 75% in 2020 to 82% at present and therefore progress is being made. Our Key Stage 2 performance is in the bottom quartile nationally and Key Stage 4 performance (progress and attainment 8) places in the second lowest quartile. The gap between disadvantaged young people and their peers is still not where we need it to be and further challenged through the pandemic and the impact on children in school.

The Dorset Education Board forms part of the governance structure within the Dorset Children's Strategic Partnership. The establishment of an Education Board for Dorset retains the strength of partnership working across the education sector deliver the opportunities and tackle the challenges of the education system in Dorset. The Board includes key educational leaders in Dorset who have the passion and expertise across the education ecosystem and expert advisers to support the Board's work. The Board 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.

The Board is chaired independently by Stephen Twigg who is a former Member of Parliament who served as a Minister in the Department for Education (DfE) and Skills between 2002 and 2005.

The Education Board will oversee delivery of the 'Best Education for all' priority in the Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2020-23 and our next plan when it commences in 2023. The priorities include:

- 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.

Section 3.14 details more of the work in our education area.

1.3d Investment in leadership: we have reflected on the leadership required for the future and have appointed additional leadership roles to provide additional capacity to our Extended Leadership Team. Interviews have been completed and appointees took up their roles in February:

- Lead for Best Start in Life: Deliver our best Start in Life approach to enable a strong focus on our practice to support very young babies, development of Family Hubs and social mobility.
- Head of Service for Children in Care - in response to the growth in in our in-house provision this role will focus now focus solely on outcomes for our children in care and our fostering and residential services
- Head of Service for Care Leavers and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children: in response to growing number of care leavers and UASC, this is a new role that will focus on our response to all resettlement activity, care leavers and the development of keeping in touch and lifelong links.

- Head of Locality for Chesil and Lead for Early Help moving from Hackney. The previous postholder has moved role in January 2023 becoming our Corporate Director for Education and Learning.

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 with one recommendation which was to improve “Oversight of arrangements when care leavers move in and out of emergency or temporary accommodation.”

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

1.4b Care Leavers

The Corporate Parenting Board has established a working sub-group, the Care Leaver Delivery Group. The Care Leaver Delivery Group has adopted a Care Leaver Covenant, ‘New Belongings’, 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 was 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.

The Corporate Parenting Board is a multi-agency partnership led by the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education. The Board report annually to Cabinet on the Strategy.

Following collaboration with the Care Leaver Covenant, and in the spirit of a whole council corporate parenting approach a Care Leavers Delivery Group has been developed. The group meets a minimum of 7 times a year and reports to the Corporate Parenting Board. The group assists Dorset Council and its partners to understand and fully comply with legal duties and responsibilities across all services as they discharge their duties to care leavers. It promotes member and workforce engagement commitment and understanding of the corporate parenting principles introduced by the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

The Care Leavers Delivery Group is chaired by Cabinet Lead Member for Safeguarding and has core attendance from the Corporate Director for Care and Protection, Corporate Director for Housing, Head of Service Children in Care and Care Leavers, Service Manager for Corporate Parenting and Care Leavers and a range of partner agencies/services including Health and Education.

The Care Leaver Delivery Group reports into the Corporate Parenting Board via the Good Care Provision Steering Group which drives the priorities of the Corporate Parenting Strategy as part of our wider partnership led Children, Young People and Families' Plan.

More information on Care Leavers is contained in section 3.13.

1.4c Post Ofsted Action Plan

We submitted our Post Ofsted Action Plan on 26th January 2022. We embedded the Post Ofsted Action Plan into our established, partnership-owned Strengthening Services Plan. All actions have been completed and the Strengthening Services Board reviews 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 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 2023 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".

Our Local Alliance Groups (representatives from partners across our multi-agency partnerships) are developing their own local plans based on the rights of children and young people which are forming the basis of the next iteration of our Children, Young People and Families' Plan, building on the current plan's priorities. All rights from the United Nations Children's Rights have been mapped

against the existing priorities and we are planning on co-producing our summer conferencing of 2023 with children and young people based on their rights and views.

1.4f Public Law Outline (PLO)

In November we had 42 children subject to pre proceedings with the average time in pre proceedings between 13-15 weeks. We had 97 children (49 families) in care proceedings through the family courts. The average time for cases progressing through the family courts over the last 3 months has been 22 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 are 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 and 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, except for parents who may have additional needs and a good example of this was seen during the inspection. As part of these improvements, we now measure the effectiveness and quality through audit by the Quality Assurance team. We share good practice examples and continue to embed quality of practice in this area through our advanced practitioner, weekly communications to staff via our 'Wednesday Wordout' and through Quality and Practice meetings.

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 September 2022 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, excluding unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

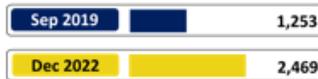


National Trends

-  **Early Help Assessments in Year**
169% increase 2013 to 2022
-  **Contacts Received in Year**
105% increase 2008 to 2022
-  **Referrals in Year**
21% increase 2008 to 2022
-  **CIN (incl CP and CIC) at 31 March**
7% increase 2010 to 2022
-  **S47 Enquiries in Year**
184% increase 2008 to 2022
-  **CP Plans at 31 March**
72% increase 2008 to 2022
-  **CIC at 31 March**
35% increase 2008 to 2022
-  **Care Leavers (19-21) at 31 March**
22% increase 2015 to 2022

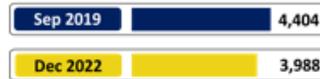
Source: ADCS Safeguarding Pressures
Phase 8 November 2022

Early Help Assessments



 **97%**
increase between 2019
and 2022

Contacts



 **-9%**
decrease between 2019
and 2022

Referrals



 **-0.5%**
decrease between 2019
and 2022

Section 47 Enquiries



 **39%**
increase between 2019
and 2022

Children in Need



 **-24%**
decrease between 2019
and 2022

CP Plans



 **-7%**
decrease between 2019
and 2022

Children in Care (excluding UASC)



 **0%**
increase between 2019
and 2022

Care Leavers



 **19%**
increase between 2019
and 2022

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 2022. The following sections identify the participation and impact of our main activities.

Peer Review of Dorset Safeguarding in Education

As part of the South West Peer Review programme in September 2022, Swindon Borough Council carried out a review 'Safeguarding in Education'. This was a positive learning opportunity with many strengths identified by Swindon:

- There is a strong focus on inclusion.
- The locality model strengthens integrated partnership working.
- There are strong governance arrangements in place.
- There is a strong learning culture in the organisation – a positive cultural shift is apparent.
- QA Framework-accountability and ownership evidenced at all levels and includes Early help, Education and SEND-Closing the learning loop approach.
- The relationship model strengthens practice.
- One Services Approach-interface between education and Social Care is strong.
- Line of Sight meetings positive opportunity and experience for social workers.

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

- Collaborative auditing to model our locality model – see the child's life as a whole.
- Evidenced feedback to social workers about sharing good practice and the Good and Better Board. (Good and Better Board is a quarterly performance updated for the wider management team. Senior Managers review performance at the monthly Performance Board).
- strengthen the feedback from children, young people and their families in the audit process through Quality Assurance Managers.
- Understand the child's school attendance within each plan – CiN, CiC and CP.
- School inclusion data and information to be included in 'Missing' meetings.

A follow-up session was held with Swindon in November 2022 with learning and recommendations being added into existing service delivery plans.

1.6 Sector-led improvement/development work

The South West ADCS Sector Led Improvement Group delivered a range of programmes in 2022. Dorset has three current Heads of Service undertaking the Aspiring Assistant Directors Programme, one of which has recently been promoted into a Corporate Director position, taking up their post in January 2023. 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.

Dorset are also providing DCS leadership to the SEND agenda for the region including the recruitment to and management of the Regional SEND Co-ordinator.

In September and October 2022, we worked with Plymouth City Council to support Quality Assurance, Virtual School, Early Help and the Front Door services. Reviewing and providing

guidance on areas of strength and for further development. In November 2022 we also provided support and guidance to Birmingham City Council in strengthening their Children Missing Education programme. Our Principal Teacher, Virtual School Head and Service Manager for Inclusion provided server remote planning sessions followed up with in-person development and training sessions in Birmingham with staff and stakeholders.

1.6 Academic Partner

We have entered into an academic partnership with Oxford Brookes University to evaluate the impact of our locality model on outcomes for children, young people and families and the workforce.

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.

Of the 380,000 residents in Dorset, 74,305 are children and young people aged 0-19 representing around 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 2022 school census) of school age children are from black and minority ethnic communities compared to 35.1% nationally.

We have approximately 3,558 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. (Jan 2023)

We are currently supporting:

- **1,334** children and young people being supported through early help
- **1,227** Children in Need (excluding Children in Care and children with a Child Protection Plan)
- **306** Children with a Child Protection Plan
- **452** Children in Care
- **530** Care Leavers

Early Help Teams in our localities are experiencing an increase in referrals compared to the same period last year. Our number of CiC has remained broadly similar to last year. However, analysis of the number identifies that the decrease in our local CiC has been offset by an increase of children coming unaccompanied from overseas.

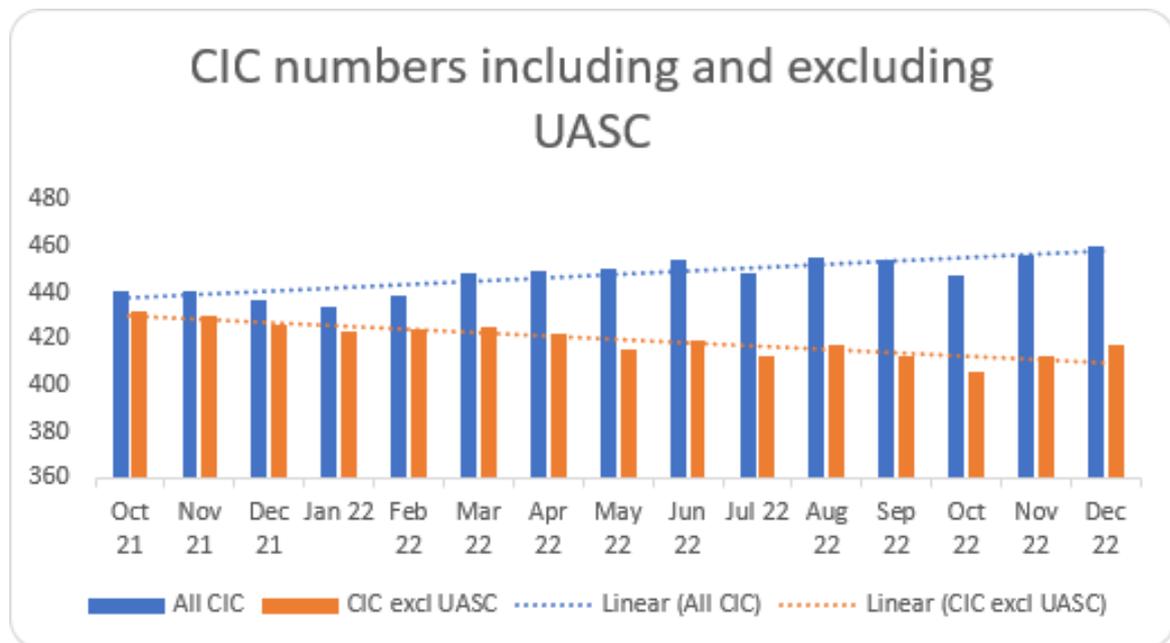


Fig. 2.1 Source: Dorset Children’s Service Dec ’22

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 Strategic Alliance will be publishing an

updated Plan in April 2023. 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' seven 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.
- **Safe at Home and in the Community** – A new priority, added from feedback from children and young people that they do not always feel safe in places they frequent or in their communities. Care and Protection services and wider contextual safeguarding across the partnership to promote safety and belonging in our communities.

We progress the actions of the Plan through the priority delivery groups and our Local Alliance Groups. Our Annual Report 2022 identified progress during the second year of the Plan and includes updates from across the partnership and is included as appendix 2.

Our Transformation Board also reviews progress and impact our ‘Transformation’ Programmes make for our communities. Our Transformation Programmes are:

- 0-25 Birth to Settled Adulthood
- Family Hubs
- Our Digital Journey
- Safeguarding Families Together
- Mockingbird Family Model
- Strengthening Services for children with a disability
- Traded Services for Schools



2.2b Our Children’s Services Strategic Partnership Governance

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

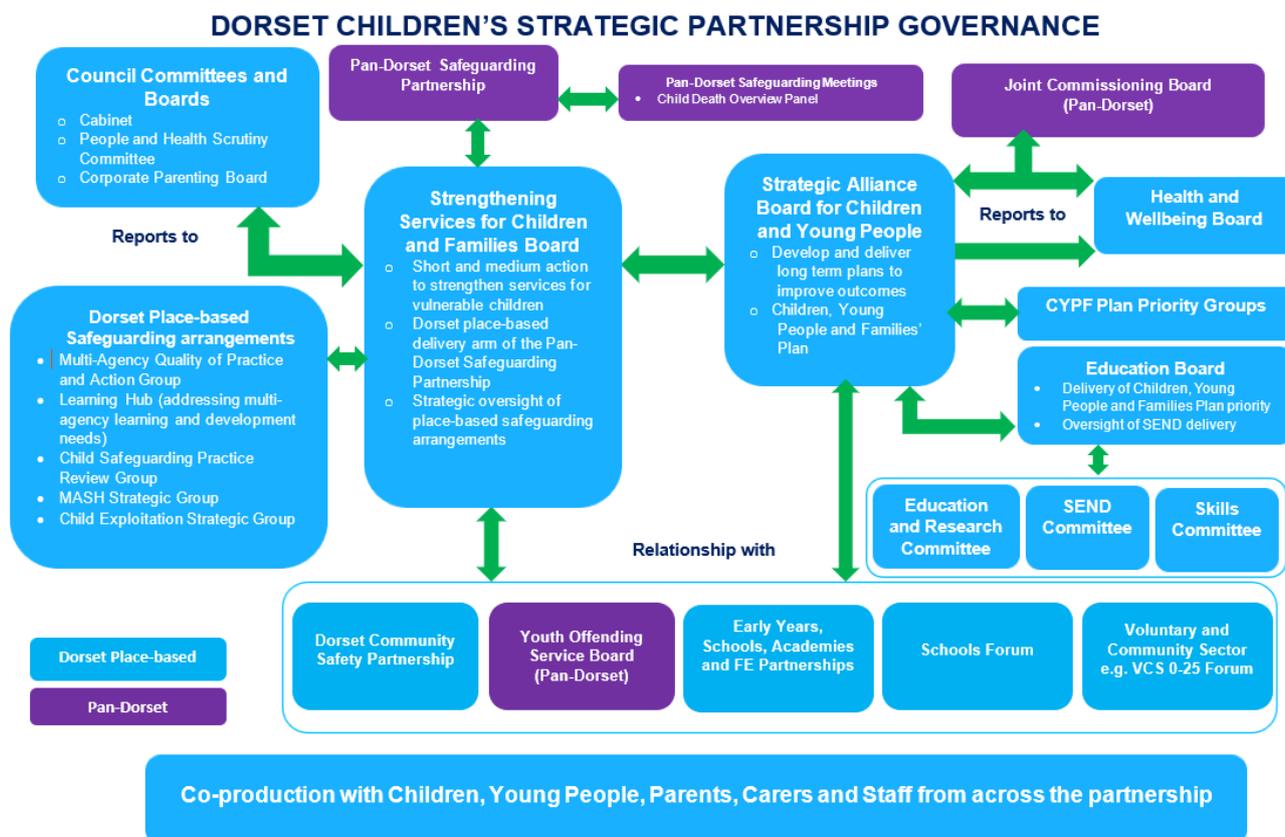


Fig. 2.2 Our Partnership Governance Arrangements

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 Board. The board acts as the delivery arm for the Dorset Council local authority area of the Pan Dorset Safeguarding Partnership (our ‘Place based arrangements’). We have developed and implemented an extensive and comprehensive plan that brings together short and medium-term actions into one Strengthening Services Plan.

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.

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 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](#). We have also appointed a new partnership manager, who is taking forward work to ensure that our safeguarding arrangements engage with and include the voices of children and families through the Board's thematic deep dives and establishing groups for people with a lived experience of the safeguarding system, following a delay to this programme.

2.3 Financial Position

The Children's Services 2021-22 outturn was £72.256m compared with a net budget of £71.432m, an overspend of £0.824m (1.15%). This is a positive outcome for a demand-led directorate operating in an ever-changing environment. There were two main structural budget issues that were reported during the year occurred as forecast: external placements (£2.27m overspend) and lost trading income due to a change in operating model (£1.2m shortfall in income). These were offset by carefully managing vacancies and agency budgets, increases in grants and other funding and underspending non-pay budgets, for example in-house fostering underspent by £1.38m. The Directorate also delivered £4.75m (97%) of targeted transformation and tactical savings during the year.

The quarter three 2022-23 Children's Services forecast is £77.6685m compared with a net budget of £75.876m, an overspend of £11.7m (2.4%). Most of the overspend sits within Care and Protection, the social services side of the directorate. External placements for children in care are forecast to overspend by £1.6m as capacity and availability of suitable placements, and movements in placements, remain a challenge. Additional budget of £1.2m was allocated in the 2022/23 budget build for inflationary pressures this area. This is currently forecast to be sufficient. The external placement overspend is partially caused by delays within the capital programme.

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 Chief Executive, Matt Prosser, has been announced as the next President of Solace, the representative body for more than 1,600 chief executives and senior managers working in the public sector in the UK.

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:

2022/23 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 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 - Strengthening Services for Children Who are Disabled and Government SEND review
- Q2 – Fostering and Adoption session
- Q3 – Care leaver accommodation – emergency use of B and B
- Q4 – Transformation Programme and the transformation priorities

2.5 Children's Services Leadership Team

Our Executive Director of Children's Services has been in post since January 2020. The Senior Leadership Team remains stable, although we have had some changes as our former Corporate Director for Care and Protection progressed to become the Director of Children's Services for Central Bedfordshire. Our new Corporate Director for Care and Protection came into post in May 2022.

The Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships took up their post in February 2020 having been covering the role on an acting up position for some time.

The former Corporate Director of Education secured a new role with a London Local Authority and we successfully appointed his successor in October 2022 with one of our Heads of Locality and Strategy promoted into the role. And taking up her post on January 1st. She brings a wealth of experience in education, schools and an early help background to the role.

We have further strengthened our Quality Assurance function across all areas of Children's Services by recruiting a Corporate Director for Quality Assurance in April 2022, leading on Quality Assurance across Children's Services as well as overseeing the wider Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership functions.

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.

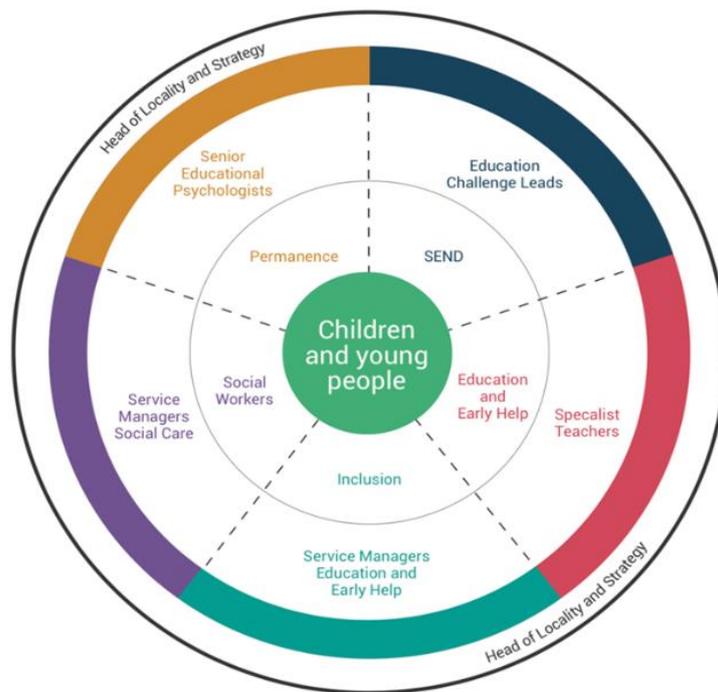


Figure 2.3 Dorset Children Thrive

The locality teams are 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 and wider staffing, has remained in place throughout the year. Our regular Diagonal Slice events (Employee Forum) 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, the Principal Social Worker and the Corporate Director for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Families Together 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. In the same theme of recognising the work of our Children's Services a special workforce event was held in September 2022. The focus was the importance of **connections** in our work with the children, young people and families we support every day but also with our partners, and with each other as colleagues too. An opportunity for colleagues to feel inspired, valued and proud of what they do.

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.

Employee surveys, launched in 2021, continue to be used gathering important feedback from the workforce. Analysis of the feedback is used at management meeting to identify follow-up communication and action from managers as well as building content for the ‘Diagonal Slice’ and staff development sessions

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 Dec 2022, we have 151 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 continued progress throughout 2021/2022 with successful recruitment to social work posts, which is a constant focus for us, given the national and regional challenges. We have a comprehensive ‘grow our own’ programme alongside other activities.

Throughout the year, the workforce has remained relatively stable. However, in November and December 2022, we have saw a larger number of Social Workers leaving. In addition, we increased capacity across our teams in line with our early help strategy in response to demand on our services. We have found recruitment more challenging this past year due to ongoing national shortage, the cost-of-living crises pushing the demand for agency working and neighbouring authorities offering increases. To address this, we are reviewing our recruitment and retention strategy, increasing our presence on social media, exploring development opportunities to retain staff and making the most of our ‘grow our own’ opportunities. We constantly review our exit interview data for feedback and a new exit interview has been launched council wide . Furthermore more, we will also we are going out to recruit internationally via an agency, following the success we had in 2020

	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22
Employed	158	156	158	158	155	155	154	155	157	157	155	151
Vacancies	24	26	27	27	29	32	33	33	31	32	32	39
Total	182	182	185	185	184	187	187	188	188	189	187	190
Vacancy %	13	14	15	15	16	17	18	18	16	17	17	21

Fig 2.4 SW vacancies

In line with the national picture during Covid and post Covid period, sickness 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 December 2022 our sickness absence rate in social care teams are 11 days lost per Full Time Equivalent, which is higher than we would like them to be. Sickness data is 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 and 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, mindfulness sessions delivered as part of the Thinking Thursday programme and regular wellbeing messages in the Wordout.

We have worked with our Human Resources and Occupational Health providers to strengthen the support offered to our staff who are experiencing ill health. We have seen an 10% rise in the use of our inhouse occupational health support since 2021, with 19% of the Social Care workforce receiving support from this service in 2022. There is also 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.

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 14.7 in December 2022, same level over the last year and having reduced from 18.8 in March 2020. Employees have workloads that enable them to develop and sustain meaningful relationships with our children.

Here are some other activities we are engaged with for recruitment and retention:

- We have successfully converted several agency staff into permanent roles.
- We are constantly reviewing our exit interview data for feedback and a new exit interview has been launched council wide.
- We are increasing our cohort of practice educators by enabling more social workers to complete training – this also influences retention.
- We have mapped the intake Student SWs up until 2026 to help with our ‘grow our own’; initiative.
- We have agreed to take 5 Step Up to Social Work Students from 2023-2024
- We are working with head of locality to identify where we can increase the uptake of ASYEs to meet our needs
- Learning and Development has mapped pathways for leadership and management training for social workers and will explore budgets for 2023-2024
- We are also now exploring international recruitment via an agency

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 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 continue with our Stop the Clock programme of 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

To strengthen the whole family approach to practice multi agency learning interventions and training have taken place, themes included for example, Contextual safeguarding, Domestic Abuse and Neglect This joint approach to learning is threaded through our Transformation work.



Fig. 2.5 Our Workforce Development Model

We're promoting leading people toward a better future through a strengths-based leadership approach using the Clifton Strengths-Based Leadership programme. We have trained coaches and facilitators to support managers across children's services to build strong, successful teams using the Clifton model to co-produce service plans, embracing the creativity, innovation and strengths of individuals within our family of services.



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 based on the evidence-based approach of Professor Thorpe and his team from the University of Lancaster. 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.

We have continued to strengthen and develop the Front Door, with a survey completed in June 2022 with Schools and Health partners. This identified that 96% of respondents felt the consultation/conversation with ChAD was child-focused and that 81% felt we worked collaboratively, with 72% receiving the outcome they were seeking. This survey also gave valuable insights into areas that required strengthening, such as how we communicate and work with partners in respect of the outcome they were seeking and ensuring that all professionals receive a written consultation after their contact with ChAD.

We have promoted and developed practice in respect of timeliness of decision-making for Contacts and Referrals. We have continued to see an improvement in this area with

3.1b Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) commenced in July 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.

The MASH has continued to strengthen our practice and engagement with our partners, with continued good attendance at the MASH Operational and MASH Strategic meetings. The improvement in respect of multi-agency decision-making has been progressed in certain areas, such as with our Police colleagues in relation to our children and young people with missing episodes and in others, we have widened the scope and focus, to a pan-Dorset task and finish group, to look at the wider partnership arrangements and opportunities to develop and strengthen our multi-agency decision making processes.

Dorset Police have established a new 'Dorset Safeguarding Hub' which brings together officers from across the Police Force in a co-ordinated, child focused service and includes specialist staff for missing children and those at risk of child exploitation. There is also further development with a focus on the High-Risk Domestic Abuse (HRDA) meetings with Police partners, to strengthen current practice and ensure we have a continued focus in our response to domestic abuse. This also includes having strong links with our Community Safety Partnership service, which includes adult and community services.

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 there were 3642 contacts, with 1343 resulting in a referral. Outturn position as of 31st March 2022 Rate per 10,000 was 428

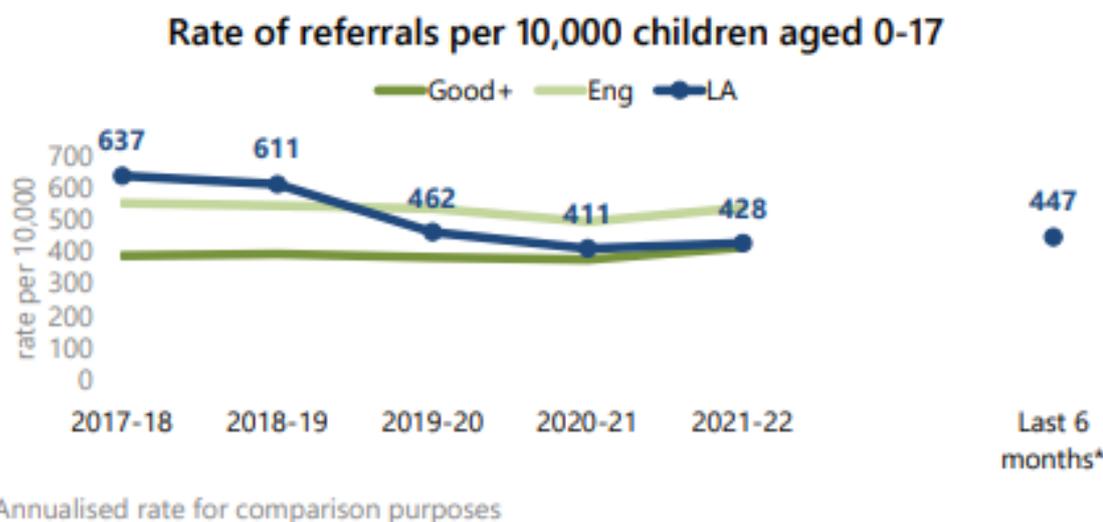


Fig. 3.1 Rate of referrals per 10,000

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. 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 in December 2022 reduced to 17.48%. 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. Evidence of the effectiveness of our partnership arrangements can be seen here:

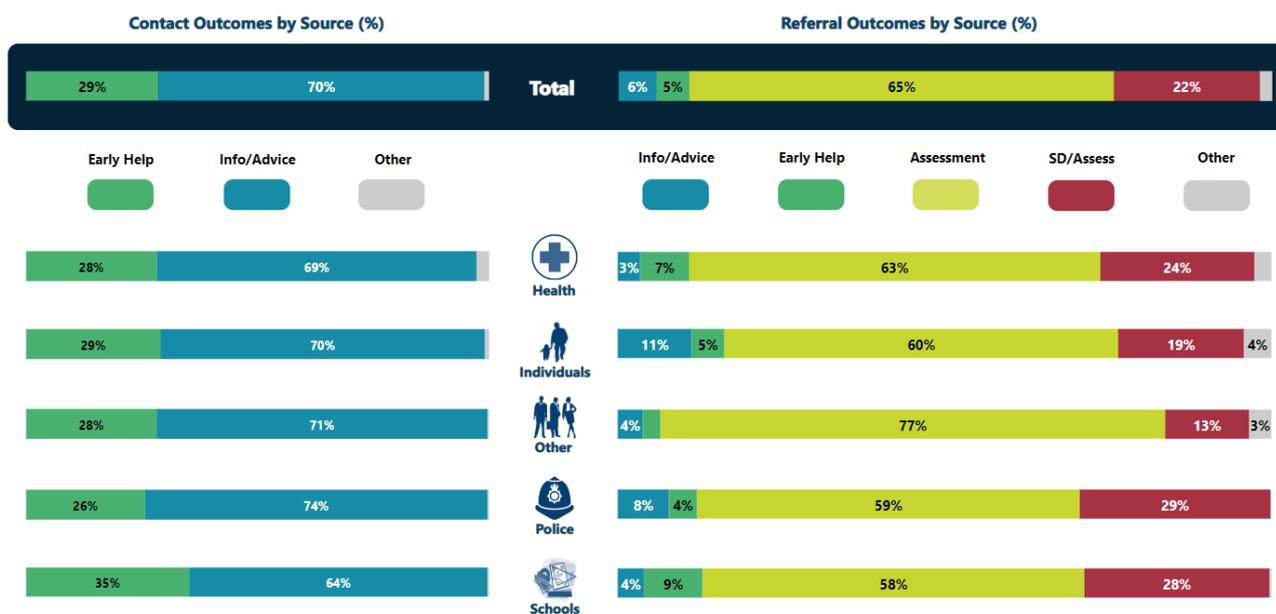


Fig. 3.2 Source of contact referrals

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. 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 s47 Enquiries that do not result in a Child Protection Conference (% of S47 leading to an ICPC 34.09% in Dec '22 – Last year 29.20%)
- 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 continue 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:

- Support for families where they live, play and work
- 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 community's children are a part of.

Our Early Help model (described below) includes information, advice and guidance; assessment and whole family working primarily in family homes; group work (including parenting support and targeted youth work) and link work with schools.

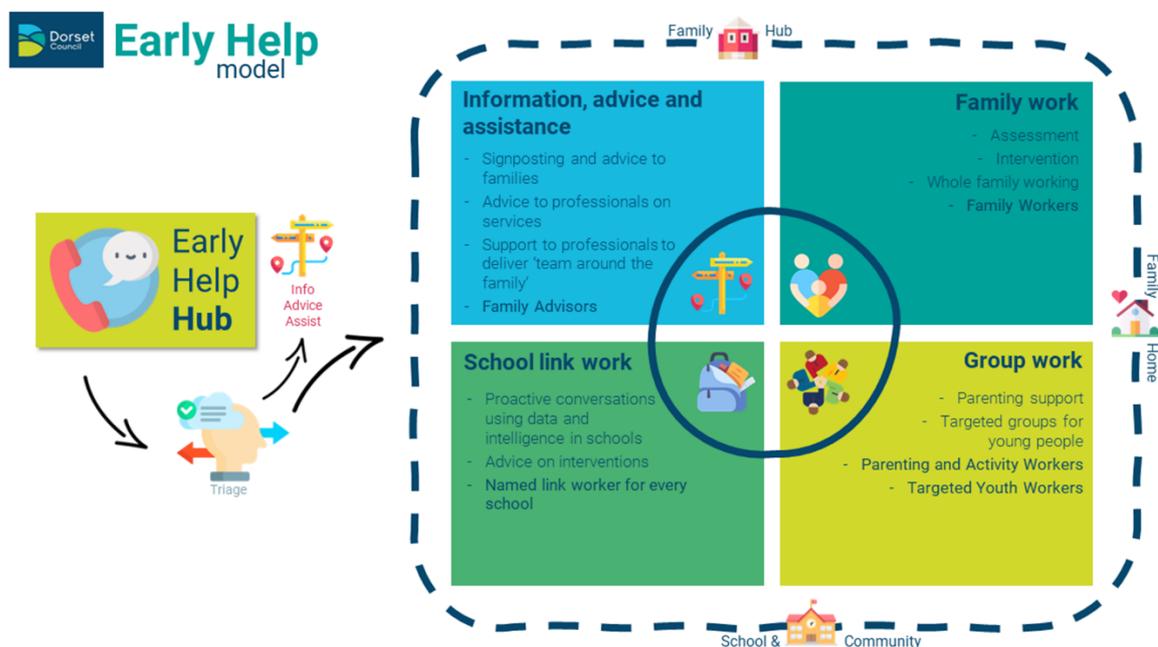


Fig. 3.3 Our Early Help Model

3.2b Direct work with Children and Families

Currently there are around 1315 children and young people in Dorset receiving early help services or support, with around 600 families being supported by a Dorset Council 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. We are currently focused on streamlining our workflows in our case management system so that we show the time from the Early Help Involvement Request to initial visit to ensure help is *early*. We are doing this 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 and enhance the learning for our teams.

A summary of audit outcomes shows that performance continues to be driven up with managers routinely using the Early Help data dashboard to ensure a timely response for families and this is evidenced by the reduction in inadequate gradings overall. Audits are paused at natural points of reflection in August and April for annual review. Observations provide evidence of strong practice, with strengths in our relationships with children, young people and families and parenting support through group work supporting good outcomes for children in Early Help plans.

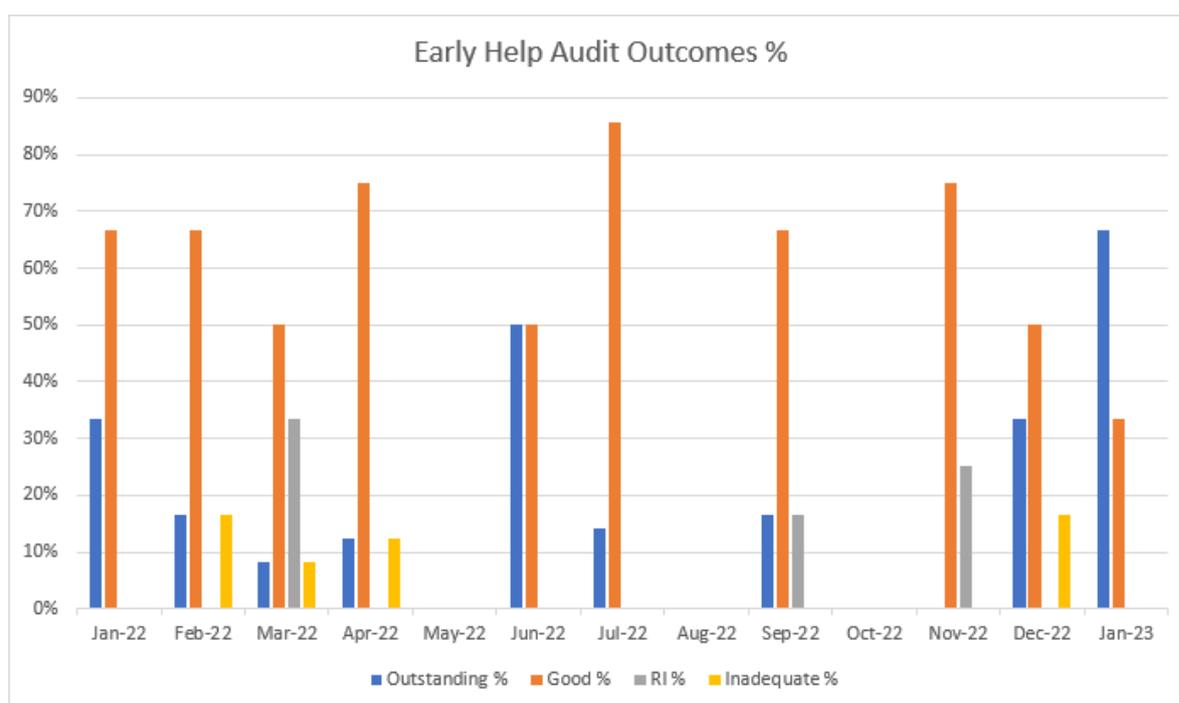


Fig. 3.4 Early Help audit outcomes

Strengths identified in the audits remain consistent in:

- Increased management oversight and regular supervision through fortnightly tracking reminders and monthly performance board meetings
- Improvement in case summaries being up to date and strengths based – we retain a focus on this.
- There is 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 – some examples are provided below

“I don't think I'll ever have the words to truly sum up how thankful I am to have met you and had your support. You believed in me when I didn't really believe in myself. I've learnt so much about myself and I've grown in confidence as a result. I've learnt how to ask for and accept help. To cut myself some slack sometimes and to not always feel like I have to be 'perfect', to take some time for me (because I AM important and my needs do matter). My boys will always be my no.1 priority but caring for them doesn't have to be All consuming.”

“Rainbows only appear after it's been Raining ...Thank you for being our rainbow”

3.2c 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 continue to strengthen this, drawing on the breadth of expertise in each locality to ensure our support is timely and impactful for children. We are ambitious to ensure link work is effectively cascaded through schools, to ensure there is a whole school understanding of our support to education practitioners.

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. Agencies represented at this have 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 followed a similar pattern to month-by-month since September 2021 and the payment by results figures for our strengthening families programme.

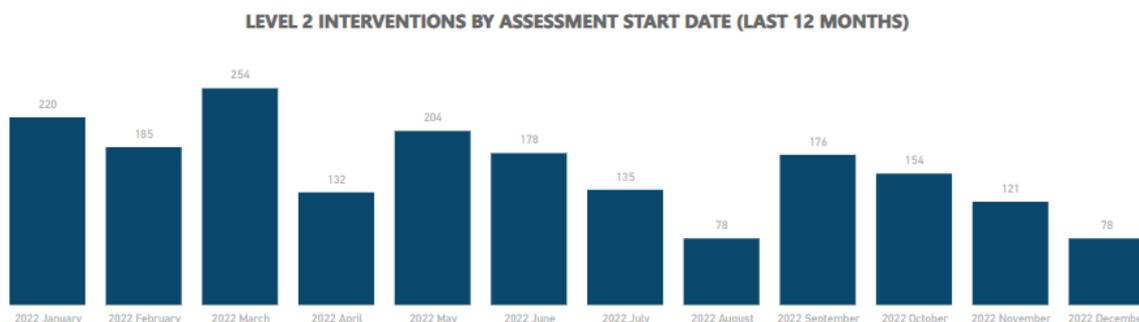


Fig. 3.5 Number of Level 2 Interventions by Dorset Council Early Help Teams (supporting partner agencies)

3.2d 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 impacts of lockdown on social, emotional and language development.

- 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.

There has been a steady increase in the numbers of children aged 0-4 supported through Early Help since January 2020 to December 2022, with many of the children attending our group work offer aged under 5.

Following a pilot in the Chesil locality we are rolling out a Team Around the Setting (TAS) initiative across Dorset. The ‘team’ includes a panel of professionals from the locality team and partner agencies who come together to meet with local early years practitioners. The pilot project showed that this approach builds strong professional relationships; improves communication and creates a better understanding of each other’s roles and the challenges and dilemmas faced. The intended outcomes in order to improve the life chances and outcomes for children and families through a partnership working approach. This ‘one team’ approach to how we offer support, information, advice, and guidance to EY providers includes Continuing Professional development opportunities for staff and supports EY staff in practice and decision-making.

3.2e Early Years provision

Our Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022/23 notes the following strengths:

- **99%** of early years provision is judged ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ (Ofsted 08/2022). Support for early years provision is targeted according to statutory duties and need through a risk assessment process.
- **85%** of eligible children take up their 2-year-old funding (November 2022). Higher than average compared to statistical neighbours, the South West and nationally This has increased from 82%. Targeted work is being done in localities to contact eligible families.
- **98%** of eligible children take up 3-year-old funding (November 2022). This is higher than, or equal to statistical neighbours, the South West and nationally at 98%
- **90.1%** of children in Dorset are at, or above the expected level in all 5 areas of development at their 2-year progress check (England 89.9% August 2022 Gov.UK)
- **100%** of early years group childcare provision offer the extended 30 hours early education funded entitlement.

Demand for childcare - families

Although lower than in previous years, we received responses from almost 400 families, which still offers statistically representation of family views. From those survey responses, we know that the most significant gaps lie in the supply of childcare for babies and wraparound provision, particularly for children with special educational needs and/or a disability before and after school and during school holidays

Predictably, COVID-19 is still having an impact on our early years provision. The demand for childcare continues to fluctuate according to family circumstances including financial and employment changes. Many parents and carers continue to work at home or access a hybrid model of working resulting in less childcare demand. The supply of childcare fluctuates particularly in the childminding sector with an overall decrease of 9 registered early years registrations. Some settings are having issues with their premises and are having difficulties in identifying alternative.

Supply of childcare – EY providers

Support is provided to early years settings primarily from an Early Years Support and Advice Officer (EYSAO) 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 carried out. We have developed a Power BI Early Years Dashboard, with training being rolled out to locality employees currently for a launch in mid-February. This will enable our locality teams to focus on the quality and services of our early years providers. This will be expanded in the longer-term to include health and education metrics to support performance management.

Between June 2021 and March 2022, we invited settings to apply for financial support to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on their settings. 27 settings were awarded sustainability support of £137,169 as a direct result of COVID-19.

Core training opportunities are free of charge to childcare professional, with almost 2500 early years practitioners registered on our training platform, Dorset Nexus. This offer includes:

- multi-agency safeguarding
- Role of the EY SENCO
- Five to Thrive
- Incredible Beginnings
- Dingley's Promise SEND training
- WellComm
- Locality network briefings including SENCO Networks
-

EY SEND

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.

12 Portage Consultants provide a home visiting education service for pre-school age children with long term additional needs across the county. Children are not required to have a diagnosis before we can provide support. We have developed a new offer and are seeking feedback from families as to how well this offer meets their needs.

We now offer:

- updated [Portage webpage](#) with pre-recorded webinar explaining all the support available
- mini-local offer signposting families to the wide range of support available including through Health and the Voluntary Sector
- welcome 'Stay and Play' sessions for new families each term in each locality
- half-termly 'Stay and Play' sessions for all families in school holidays
- re-branded Dorset Portage Facebook page

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 Dorset Education and Advice Line (DEAL) officers. A rolling training programme is offered to all EY practitioners with priority given to those settings who are currently working with Portage.

We work closely with the Dorset Music Service and Library Service to pilot specific early years sessions for families who have children with SEND. These opportunities are embedded into those service strategies and are being rolled out across the county.

Improving Social Mobility

We will be recruiting to a new post 'Social Mobility Commissioner' to support the improvement of social mobility and providing all children with the best start in life. This ambition involves strong partnerships and integrated working. For example, we are working with the Library Service to support development of their strategy including supporting:

- the approach to improving social mobility
- library staff CPD in improving the development of children's communication and language skills linked to local data
- school-readiness
- areas where children are identified as needing support in their development following their 2-year-progress check.

We have used additional COVID recovery funding to offer 'Boost Early Education Hours' to eligible children who need support in development of the prime areas of learning. Almost 9,000 additional early education hours were funded and both providers and families provided feedback on the impact of funding on the child's development. We also funded a small project to promote Home Learning. This initiative supported almost 750 children across 48 early years providers through stay and play sessions, resources to use at home and through music and other creative activities. Families told us:

- the ability to socialise with other children and different forms of play was of real benefit
- it was lovely to see where my child spends his day and learn new songs to try and home
- it helped with communication with listening and speech, understanding and memory
- it was good to spend with dad who had ideas of how to play and support with things he's interested in – it was really amazing!

We are in the process of targeting additional support to our funded 2-year-olds who have a delay in one of the three prime areas of learning. We anticipate we will be able to fund approximately 12,000 hours for these children who began their lives during the pandemic. Families and settings will tell us the impact of this.

3.2f 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.

Last financial year (2021/22) we were required to work with and deliver successful outcomes against 327 families, which was achieved and this year the target is 262 families by 31 March 2023. This lower figure is to enable us to transition smoothly to using the new national Outcomes Framework in both the identification of eligible families as well as making claims for successful outcomes. A stated aim of the national framework is to allow for greater national comparisons.

At the end of quarter 2 (30 September 2022) we had submitted 172 claims as illustrated in the Performance Dashboard provided by Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC). This shows our performance to be in line with our projections for claims across the financial year. Since the end of Quarter 2 we have submitted a further 51 claims bringing our total to date to 223, leaving just 39 claims to be made before the end of March 2023.

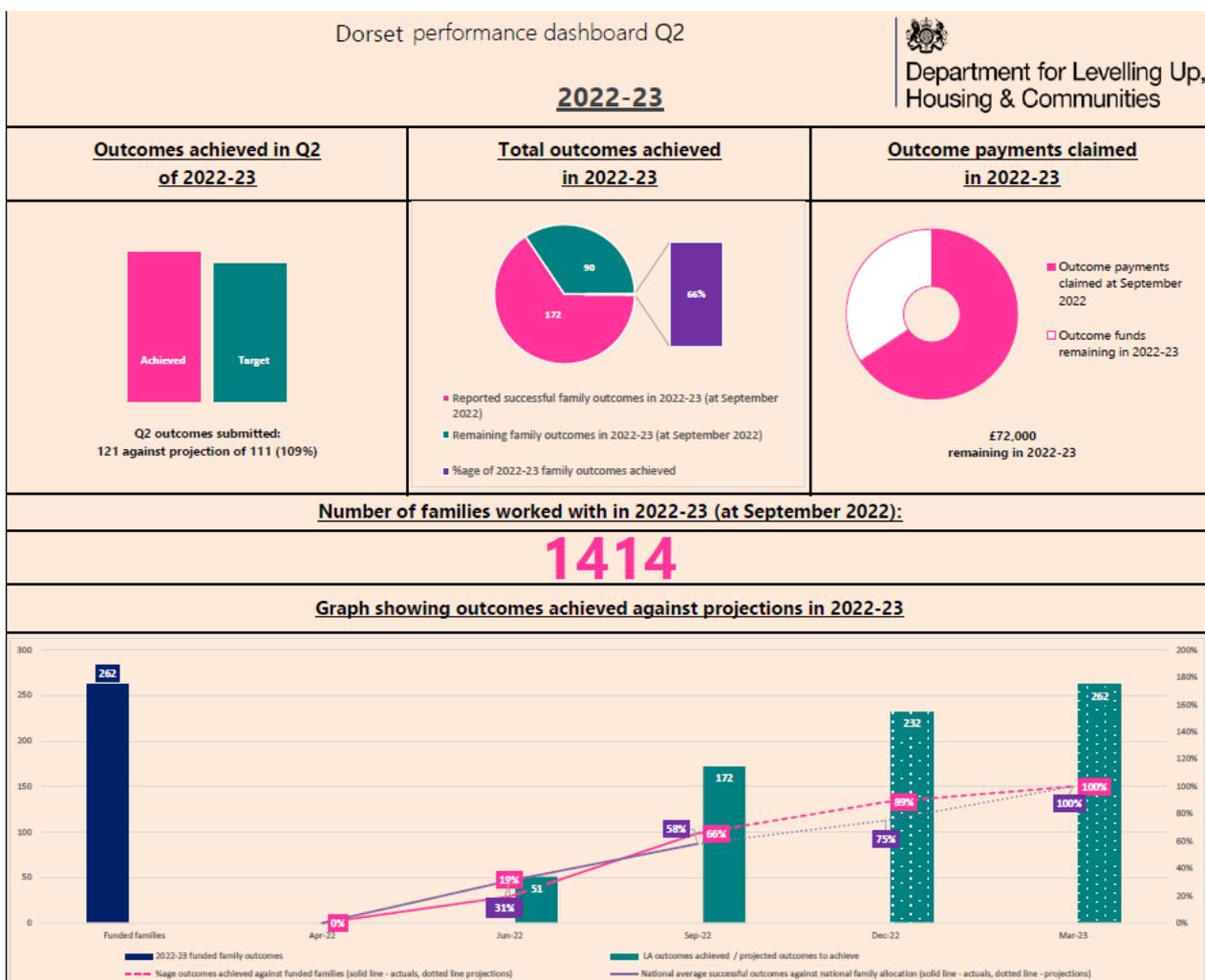


Fig. 3.6 Supporting Families Payment by Results Claims

From the 1st of October this year we are required to transition to the sole use of the new national Outcomes Framework provided by the national Supporting Families Team. Early indications suggest that data teams are finding it harder to identify a sufficiently large pool of families eligible for the programme using data alone, and soft intelligence from Lead Professionals supporting families will need to be captured in addition to boost numbers. Whilst this is unlikely to present a problem for us in Dorset in this financial year, we are planning for future years as target numbers rapidly increase.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Total
	Phase 2	Phase 3			
Funding	Achieved	Confirmed	Indicative	Indicative	
PbR number	327	262	424	525	1211

Fig. 3.7 Supported Families

Work is therefore going on between data teams at a regional level, across the local authorities in the southwest to collectively look at this common issue and provide peer support during this period of transition. The early findings about lower eligibility numbers are also being shared with the national team.

3.2g Young Carers

A new pathway for September 2022, we have introduced an improved young carer pathway recognising the need for joint working across the system, including adult’s services, education providers, carers organisations and the voluntary and community sector and healthcare professionals with all requests for assessment now being coordinated through the Early Help Hub.

We have a small team of dedicated family workers who undertake assessments of the level of caring responsibility and support required which includes respite and time out from caring roles, signposting to additional support, advocacy and 1:1 or small group work support. 90 young people have been assessed as undertaking a significant carer role and a further 217 registered as undertaking a caring role.

In addition to this team, young carers can also access information and support from:

- Carer Support Dorset – jointly commissioned by Dorset Council and NHS Dorset. This service provides a register all children and young people in a caring role regardless of whether they undertake a ‘significant caring role’ ; supports and enables the voice of young carers; raises awareness of young carers and support the training of the whole children’s workforce of the issues they face; supports the transition of young carers into adulthood, including those that will become young adult carers
- [MyTime](#), a Dorset based charity which supports registered and unregistered young carers. The service offers:
 - support and advice to schools including training for SLT members, pastoral teams and governors, awareness raising with children and young people and policy writing. MYTIME currently support around 25 schools in the Dorset Council area. Provision of breaks from caring.
 - range of activities every school holiday with Dorset receiving a dedicated number of places. These activities are available to considerably young carers than the Dorset Young Carers team were previously able to offer. The team support with

transport arrangements and attend each day to support young carers open to them.

- Zoom Youth Groups for young carers of different ages are offered each week over different evenings.
- Employability Programme for approximately two groups a year to support young carers aged 16-18 to understand the skills they have to offer and some of the routes open to them

As we improve our pathways and expand our offer of support into education settings, we expect the identification of young carers to continue to grow.

3.2h Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme

In 2022, our growing HAF programme was delivered to 2,000 eligible children by over 60 providers in 80 venues. We were able to use additional funding to increase the offer for children and young people with SEND. We also worked with swimming pools across Dorset to offer almost 30,000 free swimming sessions for children under 16 years and additional support for families supported through Early Help who needed to swim with their child.

What our young people said:

- “A place to meet with friends, meet new people the same age!”
- “It is better than sitting at home on my phone”!
- “If I wasn’t here, I would be sleeping; it gives me something to do and not be sad at home”

What our families said:

- “My daughter is 12 years old and goes to special needs school in another town.... Spending every day for 3 weeks with Columbus had made a massive difference on her. She tried different activities out of her ‘comfort zone’ and made friends too. The activities leaders have been amazing and always gone extra mile to help her and give her encouragement to socialise with others
- “The farm is utterly amazing my daughter loves it. She is the most calm and best at interacting with other children whilst on the farm, much better than all other settings. Staff are so caring and helpful and really 'get' how she ticks, making her happy, contented, and able to achieve whilst there”
- “Within a few minutes of arriving my son's anxiety about going somewhere new and being a distance from me melted away. He thoroughly enjoyed his time. He says he enjoyed the food the most”

3.2i Household Support Fund

Children’s Services has led the implementation of the household support fund since its introduction during Covid 19 to ensure we optimised the impact for local children and families. We have prioritised the distribution of supermarket vouchers to families eligible for FSM or receiving Early years Pupil Premium in the school holidays as well as others identified by schools and early years settings that may be experiencing financial hardship, putting millions of pounds directly into household budgets (equating to £1.1M in May half-term and the school holidays).

We allocated discretionary funds directly to our locality and care leaver teams to ensure we could support those experiencing financial hardship and continue to do so and distributed over £750k to applicants of pensionable age and £265k to those of working age via a public application scheme.

With the removal of ringfencing, we have secure continued corporate commitment to supporting children and families of Dorset through the extension of the supermarket voucher scheme and discretionary schemes. We have also opened a public application process for families with low disposable income and provided support to our Food Banks and social supermarkets who are experiencing high demand.

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.

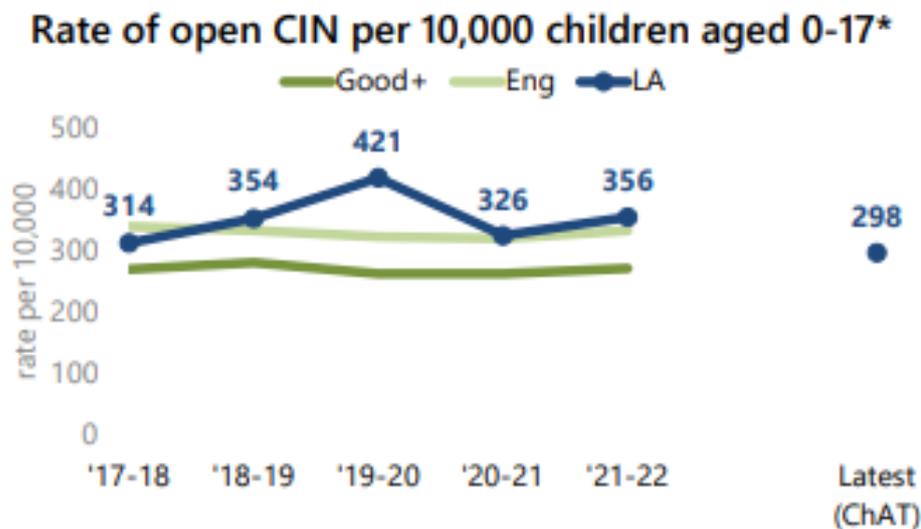


Fig. 3.8 Rate of children in need

Our Children in Need (CIN) numbers have continued to decrease during 22/23 and data indicates we are 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 reduce as different help is offered.

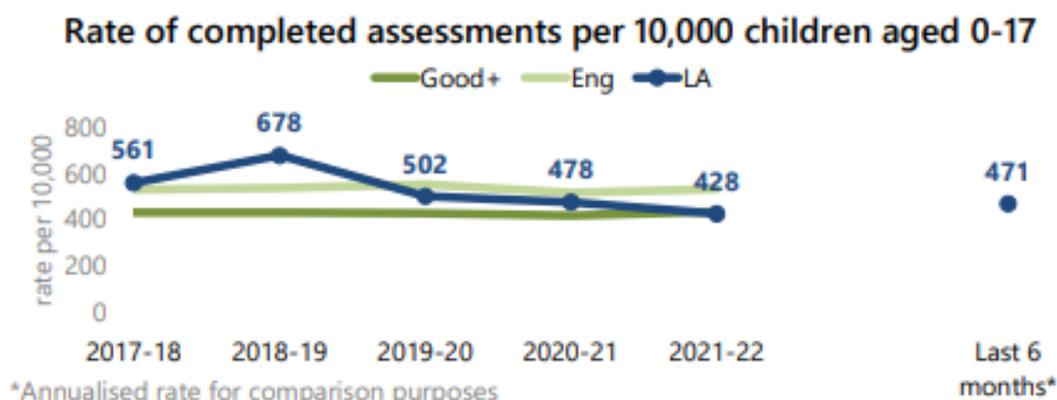


Fig. 3.9 Rate of assessments per 10,000 children aged 0-17

Although there has been a decrease in the timeliness of social work assessments completed in 45 days in the last 6 months, timeliness remains in line with good and outstanding local authorities in the last 6 months. Timeliness is a continued area of manager focus and the average duration for completed assessments is 35 days.

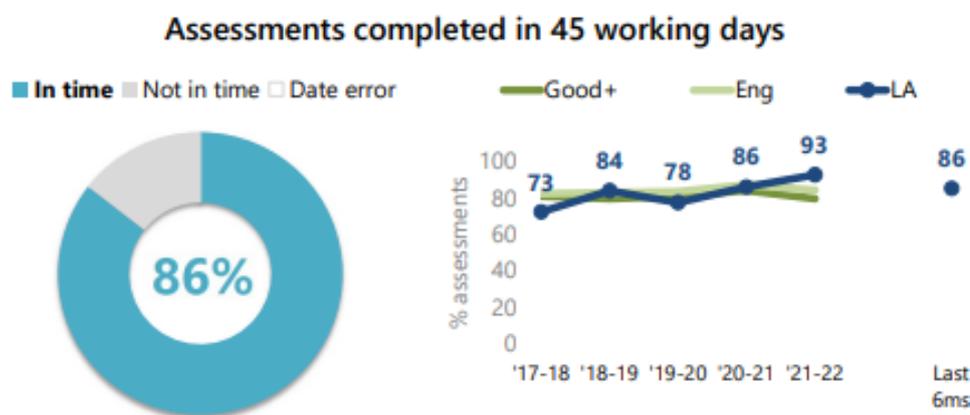


Fig. 3.10 % Assessments completed in 45 days

3.4 Child Protection

3.4a Section 47 enquiries

In the last 6 months, there were under 600 section 47 enquiries, with the rate of s47 enquiries per 10,000 as 170. This is in line with national rates but higher than good and outstanding rates. A high proportion (67%) of s47s did not require an ICPC. This has been identified as a priority for the CHAD team.

3.4b Child Protection Conferences

The rate of Initial Child Protection conferences has reduced over the last 6 months and is now more in line with national rates per 10,000 and timeliness of our Initial Child Protection Conferences, has remained strong.

Conferences are in-person with the social worker and the Quality Assurance and Reviewing officer (QARO) together with the family with partner agencies, who can join 'remotely' through hybrid technology. We monitor the quoracy to ensure full contributions from partner agencies so that decisions are based on complete and up to date information.

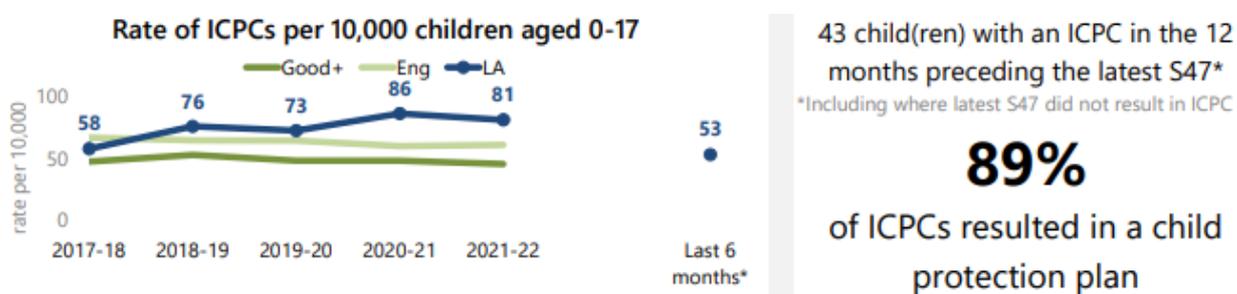


Fig. 3.11 Rate ICPCs per 10,000 children aged 0-17

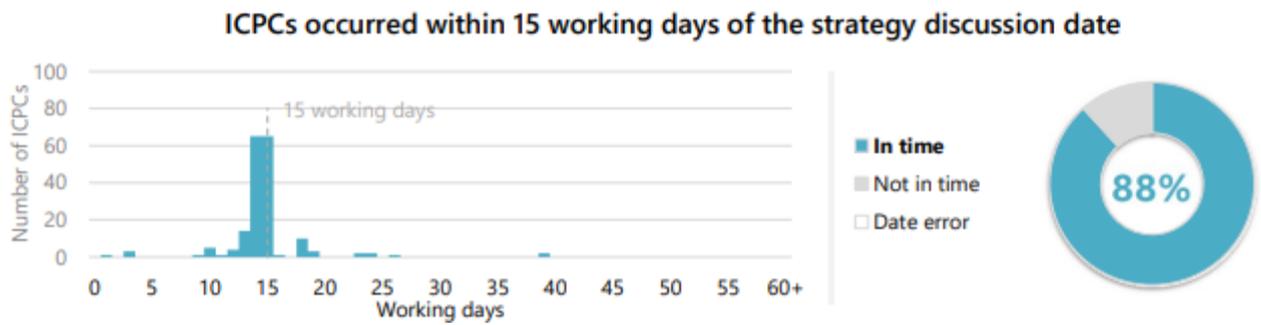


Fig. 3.12 Child Protection Conferences

3.4c Child Protection Plans

The rate of children subject to a Child Protection Plan in Dorset at the end of December was 45 per 10,000,

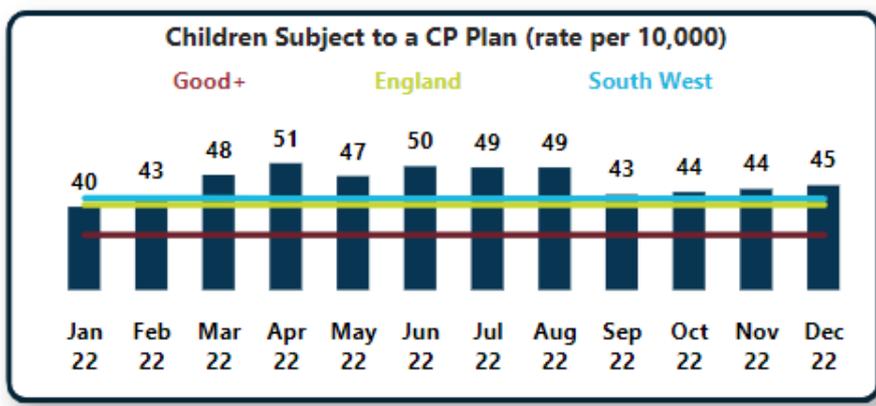


Fig. 3.13 Rate of Child Protection Plans

In response to the high number of children being supported through child protection plans in June and 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.

The percentage of children who are made the subject of a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time, in the last 6 months is 24%, this is a reduction from the previous financial year and shows that action taken following a review of re-registrations is having impact. This action included additional quality assurance to support robust decision making and increase oversight in line of sights showing we are responding to risk more effectively. We have also seen a reduction in the proportion of plans ended in less than 3 months from 26% in 3 months to 14% in the last 6 months – again following a detailed review and enhanced manager oversight.

3.4d Child Protection Visits

We continue to give conspicuous care to timeliness of Child Protection visits. At the end of December 2022 90% 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 building on the 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 (CWAD)

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.

December 2022, 543 children were receiving a service from the Children Who are Disabled team:

- 138 children are allocated to a Family Worker.
- 213 children are allocated to a Social Worker, 25 of whom are also supported by a family worker.
- 148 children are held 'virtually' in the Early Help team (i.e. receiving a short-break support package but not allocated to a lead worker).
- 93 children are allocated to an Occupational Therapist, 56 of whom are also allocated to a social worker or family worker.

Of these:

- 45 are children in care.
- 11 are children supported by a Child Protection plan
- 154 are children supported by a Child in Need plan
- 284 children are accessing short break support via direct payments
- 23 children access residential short breaks

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

Our focus is predominantly on children with substantial and permanent disabilities. However, we work with autistic children who are higher-functioning when it is in the child or family's best-interest that their case be held in a more specialist team. We have open, needs-led conversations through the Step-Up/Step-Down process and between CWAD/Locality/CHaD managers about which social care team is best placed to work with a family.

3.5b Birth to Settled Adulthood

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. The workstreams and foundations for delivering a birth to settled adulthood service is now fully implemented. As part of this

collaborative re-design work has now taken place involving both children's and adults' social care, SEND and local health services, under the guidance of an Independent Chair of the Birth to Settled Adulthood Board. We're seeing the immediate benefits of Co-working improving knowledge and understanding across areas and implementing changes alongside the service re-design. The workforce have also been approached and engaged in various aspects of the work and a dedicated workforce plan is supporting with development, training and co-production. We have also worked closely with the Dorset Parent Carer Council to both formulate our plans and vision as well as launch sessions with families, parents and carers. This will now support further collaboration on the service re-design and will facilitate alignment with the workforce group.

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 in an additional provider. We have developed 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, who were part of the planning of the delivery of the service, continue to be involved in the delivery and oversight of the service. We continue to assess gaps in the range of choice available to parents, with work 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. The service offer consists of community outreach support, accommodation-based support, helpline, and recovery programmes.

We have implemented 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.

We are implementing a new model of integrated working, with adult's practitioners embedded in our locality teams in the Chesil, Dorchester and West localities. The teams welcomed domestic abuse practitioners in November 2022.

3.6b High Risk Domestic Abuse Model (HRDA)

HRDA has been embedded into our multi-agency practice since 2020. Ofsted identified improvements in the model in the ILACS Report Nov 2021:

“Since the Ofsted focused visit in October 2019, when inspectors looked at arrangements for children in need or subject to a child protection plan, children have received a more consistently good service. The effective application of thresholds at key decision-making points is underpinned by the regular professional discussions held by advanced practitioners and their managers.

In parallel, a well-structured suite of multi-agency meetings prioritises those children who are most at risk from domestic abuse and exploitation in all its forms. As a result, shared intelligence is used well to identify and disrupt networks of abusers when children are missing from home or otherwise vulnerable.”

Our HRDA model was developed 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.

The main impact is 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 one another. Evaluation identified several recommendations to improve the model. The recommendations are being taking 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 continue to work collaboratively with our police and education colleagues using Operation Encompass to enable 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 and embedding the [Dorset Domestic Abuse Strategy](#).

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 was 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 began 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 continued 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 had 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 available on the [Pan-Dorset website](#)

Dorset Police are leading a Tri-Force Domestic Abuse approach and are bringing actions from the delivery plan into partnership meetings, plans and strategies through our established partnership governance channels.

3.7 Pan Dorset Youth Justice Service

3.7a Our approach

The Youth Justice Service is a Combined Pan-Dorset partnership comprising Dorset Council, BCP Council, NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board, 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, 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.

In October 2022, our Joint Youth Justice Service was inspected and rated as 'Good'. The inspection report, which was published on 17 January 2023, identifies multiple strengths in the work of the service, including strong partnership working with local authority, health, police and probation

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 down to 40 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 current work to enable proactive early identification and intervention.

Local data does not indicate over-representation of children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds among our first-time entrants.

3.7c Use of Custody

Dorset continues to see low levels of custodial sentences. 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 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 have seen a reduction in the number of children from Dorset in our care during 2022/23, however our overall number of children in care has remained similar as we have welcomed a growing number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to our care family. Our rate of children in care is 66 per 10,000 population. Children continue to mostly enter care in a planned way through the governance of weekly Line of Sight Meeting and Leadership Oversight and via planned court intervention.

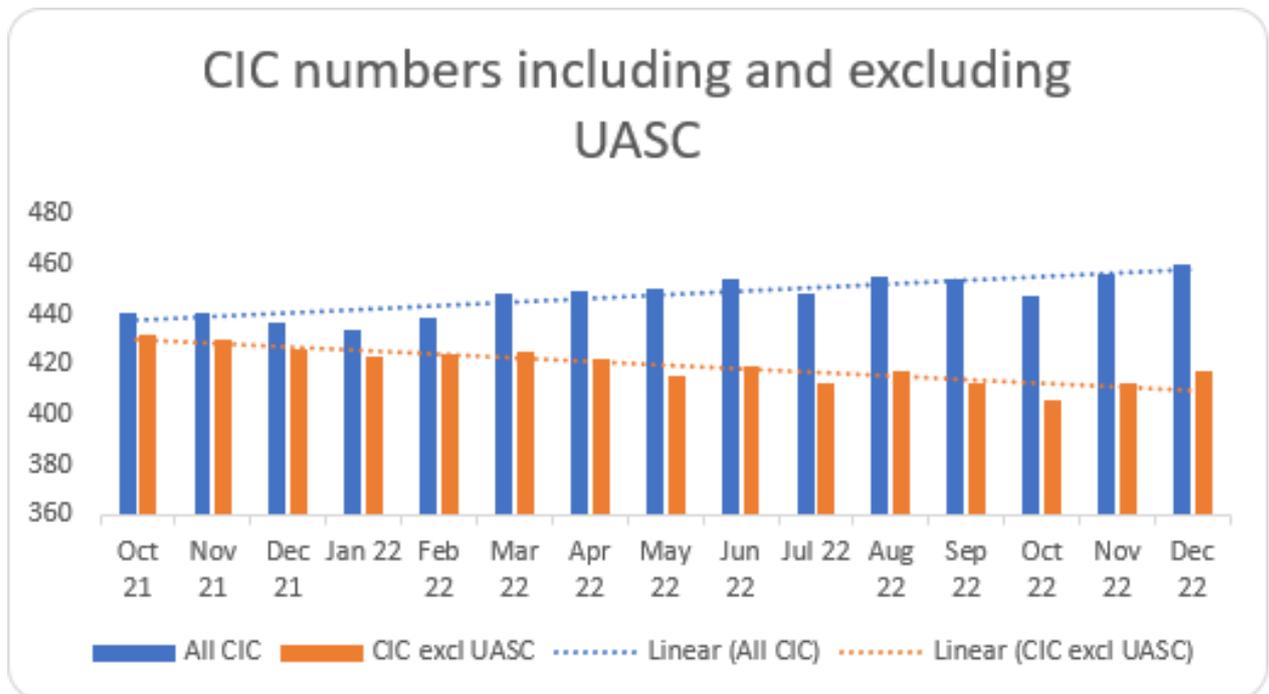


Fig. 3.14 New Entrants to Care (2021 to 2022)

3.8c Health Assessments and dental care

There are good working relationships between children’s social care managers, the Children in Care Health Service and NHS Dorset, with all partners committed to improving health outcomes for children in care. However, we have seen a continued underperformance which is due to several factors and challenges which include children placed out of area. Despite escalation through NHS Dorset, we have not yet been able to improve the performance in this area. We have requested a formal review of the service by NHS Dorset and this will be a continued area of focus for the Strengthening Services Board and pan-Dorset Safeguarding Partnership.

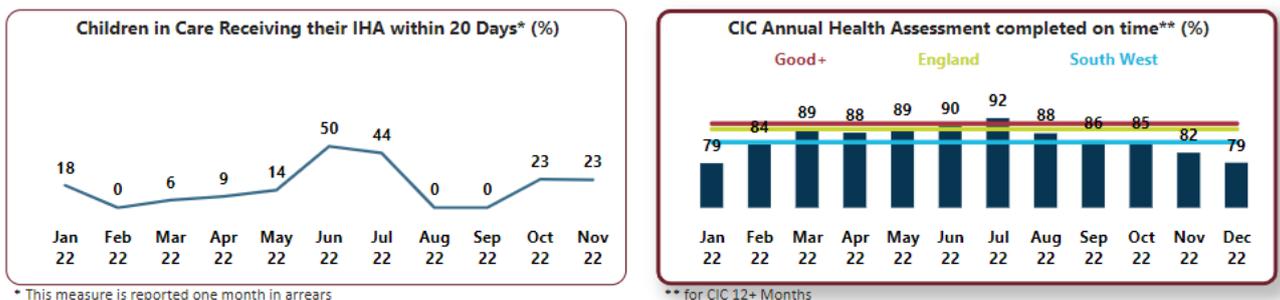


Fig. 3.15 Child in Care Health Assessments completed on time

We recognise the importance of good dental health and that this has been a real area of challenge for us in Dorset. Despite improvements in performance, we 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 remain a priority for dentistry in the south west which will support improvement in our performance into 2023/24.

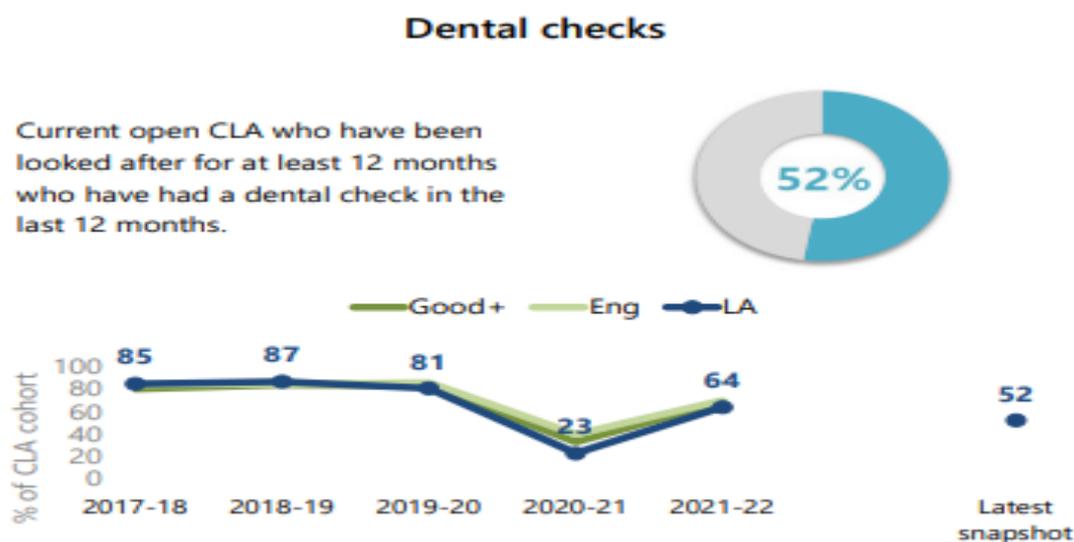


Fig. 3.16 CLA Dental Checks

3.8d Emotional wellbeing and mental health

We have improved the completion rate for Strengths and Developments Questionnaires (SDQs), however the average SDQ score for our Children in Care aged 4-16 is currently 16.4, this is higher than our comparator local authorities and has continued to be above our local target. 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 NHS Dorset 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 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. A new partnership agreement was implemented in April 2022 which we are reviewing to ensure that it is bringing about the positive impact we require for our children and young people.

3.8e Achieving Permanence

The number of children who have a Permanence Plan has remained above 90% with 92.68% of children in care for 4 months or more have a completed Permanence plan in December 2022. 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 Placement stability

Long term placement stability continues to strengthen further and is reported at 76% which puts us above national and good statistical neighbours' averages. We remain ambitious to enable our children to live in settled and stable placements. We have had under 7% of children in care experiencing 3 + placement moves in the previous 12 months with 6.52% in December 2022, which is better performance than the national average and Good and Outstanding comparator authorities.

3.8 g Children placed at a distance

Although a significant improvement from 2021/22, we still have too many children placed out of area (40% compared with 47%), and this is a particular issue for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, where we have been unable to secure sufficient local provision. To address this, and following engagement with Ofsted, the DfE and the Home Office we are developing an alternative model of care and education using boarding schools, which we anticipate will enable us to offer more care and support in Dorset.

3.8h Voice of our children and young people

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 Corporate Parenting Board governance structures including the Governing body of the Virtual School, the Care Leavers Board and our New Belongings work.

The voice of young adults who are care experienced continues to provide us with learning and opportunities to make things better together. The council's annual survey of care leavers has been undertaken using the 'My Life Beyond Care' Coram Voice survey. This has given the whole service a significant opportunity to understand how care leavers feel, where there are 'Brightspots' and where there are areas for improvement. Their feedback has provided a structure and plan for service development as care leavers ranked their priorities – the most important of which was 'being safe and settled in accommodation.

Young people had identified that they wanted a way to be able to reach team managers, giving ongoing feedback about Personal Advisors and the service. This has been set up and young people were informed by the Care Leavers Team that this was live.

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 are 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 is also being 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. An advocate is allocated to young people in Dorset to ensure their views and concerns are heard, especially when they are involved in statutory processes which they may not understand, to help them to explore their options without prejudice or influence, to ensure they know their rights and to ensure they have the information to help them to make informed choices, and decisions. Advocacy services ensure they are in contact with the relevant people or contact them on their behalf and accompany young people to meetings or appointments if they require it. NYAS also works with young people to develop their self – advocacy skills and the confidence to advocate for themselves, which will grow into a life - long skill.

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 to best support the children in the home to have their views heard.

3.8i Independent Visitors

The children's Independent Visiting service provides volunteers to visit, befriend and support Children who are Looked After. Those who live in foster care, residential homes and residential special schools and supported living arrangements up to the age of 18 years old. An Independent Visitor is an adult who has volunteered to spend time with children looked after and are someone they can trust and someone they can rely on. The role of the independent visitor will be to visit at least once a month, so the young person will see them regularly. They'll plan for whatever the young person wants to do and the time they spend will be all about the young person.

Referrals into the service in the first 12 months (August 2021 to July 2022) totalled 842, of these, 456 were for issue-based advocacy where the young person is in care or is a care leaver, and 386 referrals were for young people needing advocacy support due to their involvement in the child protection processes. Referrals for the first quarter of year two (July 2022 to September 2022) totalled 128, of these, 56 were for issue-based advocacy and 72 were for child protection advocacy.

Training and support on a group and individual basis has been completed ensuring that there are clear lines of communication and understanding of the NYAS recording and reporting systems. All IV's have completed the NYAS compliance training and quarterly best practice meetings are undertaken with all current IV's (IVs going through recruitment also have the option of attending

these meetings). Best practice meetings cover a range of topics, which are chosen by the independent visitors.

The Senior Advocate has worked closely with Children's Services leads to promote the advocacy referral process to locality teams. There has been a push within the advocate team to complete internal referral for young people once they have received a service, which removes the emphasis on the social workers needing to make referrals, thus providing a more consistent offer to young people. This approach enables children in care to build a trusting relationship with the advocate over a period of time. A future focus is to work with children services to support young people when they first come into care, so they understand their rights and know how to access the advocacy service.

There has been a resumption of face-to-face meeting, where the advocate will always aim to provide a face to face with a young person, including out of county young people where we have advocacy services running in their area and can offer a local advocate. New ways of working and processes have been implemented within the advocacy team, and young people are routinely being asked to provide feedback on the outcomes framework and the data can start to be used to identify trends in young people understanding of their rights regarding their care and the service can respond accordingly. The young people and volunteers are very positive about their experiences and the impact it has on their wellbeing. It allows young people to have new experiences and have a safe space where they can be themselves and talk openly, without judgement.

3.8j Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officers

Our Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officers (QAROs, undertake the role of IRO) 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 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 QARO's are providing challenge and a critical eye to our children's plans. 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 moving into leaving care

3.9 The Right Homes for our children

3.9a Unregistered Provision

We continue to have no under 16s living in unregistered provision.

3.9b Increasing sufficiency

We have moved 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.

3.9c Mockingbird Launch

We launched our first Mockingbird Constellation in November 2022 and are already seeing an impact for the foster carers and the children they are caring for:

- Prevention of 3 foster carer household resignations
- Stability support preventing 4 children moving from 2 households
- Nurturing relationships between the children & young people within the constellation
- Supportive relationships formed between foster carers
- Recognition of hidden talents within our young people
- Successfully appointed Hub Home Cares for constellations 2&3 launching March and April 2023



3.9d Harbour and in-house residential provision

The Harbour multi-disciplinary 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. Offering a combination of outreach, fostering and residential provision, progress is being made towards meeting the intended outcomes. The duration and intensity of support has varied according to the needs of young people.

We have successfully opened our 3 bedded residential unit (College House), a refurbished Edwardian home that also provides a hub for the integrated Harbour team on the ground floor. From here the team work intensively with children and their families to either support a safe return home or a move to alternative family-based care.



3.18: College House Oct 2022

Sunnyside Bungalow (2 bedroom) and Clarence House (1 bedroom) further complement the accommodation portfolio of The Harbour offering mid-term or bespoke accommodation to meet children's needs.

To ensure our homes are homely and take account of the climate emergency we have furnished our homes through a reuse project, making use of previously adored furniture. We co-designed the

interior with young people, who are also integral members of our interview panels for recruitment to these new services.

The impact of the Harbour Model include:

- Supporting young people to safely remain at home – 94% of those worked with remained at home and there has been a reduction on over 13s entering care
- Improved family relationships
- Improved placement stability
- Reduction in 1st time entrants to criminal justice system

3.9e Further developments in In-house residential provision

The Harbour has had a positive early impact and this evidence suggests that a similar approach, incorporating residential and fostering provision, community-based support and in reach provision, could also improve outcomes for children who are disabled.

The work to develop our sufficiency strategy, the creation of the Dorset Centre for Excellence, our SEN Capital strategy, and shorts breaks offer has created the opportunity to strengthen our services for children who are disabled through an integrated and systemic offer. Within this approach we are developing the following accommodation spaces.

- Hayeswood Bungalow, Wimborne, (2 – 3-bedroom overnight respite)
- Chestnut House, 45a Dorchester Road Weymouth (5-bedroom mid-term home)
- Brackenbury – lifelong home
- The Dorset Centre of Excellence, Shaftesbury

3.9f Unregulated provision

We consider that those aged 16 and 17 should be placed in regulated provision other than where an alternative plan is clearly in their best interests. Placements of this type are by exception and are approved by the Corporate Director, Care and Protection

To compensate for the lack of regulation, we have our own robust and enhanced monitoring, reporting and quality assurance arrangements in place, inclusive of:

- Due diligence checks and contract monitoring of provision by commissioners
- Enhanced visiting arrangements by both social workers and quality assurance reviewing officers
- Quality assurance visits by the Senior Leadership Team from January 2023
- Regular tracking and monitoring meetings between commissioning and operational staff
- Regular reporting on these young people and the provisions at Directors Performance Board and Corporate Parenting Board

We have thirty-three 16- and 17-year-olds living in unregulated provision, seventeen of whom are unaccompanied minors, where we have struggled to identify suitable local provision. We have been working with local providers to prepare them for the new regulations as they are published, and it is included in our commissioning arrangements.

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

3.10a Missing children

We continue to strengthen 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.

There has been an increase in the numbers of our Children in Care having a missing episode in the last 12 months to 14% (previously 12% reported in the Self-Evaluation of February 2021). Some of the factors are a result of the lifting of restrictions in place during Covid-19. Since September '22 We have seen a reduction in the number of incidents. We are monitoring numbers and the impact of the Harbour through Quality Assurance dip samples of RHI and ongoing Harbour support to our CiC provide greater understanding.

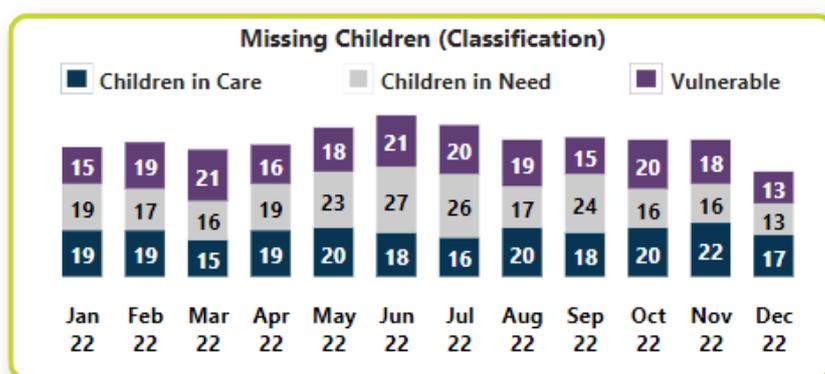


Fig. 3.19a Missing children in Care, in Need or Vulnerable

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. Since the new practice was put on place, 93.59% in 2021 and 93.62% in 2022 were offered RHI October 2022.

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 who meet 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.

In April 2021 we launched our contextual safeguarding approach and toolkit based on the Hackney/ University of Bedfordshire model of contextual safeguarding. 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 December 2022 we had 100 children identified as at risk of child exploitation, 66 significant risk, 19 moderate risk and 15 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 12 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.

Prevent and Channel Panel

There were 41 Prevent Referrals in Dorset for the period 1st Feb 2022 to 30th Jan 2023. The majority of Prevent referrals are presented with mixed, unclear or unstable ideology or vulnerability present but no ideology. There are mixed themes for Dorset with referrals about people having an interest in guns, weapons, violence and mass killings featuring prominently. A high percentage are linked to individuals' use of the internet both at school and home. There has been an increase in the number of young people with prevent referrals over the past 2 years which

reflects national trends. There has been significant work that has been undertaken with Prevent by educators, who remain the commonest source of referrals in Dorset.

We have an established Channel Panel for both adults and children in line with the renewed Channel Panel Guidance in 2021. During 2022 there have been 3 active Channel Panel cases, all of which have been young people aged under 19. The ideological beliefs identified have been extreme right wing or mixed, unstable or unclear. All of those young people involved in Channel have been identified as having neurodiversity or mental health needs and accessing extremist material through the dark web. There has been strong partnership engagement with Channel Panel which has supported intervention for these young people to manage and reduce risk. The themes from the referrals are fed into our Learning and Development programmes.

3.11 Fostering Services

3.11a Fostering Service Overview

The fostering teams currently support 185 Fostering Households which is made up of 123 Mainstream Foster Carers, 59 Connected Persons Foster Carers and 3 other care types. The 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.

The fostering team is supported by Clinical Psychologists who engage with assessments and matching of placements to develop support plans with carers. They offer formulations where carers are experiencing challenges to prevent placement breakdown. They are also leading training within the team to ensure that there is a consistent trauma informed approach embed with carers and fostering social workers.

3.11b Service Improvement and Key Service Developments

To increase the number of enquiries and even more importantly the quality of applicants we commissioned a marketing agency to work with in-house services to redesign Dorset Council's recruitment strategy. We have implemented a new Fostering Service micro-site; Delivered focussed and targeted digital and media campaigns; Worked in conjunction with local businesses and enterprises and the wider council to ensure a greater visualisation of recruitment and reintroduced face-to-face recruitment including attendance at countywide events, regular pitches and pop-up stands.

We have:

- Introduced the Mockingbird model with a first constellation of foster carers in place
- Undertaken a review of our enquiries, recruitment, and induction processes leading to improvements.
- Undertaken a review of placement stability and foster care resignation procedures
- Introduced Microsoft 365 accounts for foster carers.
- Continued our partnership with Dorset Foster Care Association.

- Reviewed our foster panel processes.
- Review and updated our policies, practices, and procedures.
- Begun planning for a therapeutic DDP / PACE led service.
- Development a Business Intelligence Dashboard

Connected Person Foster Care

While we have been rightly striving to recruit and retain mainstream foster carers, we have at the same time been focussing across our social work teams on ensuring that where children must come into care, wherever possible we identify extended family members or otherwise connected people to provide such care. We are very pleased that the proportion of connected persons foster carers approved by the service has increased. In December there are 55 connected persons foster carers looking after 77 children in care.

3.12 Adoption Services

Adoption and Special Guardianship Services have been provided by Aspire Regional Adoption Agency since 2017. 23 children have been adopted this year as of December 2022, compared to 20 in 2021. A further 29 children are living with adopters and should be adopted in the next few months, compared to 27 in 2021.

Where 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.

The average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family has increased this year and was 489 days as December 2022.

(A10) Time between entering care and placed with family for adopted children

489 days Average number of days between entering care and moving in with adoptive family for adopted children (adjusted for foster carer adoptions)
 22 children

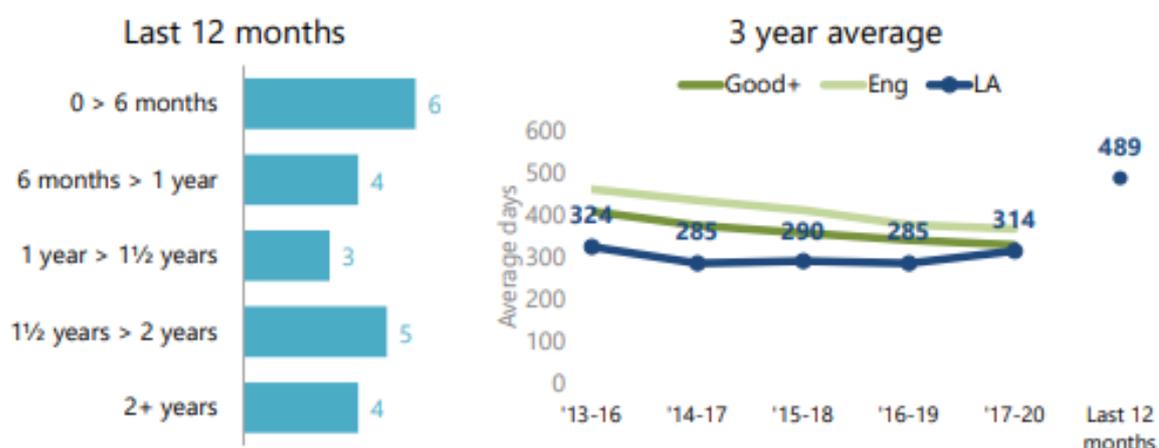


Fig. 3.21 Timescales - Placements to adoption

Placing children with complex needs, 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 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.

Families for Children VAA (FFC) had been a longstanding partner with BCP and Dorset Council and held the contract for the independent birth family support. Following notification of pending closure of FFC, Aspire RAA recommended that Aspire made the contract with Permanence and Children Together VAA (PACT) to deliver the birth family service and Aspire took on those families identified as being local to the area. PACT have considerable experience of adoption and working with vulnerable women which will support the birth parent service going forward. This meant that there was minimum impact with PACT taking over on 1 September 2022 following the closure of FFC on 31 August 2022.

Key achievements for 2022 included:

- Further improved 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)
- Improved 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
- In the first 6 months of this year we have made almost as many Should Be Placed for Adoption decisions and Placement Orders as we did in the whole of last year and timeliness is improving
- We have had 23 Adoption Orders made so far made this year
- We have celebrated the adoption for one of our children at the age of 9 years old.

3.13 Care Leavers

3.13a Our Care Leavers

At the end of December 2022, we had 530 care leavers in our family, including 94 16-18-years olds being supported through transition by a Personal Advisor alongside their social worker.

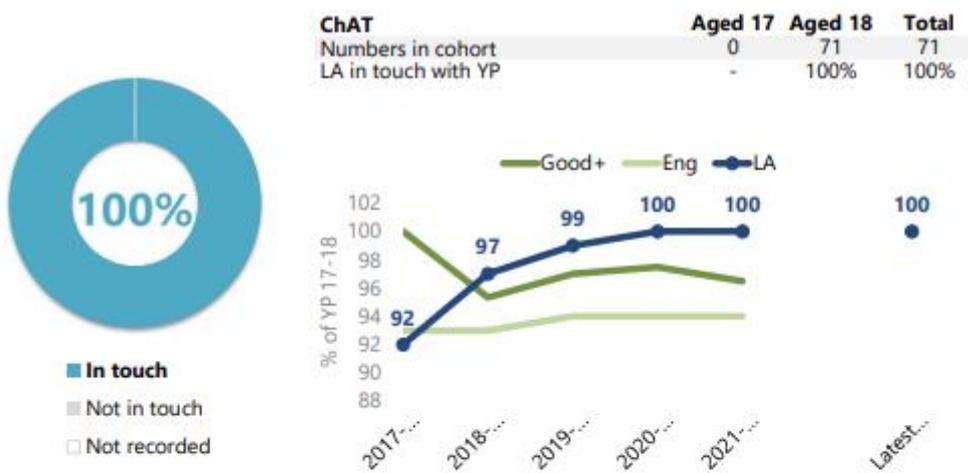
Most of our care leavers remained in care until their 18th birthday. Whilst the picture is improving, we know not as many of our young people are benefiting from Staying Put arrangements as we would like. We continue to look at how we are supporting foster carers to continue to provide a safe and stable home for our young people after they turn 18 and into adulthood.

Personal Advisers are secondary allocated to young people 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.

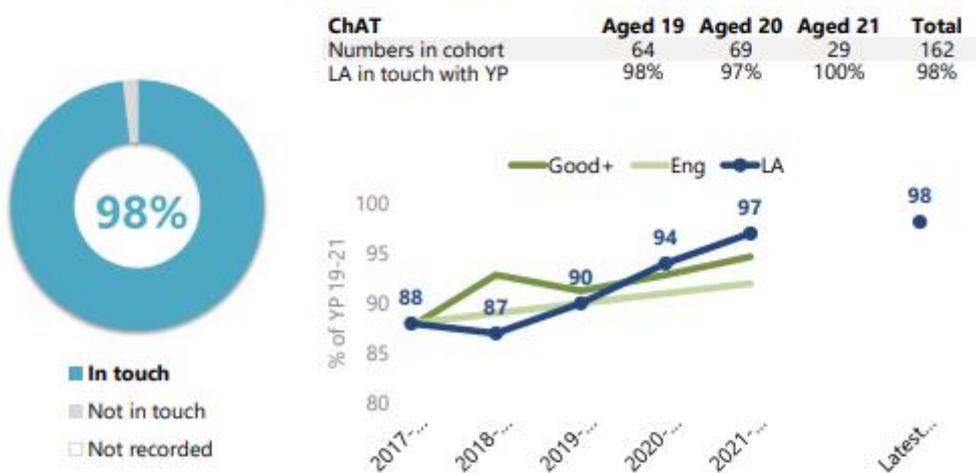
3.13b Keeping in touch

We are consistently in touch with over 96% of our care leavers.

LA in touch with 17-18 year olds



LA in touch with 19-21 year olds



3.13 Keeping in touch with our Care Leavers (ChAT)

3.13c Finding the right place to live

A high percentage of our care leavers are in suitable accommodation, 96% in December 2022. We continue to work at pace to ensure that all our care leavers have safe, stable and permanent homes that meet their needs as this was the number one priority identified by our care leavers participating in the Coram Voice – New Belongings Survey. To this end, Dorset Council purchased accommodation in Kirtleton Avenue, Weymouth which will provide 8 appropriate homes to meet the needs of our care leavers from January 2023.

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 have combined with existing spend on care leaver accommodation to increase purchasing power. Tender evaluation has been completed and contract awards will be made in the next few weeks. 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.

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

When a care leaver has been placed in B and 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 have developed 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 65% of 17/18-year-olds and 65% of 19-21-year-olds accessing education, employment or training. This an area in which we are making progress and will continue to further strengthen practice and work with our partners to continue to improve our offer for young people leaving our care.

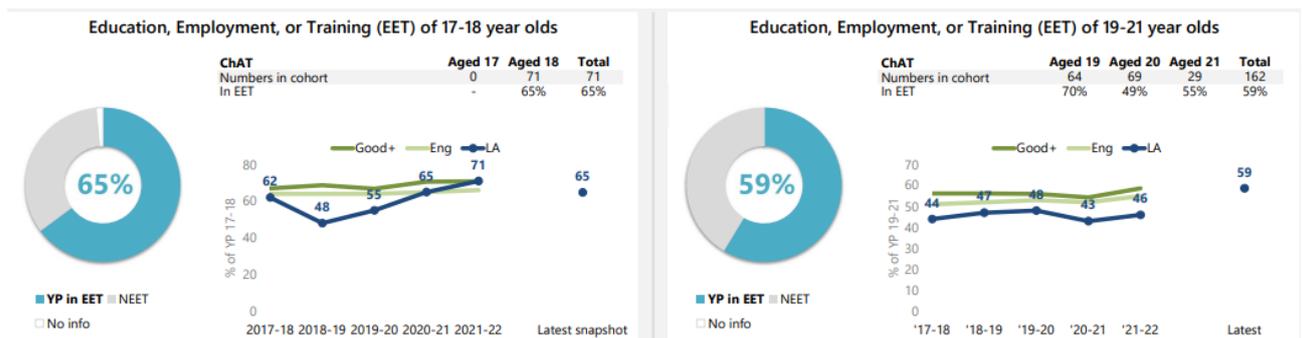


Fig. 3.22 Care Leavers EET

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

- 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.

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.

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 worked to reduce the number of care leavers in temporary accommodation, in December 2022 we had 21 young people in temporary accommodation. We are ensuring the revised practice standards are embedded in practice by regularly auditing with QARO's supporting this process.

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 of those young people living in temporary or unsuitable accommodation.

The Business Intelligence Dashboard is embedded into management practice including operational management meetings within the Care Leavers Service to review areas of practice including suitability of accommodation, education, employment and training and activity status, but also to support with caseload allocation and management, monitoring of timely/completed supervision rates and pathway plans. The Dashboard provides up to date information for reporting purposes to senior management, via exception reports for unsuitability of accommodation, monitoring of transitions from Children in Care to Leaving Care service.

The Leaving Care Service continues to work with the Youth Voice Services and has co-produced a guide for young people who enter emergency/temporary accommodation. We continue to develop positive relationships with Housing colleagues through the development of the Joint Housing Protocol, we have secured funding from the Department of Education for a Project Housing Officer, to continue to develop systems and processes between the Leaving Care Service and our Housing partners including registered social landlords and private landlords. We held a Care Leaver Landlord Event on 1st November 2022 to increase the housing offer to care leavers. We have also been successful in securing additional funding for Staying Close from the DfE.

We had high rates of participation in the most recent New Belongings survey with 60% return rate from Dorset care leavers (170 young people). We continue to work with young people on their identified top 10 key priorities which include the top 5:

- Being safe and settled in accommodation
- Having good health and well-being
- Relationships: having people for emotional support
- Making sure support works for all care leavers
- Entitlements: knowing your rights as a care leaver

The New Belongings project has successfully been implemented within Dorset, officially the national project has now ended, however senior Leaders from Dorset have committed to providing funding to facilitate two-yearly surveys with young people which will enable us to truly assess the impact of the interventions put into place.

3.14 Education and Inclusion

3.14a School Performance

In 2020, 75% of schools and academies were rated good or outstanding. 80% of Dorset schools and academies are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, 82% noting recent unpublished inspections which are due for publication in by the end of December 2022.

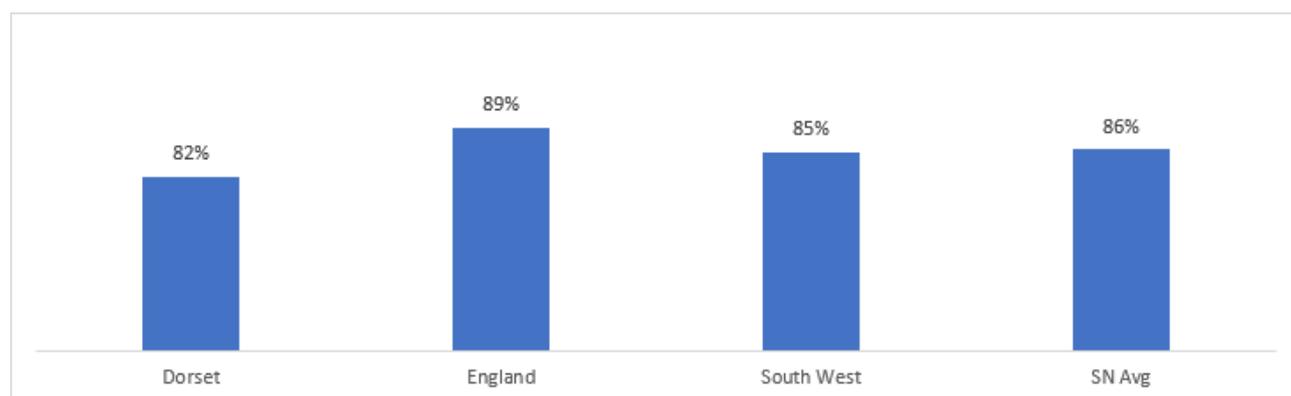


Fig. 3.23 Ofsted Grades in Dorset, with comparators (source: Ofsted, as at December 2022)

The Education Challenge Leads (school improvement partners) work 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.

Early Years Foundation Stage:

66% of Dorset children in reception year achieved a ‘good level of development’ (GLD), 1% above the national. Dorset had been below national since 2017. The impact of Covid can be seen locally and nationally with both being lower than pre-Covid levels in 2019.

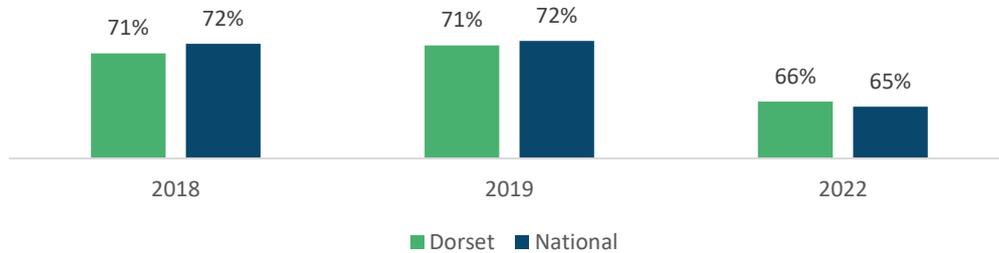


Fig. 3.24 EYFS Good Level of Development trend.

Strengths include outcome for children identified as SEN Support who achieved 31% GLD in Dorset compared to 23% nationally. FSM Eligible pupils achieve 7% below national

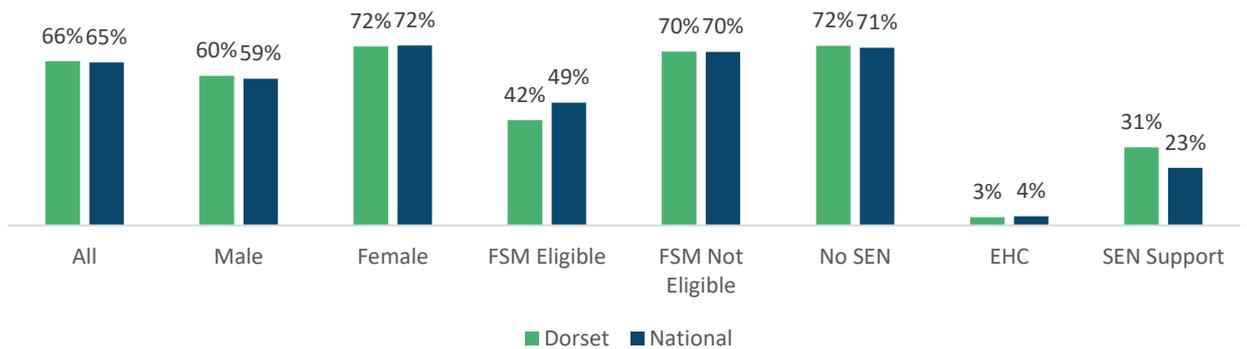


Fig. 3.25 Good Level of Development 2022

Phonics:

Dorset has improved from 1% below national (2021) to 3% above (2022). The impact of Covid can be seen locally and nationally with both being lower than pre-Covid levels in 2019.

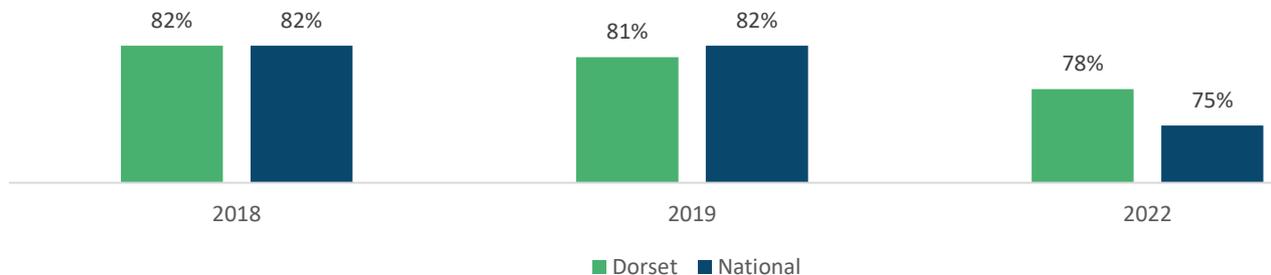


Fig. 3.26 Phonics

Key Stage 4: The percentage of pupils achieving Basics (GCSE English and Maths) at grade 4 or higher is in line, however those achieving grade 5 or higher is 5% below national and below other comparators. This is primarily a Maths issue. Progress 8 has dropped from .02 in 2019 to -0.09 in 2022. Progress figures in English and Maths have also dropped: from 2019 figures of -0.4 and +0.4 respectively.

2021/22	A8	Basics 5+	Basics 4+	P8	P8 - English	P8 - Maths	P8 - Ebacc	P8 - Open
England	48.8	49.8%	68.8%	-0.03	-0.04	-0.03	-0.04	-0.04
South-West	48.7	49.2%	69.1%	-0.06	-0.13	-0.07	-0.03	-0.08
SN Avg	47.8	47.3%	68.0%	-0.10	-0.16	-0.10	-0.06	-0.14
Dorset	47.8	45.0%	68.3%	-0.09	-0.13	-0.13	-0.02	-0.12

Fig. 3.27 KS4 percentage of pupils achieving Basics (GCSE English and Maths)

The gap between pupils identified as disadvantaged and other pupils is increasing. For Basics grade 4 or higher, the disadvantaged attainment gap is larger in Dorset than national averages: 45% of Dorset children achieved compared to 75% of those classified as not disadvantaged (48% and 76% nationally). Disadvantaged pupils in Dorset had a progress 8 score of -0.77, compared to -0.55 nationally and -0.67 in the South-West.

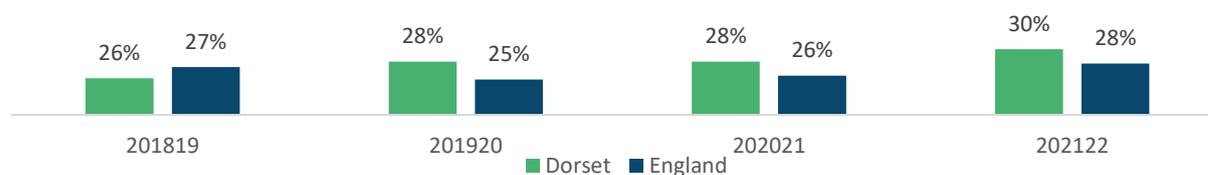


Fig. 3.28 Disadvantaged gap - Basics grade 4 or higher.

Our new Education Board for Dorset commenced in May 2022. The Board includes 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 focus. 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 were engaged in the work of the Board to ensure that the strategies were co-produced.

The Board focuses 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 creates 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 and that they have the right support at the right time enabling our children and young people 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 was followed up in our annual conferences in July 2022 with a focus on the importance of inclusive schools in the hearts of their communities; with keynote speakers including Stephen Twigg, the Chair of the Education Board. Young people co-produced and led workshops gathering ‘pledges’ from education leaders and partners across the system to improve children’s experiences in Dorset.

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 and to date 43% of all Dorset schools have engaged in this training with a plan for a further rollout to the remainder over the next two years.

Dorset has reduced its number of permanent exclusions, the rate of permanent exclusions in Dorset is declining from a high in 2018/19, to 31 in 2021/22 and zero permanent exclusions of primary age children. This is the lowest level of exclusions in Dorset since 2015/16.

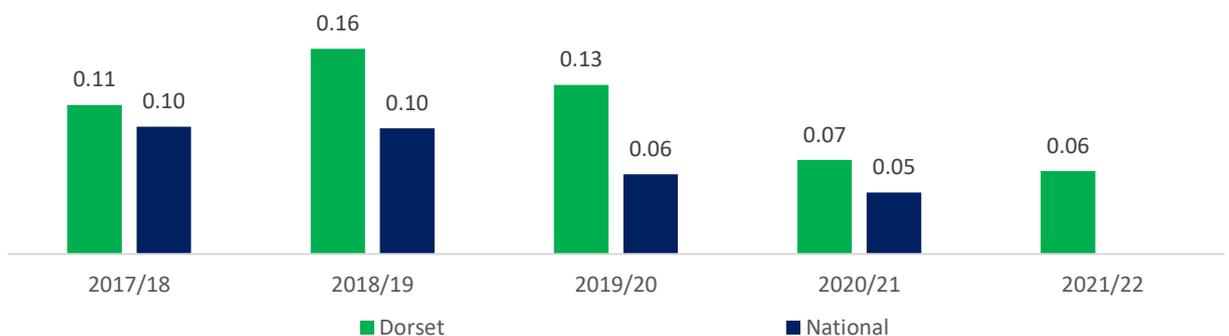


Fig. 3.29 Dorset permanent exclusions

From Sept 2021 – August 22 there were 663 cases of Children Missing Education (CME). Since September – October 2022 we have 134 CME with 60 active CME in October

Our aim is to close CME cases within half a term. In October 2022 we achieved this for 96% cases. 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 we maintain our foci on the whole child and family and what support is needed to help overcome underlying 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 identify attendance issues rapidly so we can deliver support by mobilising locality practitioners to work with schools and families at the point of low attendance, instead of the point of missing significant amounts of education.

In May 2022, the DfE published new guidance on school attendance, which applies from September 2022:

- Attendance cannot solely be the preserve of a single member of staff or organisation – improving attendance is everyone’s business
- Absence is often a symptom of wider issues a family is facing
- Work together to understand the barriers to attendance and provide support
- Legal interventions should be a last resort – schools, trusts and LAs are expected to work together to make use of the full range of legal interventions

The data on the following graphs identifies Dorset’s attendance trend and the identification of particular groups we need to work with, alongside schools, families and communities to improve attendance.

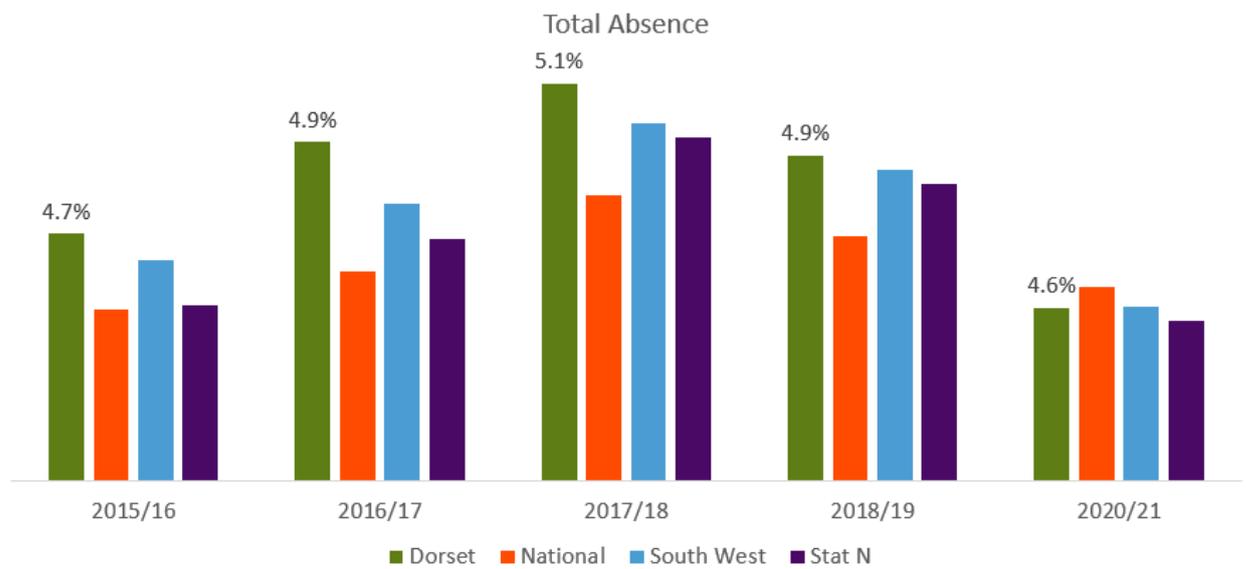


Fig. 3.30 Source: Dorset Children’s Services - Overall Absence – National annual trends

Further analysis of the data identifies absence by group (percentages impacted by low numbers although the importance of attendance remains paramount)

2020/21 Absence by Group

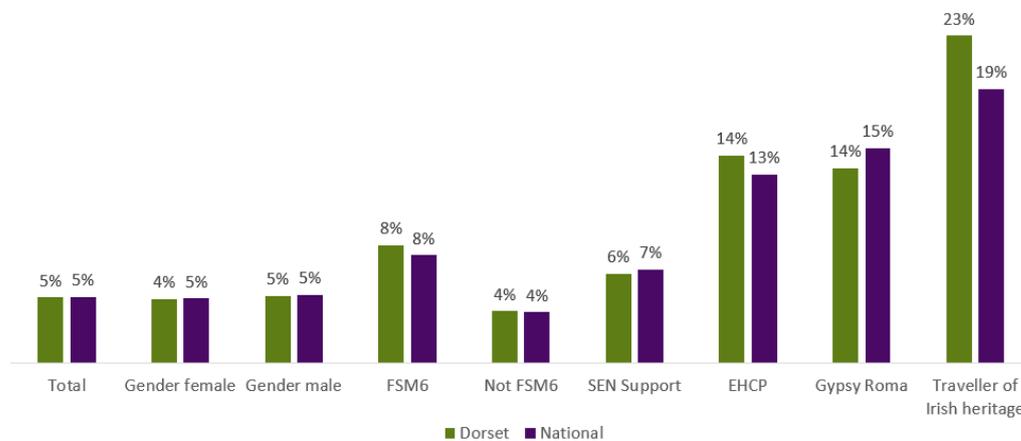


Fig. 3.31 Source: Dorset Children’s Services - Overall Absence

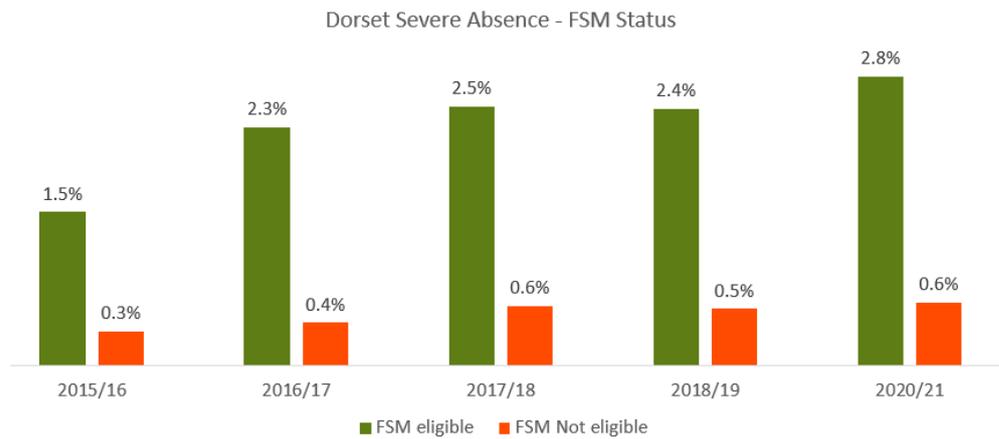


Fig. 3.32 Source: Dorset Children's Services - Severe Absence

We held a workshop with school leaders and partners including health and police in October 2022 to develop a delivery plan to address attendance issues. The Workshop identified the following Dorset wide priorities:

- Consistent Dorset wide policy and practice
- Knowledge sharing and communication
- Early identification of causes lead to development of targeted interventions
- SEMH/EBSA support packages
- Parent support packages from birth
- Consistent approach to transition
- Transport solutions

Progress against the plan will be reported into our Strengthening Services Board as well as our Education Board.



Spotlight on good practice – Dorchester Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Project

Through a partnership project between the local community and our inclusion leads we have been engaging with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller camp near Dorchester and as a result have seen:

- Attendance and engagement has improved for 7 children at Piddle Valley and Dorchester middle school from well below 50% last year to a high of 86% this year.
- Good progress being made in reading and maths
- Positive feedback shared in person to parents on site by Headteacher and teachers from Piddle Valley First School
- Engaging with homework and extra- curricular activities including football club
- Visit to cook at Wagamama's in Dorchester - Best bit "eating with chopsticks!"
- 3 young people attending DLC bike project completing AQA qualification in Motorbike maintenance and riding. Attendance 100% and positive feedback from teachers especially for the girls.
- 2 young people attending Weymouth College. One young person engaging really well with multi skills course.
- Feedback to younger sibling "You also learn maths and English on a Monday and its not too bad!"
- Great partnership work between DYCC, schools, college and locality team to build relationships.

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:

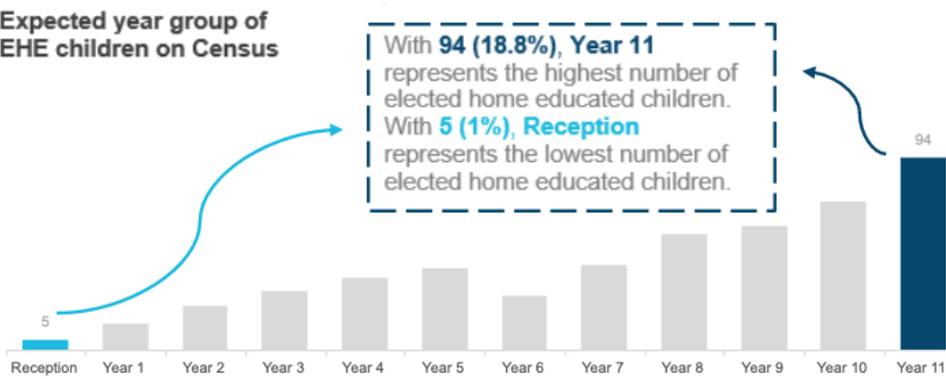
Following consultation with home educators in 2020 we put building warm, open relationships as a priority for the way the Inclusion Leads work. This led to the co-production of an EHE guide for parents, an EHE policy and the opportunity for our parents to contribute to the professional development for 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. We continue to consult with home educators to gain their feedback on the way that we work with them and to implement improvements where needed.

Although we saw numbers of EHE registrations rise during Covid to above 600, however this was not sustained, this has reduced to 509 children at October 2022. The Inclusion Team's work is key to ensuring that children are receiving a suitable education and families are supported when they choose home education. As a result of this work 73 children have returned to school education last academic year, and 45 children September to October 2022.

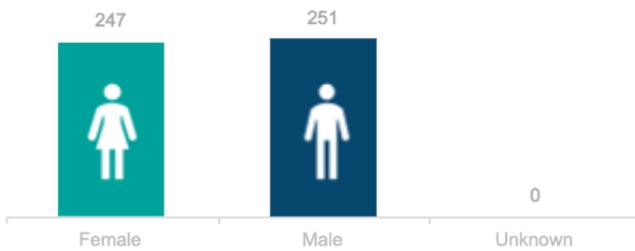
Our work with EHE families was recognised by Ofsted in November 2021: "Dorset saw an increase in children being electively home educated in the context of the pandemic. However, the numbers of children being electively home educated have now returned to pre-pandemic levels. A strong and joined-up approach between schools and children's social care in this instance keeps children safer."

The engagement work of our Inclusion Leads 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.

Expected year group of EHE children on Census



Sex of EHE children on census date



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. We do this by actively tracking our post 16 population, so we know which young people are NEET, and reduce our 'Unknown's. Those that are NEET are provided relationship-based support through an EET Advisor to support early when a young person does become NEET.

The EET Advisor will work with key professionals including partner organisations and providers to ensure young people 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.

Just over a year on, the integration of the EET Tracking and Re-engagement team is paying dividends, with EET Advisors forming strong relationships with key professionals such as SEN Leads, Family Workers, Social Workers, the Virtual School, and Care Leaver Personal Advisors. It has also improved our ability to track young people who are or might be NEET by providing access to the Mosaic and Synergy systems. As a result, we successfully contacted more young people in 2022 with only 1.4% (108 of 7453) recorded as no offer obtained due to 'unable to contact' compared to 4.7% in 2021.

Most importantly, despite a slight increase in February 2022 to 2.9%, our NEET cohort for academic age 16 and 17 young people saw a return to 2.7% in March where it remained until a further reduction to 2.6% at end of August 2022 (the last month relevant to this cohort). For September to August, we have consistently had lower NEETs in each month compared to the previous year 2020-2021. NEET % has also been lower each month than our statistical neighbour mean indicator.

Although our NEET figures have remained consistently at 2.7% since March, we have seen a churn within this population. Our EET Tracking and Re-engagement Team have supported more than 100 young people

to return to employment education and training in this period, but we have seen similar number of young people become NEET. This may reflect the current economic conditions with the availability of work proving tempting to a cohort of young people but we will be doing more work to understand and prevent this so we can try to reduce the number of young people who become NEET after they enter year 12 including an event for young people who are unlikely to take GCSEs.

September Offer

Y12 and 13 offers made went in at 94.6% an increase of 2.5% on last year and a marked improvement in our contact rates since last year, with a reduction in the numbers we were unable to contact from 4.6% last year to 1.4% this year.

Dorset Y12 & 13 NEET	2020-2021		2021-2022		Year on Year	Statistical neighbour avg 2021-2022
	No. of YP	NEET rate	No. of YP	NEET rate		
September	115	1.6%	84	1.1%	Improved	1.8%
October	176	2.4%	126	1.7%	Improved	2.1%
November	222	3.0%	166	2.3%	Improved	2.6%
December	228	3.1%	184	2.5%	Improved	2.8%
January	230	3.2%	204	2.8%	Improved	3.1%
February	254	3.5%	212	2.9%	Improved	3.2%
March	246	3.4%	202	2.7%	Improved	3.2%
April	249	3.4%	201	2.7%	Improved	3.2%
May	230	3.1%	199	2.7%	Improved	3.2%
June	228	3.1%	201	2.7%	Improved	3.2%
July	220	3.0%	195	2.7%	Improved	3.2%
August	212	2.9%	194	2.6%	Improved	3.3%

Total Offers Made	Offer not appropriate at this time			No Offer Made			No contact			cohort
	Going into employment without training	Personal circumstances prevent learning	Other Reason	No appropriate provision	Considering options/ not yet applied for training	Application made awaiting outcome	Unable to Contact - current address not known	Unable to Contact - other reason	Guarantee status not yet recorded	
7053	167	44	14	9	48	10	7	101	0	7453
94.6%	2.2%	0.6%	0.2%	0.1%	0.6%	0.1%	0.1%	1.4%	0.0%	

Fig. 3.35 Dorset NEET

Annual Destinations Survey

Annual activity survey (AAS) for the destinations of Year 11 leavers (2022), the purpose of the Annual Activity Survey is to establish young people's destinations, on 1 November, in the year they completed compulsory education. The survey should not be confused with the Key Stage 4 Destination Measure; whilst it focusses on the same cohort, the destination measure shows sustained destinations over a period of time. The table below shows the outturn as of 24/01/2023, which indicates that most of our Year 11 pupils went on to participate in Full-time education (90.06%), with the majority of these attending a school 6th form college or a further education college.

Current year 12 & 13 (academic age 16 & 17) in apprenticeships is higher in Dorset than national figures (5.0% in Dorset, 3.7% England). The employment figure for this cohort is also higher (3.7% Dorset against 2.0% England) – NCCIS LA Performances tables November 2022 (latest national data available).

Of the 21 with no current activity established, 7 are confirmed to have moved abroad, 9 we are still attempting to contact and 4 are out of county residents awaiting any known tracking information from their resident LAs. – AAS submission due 31st January 2023

Annual activity survey (AAS) destinations as at 1 November of Year 11 leavers 2022 (provisional until submission on 31st January 2023)

Full time education	3416	90.06%
Full time training	28	0.74%
Apprenticeship	170	4.48%
Employment with study	8	0.21%
Working towards participation	3	0.08%
Temporary break from learning	15	0.40%
Employment without training	60	1.58%
Not settled (active in the labour market)	70	1.85%
Not Settled (not active in the labour market)	2	0.05%
Current activity not established	21	0.55%
No destination	0	0.00%
Total	3793	

3.36 EET Destination data

3.14f 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."

Dorset SEND Strategy: [send-strategy-2021-to-2024](#)

We presently support approximately 3,497 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. The primary need in Dorset of Autistic Spectrum condition (994), followed by social, emotional and mental health needs (824)



Fig. 3.37 The table below shows our SEND children and young people by school year:

In May 2022, Ofsted visited Dorset as part of the development of the new Local Area SEND Inspection process. Ofsted reviewed Dorset's SEND Strategy, processes and casework across our partnerships over a two-week onsite inspection under live conditions.

Performance information

- Timeliness of EHCPs being completed within 20 weeks in 2022 has been below our target of 80% with a monthly average of around 65%.
- 64% of children with EHCP are education at mainstream provision and 26% are educated in maintained specialist provision and 10% in independent specialist provision
- There has been around 80-85 children with an EHCP out of education each month since September 2022. Services work with families to ensure access to appropriate education is available.

3.14g SEND Strategy

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.

3.14h Data and Business Intelligence Insights

Working with our Business Intelligence team, a project has been ongoing throughout 2022 to further 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. This has supported early identification of performance challenges to support the service in ensuring they can deliver sustainable and measured performance outcomes.

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.

In February 2022 we completed 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.

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 and A events in collaboration with Dorset Parent Carer 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.

Our High Needs Block remains under pressure and we have an agreed plan for reduction of spend and an agreement through the DfE Safety Plan. The majority of our requirements under Safety Valve Agreement remain on track. The number of new EHCPs continues to grow but the Council remains on track with the stabilisation of EHCPs and ahead of its forecast. There have been some delays in increasing the number of special school places in line with the Council's £40m investment in specialist provision; these delays are owing to external pressures in the construction market. This includes a new DfE led SEND free school which was delayed in opening, and another that has not yet started the implementation phase. This remains one of the highest priorities for the whole Council.

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 to create up to 280 special places for children and young people, which opened in April 2022.
- Are in the process of converting a recently closed primary school into a specialist college for post 16 education attached to a maintained special school to create 75 more places
- Supported the opening of a new free special school built on the site of a closed mainstream middle school which opened in the summer of 2022 for 160 young people with communication needs and separately social emotional and mental health needs.
- Worked to create additional specialist communication inclusion hubs in mainstream schools across the county to create approximately 100 more places.
- Expanding more of our good and outstanding special schools to create more capacity in our existing settings

3.14m School age children and young people – SEND Profile statistics

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

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 locality experts. Since January 2022, 274 children are being supported to access early education and childcare through their early years setting applying for Early SEND Support funding. 68% are boys and 32% are girls. 76% are reported as having speech language and communication needs.

From the SEND dashboard, the most common primary need for children under 5 is speech, language and communication difficulties (49) followed by Autistic Spectrum Disorder (20). There are 95 children under 5 years with an EHCP; 65% are boys and 35% of girls. Most of these children are in Chesil (26) with the least number in West Dorset (6)..

In January 2023, 133 children under 5 were eligible for further support through Disability Access Funding in their local setting. A total of 4,888 children are accessing 2,3- and 4-year-old early education funding (January 2023). Of these children 427 are eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium.

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 Dorset Education Advice Line launched in Oct 2021. To date, we've received 219 contacts. 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.

We built 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 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 appointed a SEND Quality Assurance Manager who started on 1st March 2022 as part of our commitment to ongoing quality reviews of our SEND work and practice development. The SEND Quality Assurance Manager undertakes a range of deep dive audits and thematic audits to strengthen the quality of practice and provide assurance that our SEND service is delivery good quality and ambitious practice for our children and young people.

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 implementing 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.

We launched our SEND Customer Charter working in partnership with our Parent Carer Forum in May 2022. This charter sets out how front-line staff will communicate with families and our commitment to working with our children, young people, and their families. We promoted this through the SEND e-newsletter, at head teacher briefings and through the Education Bulletin. The Charter sets out our commitment to CYP and families to being responsive and sets out our expectations for families.

3.14r Educational Psychology

Educational Psychologists are embedded within each locality and work 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.

3.14s Outreach Support Offer

Outreach has provided support to 88 young people across 89 settings. Of the 88 young people where outreach has provided support the most frequently occurring special educational need falls

within the category communication and interaction. There has been an increase in requests to provide support for CYP with additional sensory needs. The number of children with an EHCP vs SEN support is almost equal which is an increase in the numbers of children with an EHCP. Evaluations from the settings rate the service highly. The impact on the child being able to spend more time in class and on their achievement was rated as significant in 26% and quite a lot for 19% of the cases at closure.

Therapeutic Thinking 54% (73) of Dorset schools have now attended the 3-day tutor training. The locality with the highest number of schools trained is Dorchester followed by Chesil. The area with the lowest percentage remains to be Purbeck locality. We are doing some targeted work with this locality and offering training in a location within the Purbeck area. This year we have seen a reduction in schools attending the training. At least 42 settings have started to roll out the training to the wider staff team and are looking at policy change and implementation practice. We are working with the schools to gather impact information and data. We are yet to see any real impact on attendance, suspensions and exclusions due to the slow pace of system change within schools.

3.14t The Virtual School

The Virtual School is the key educational advocacy service of Dorset's Education Service within the Children's Services Directorate for Dorset's Children in Care and Care leavers regardless of where they are placed.

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

Some of the key strengths this year have been:

- A reduction in the number of children on reduced timetables
- A reduction of the number of children missing education
- An effective quality assurance system for Personal Education Plans (PEPs) that has led to 93% of PEPs being good or better.
- 76% of Post-16 young people in Education, Employment or Training
- 100% of our Year 13 young people who applied for university have been offered places
- 100 children celebrated at the Dorset Virtual School Exceptional People in Care (EPIC) Awards, and weekly celebrations of over 100 children and young people who have excelled in education or overcome significant barriers.
- Raising the profile of the role of the Virtual School for children previously looked after, working closely with Aspire Adoption Agency
- Introduction of Designated Teacher of the month award to share best practice within schools
- Implementation of Action Research Projects in schools with University College London to develop practice
- Delivery of the first Dorset Young Person Conference to raise ambition and aspiration
- Production of the Handbook for Unaccompanied Young People in multiple languages
- The Virtual School is highly ambitious for children in care, wherever they live; A particular strength is the impact of more aligned working in the six localities to secure creative and beneficial outcomes for children (Ofsted (ILACS) Inspection Report November 2021

We need to continue to focus on:

- Child and young person voice, through the Virtual School Council and Virtual School Newsletter to ensure that the child voice is clearly heard throughout our work
- Improving Social Worker and Personal Advisor attendance to PEPs
- Developing child-led PEPs to enhance the child's voice
- Greater representation of the cultural identity of our young people
- Developing a mentoring system to support aspiration and ambition
- Developing wider learning opportunities and positive experiences for our children
- Improving school transitions, particularly for those children with SEND
- Eradicating the use of suspensions, reduced timetables and the number of children missing education

The Virtual School team delivers their work within the Dorset Council locality structure, enabling best practice to be disseminated within the wider Children's Services structure. This enables the best possible support and guidance to be available for our schools and children and young people.

Each member of the team holds a whole school responsibility to support the priorities of the Virtual School. This enables the team to develop leadership skills and have a sense of autonomy over the priorities within the school. During 2021/22, these whole school responsibilities led to the development of a PLAC handbook aimed at supporting schools and parents of children who were previously in care and an Education Plan designed to support schools with children previously looked after, a handbook and welcome pack for our unaccompanied young people, the creation of a Virtual School Council and development of an Early Years training package to support an online PEP system.

The School Development Plan 2022/23 has set three strategic priorities:

- Achieving educational stability: To provide children and schools the right support to enable full time stable education age 2 – 18
- Improving how children are represented in our work: To provide children with the best support led by them
- Developing opportunities for children to achieve their ambitions: To provide high quality opportunities that lead to educational and employment success

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 Virtual School set an ambitious target of 95% attendance for our statutory school age children. Dorset Virtual School did not meet this target, but attendance was in line with the national average (88.57% compared to the national average of 88.7%) and above 2020/21 (85.5%). The attendance of our children was also in line with the Welfare Call average of 88.4% across 201 local authorities' Virtual Schools.

There has been a slight increase in the number of children achieving 95%+ attendance for the year at 47.15% compared to 44% in 2020/21 with 53.50% achieving 95%+ attendance during the

summer term. Positive reinforcement of this attendance of 95%+ is undertaken through the termly celebration system for attendance.

Monitoring identified two challenges with attendance: unauthorised absence and persistent absence in specific year groups.

Unauthorised absence was a concern at 2.91% compared to 2.33% in 2020/21. However, Dorset was significantly better than the Welfare Call average of 3.22% across 201 local authorities' Virtual Schools. A piece of work to analyse a small cohort of young people with unauthorised absence undertaken in the Spring Term ensured that Virtual School Leads met with the team and families of the identified young people to determine the causes and potential barriers to education. This intervention saw some reduction in the number of unauthorised attendance marks, but high unauthorised figures continued in year 10 and 11. Further work in September 2022 will focus on this cohort of young people and interventions to reduce the absence.

Persistent absence figures are improving. 27.05% of our children have had persistent absence compared to 44.6% 2020/21 and is lower than the national average of 30.4% in 2020/21. However, year 10 and 11 both had higher persistent absence figures. Analysis and monitoring of a group of year 10 students with persistent absence has seen some success with 50% of the group improving their attendance over the final summer term with a regards system in place for this. Further work will be undertaken to improve overall school attendance working with the inclusion team

Our ambition is for effective inclusive practice in our schools which leads to zero suspensions and permanent exclusions of children in care. This was an area for improvement during 2021/22. There were 0 permanent exclusions during 2021/22. This was due to collaborative working between schools and VSLs to reduce the risk of permanent exclusions.

Despite a focus on reducing suspensions, 14.61% of children had at least one suspension during the academic year compared to the 11.67% national benchmark. This amounted to 51 children being suspended during the year with 86% from secondary school age (75% of these were Key Stage 4). 61% of these children had repeat suspensions during the year. During the academic year, several steps have been taken to reduce suspensions and permanent exclusions of our children. These have included: a focus on any children who have had suspensions in Virtual School monthly pupil progress meetings, detailed monitoring of suspensions and the schools that suspend to highlight trends and patterns; training for Virtual School Leads and Designated Teachers in relation to reintegration post suspensions that put the emphasis on what schools can do differently rather than on the child as the 'problem'; and further amendment to our reintegration paperwork ensured that the child voice was at the centre of the work.

Through monitoring, we have identified schools that repeatedly used suspensions for Children in Care and a priority for 2022/23 is to ensure that the Virtual School is putting in place support that focuses on helping the school to better understand the whole child and look at strategies that may be more effective than suspensions.

Despite the steps taken during 2021/22 to reduce suspensions, there is an inconsistency in approach to high support/ high challenge of our schools that regularly suspend. Reducing suspensions is a priority for 2022/23 through several interventions:

- Further analysis of Pupil Premium + spending linked to children with suspensions is being monitored for 2022/23 to ensure that rapid support is put in place.

- Further work needs to be undertaken to respond more quickly to schools who are high suspenders from both our Virtual School Leads and leadership, using the locality leadership to respond more effectively to schools.
- Further work to share the good practice in settings where suspensions are low with other schools

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 introduced a system where we are notified of those children, young people and their families who are in unsettled accommodation, such as bed and 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 and 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 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.

The numbers of children assessed and supported in private fostering placements in Dorset continues to be low.

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.

We have not seen any unaccompanied young people travelling from Ukraine through the Homes for Ukraine scheme; however, we have identified a small number of children who travelled with family members and are being supported through private fostering arrangements. We continue to track this closely and undertake welfare visits to all Ukrainian hosts and guests to ensure we are identifying any children who may need private fostering assessment and support.

3.17 Designated Officer

The Designated Officer (DO) role sits within our Quality Assurance and Partnerships Service. We have continued to undertake improvement activity as part of our Strengthening Services Plan. Practice Standards are embedded. A data dashboard has now been developed to support management oversight, tracking and monitoring. The Mosaic workflow has been reviewed and refreshed to support improved data recording and reporting. The first stage of moving historical records from an old system has been completed with further work planned to ensure that all records are in one place (MOSAIC). The DO is reviewing their communication with those involved/subject to the management of allegations process and has developed some draft letters to children and the subject to strengthen this area. This forms part of a broader plan to develop the LADO service.

Work continues to strengthen our communication with partners to raise the profile of the DO in Dorset. The DO now meets regularly with the police to support consultation taking place with the DO about management of allegations involving police staff, and there is a plan for training to be rolled out to police staff regarding the management of allegations process. The DO has delivered training to a range of local provisions/services including adult safeguarding to support a more joined up approach and will be delivering training to a local children's activity provider and to early years providers in March. The DO has also developed more effective links with the armed Forces cadets and is in the process of developing better links with the armed forces locally.

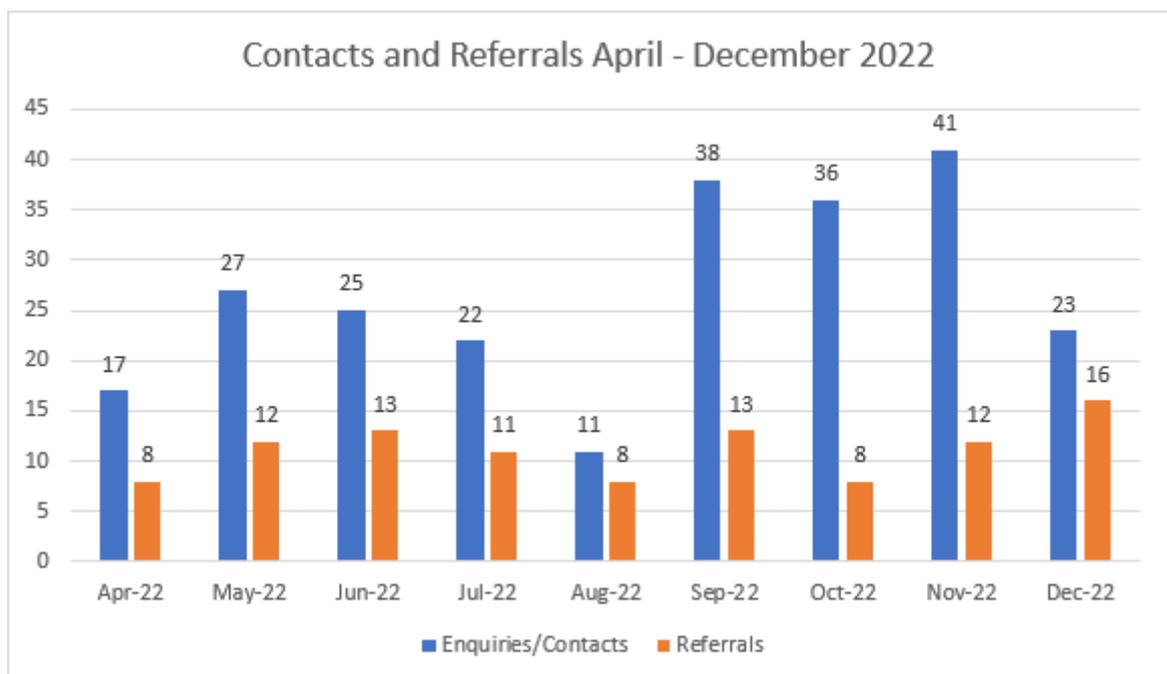


Fig. 3.38 DO contacts and referrals, 2022



There were a total of 259 inquiries to the DO service during 2021/22 of which 86 progressed to a referral. From 1 April 2022 to 31 December 2022, there have been a total of 341 inquiries into the DO service, of which 101 have progressed to a referral, leading to an Initial Evaluation Meeting and further work. This is significant increase in contact with the LADO service. This is likely due to the increase in networking that the DO has been undertaking this year, improved recording implemented to ensure all enquiries are captured in mosaic and a trend nationally of increasing referrals to Local Authority DO's.

We continue to provide a quarterly DO Highlight Report setting out activity and learning which feeds into our Quality of Practice and Action Group. This identifies key themes and enables us to provide any targeted support to specific agencies when required.

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. Our Children's Services Monthly Performance Report is published and shared with all managers to inform performance conversations and pulls together a large number of performance indicators across a wide range of services, including Early Help, Social Care, Education and Inclusions. This report is interactive and available to all staff and provides one version of the truth. This report is used extensively to review performance on a monthly basis and support our Performance Management Framework, providing good visibility of performance across the service.

We have several 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. Dashboard development continues but further reports are now available, including Early Help, Harbour, Inclusions and Transitions.

We also publish a Corporate Parenting Dataset and use a Performance and Impact Report to enable our Strengthening Services Board to monitor progress of our Strengthening Services Plan.

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.

Our Performance Board is restorative in its approach, offering 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.

There is strong corporate line of sight, with key messages from the 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.

We have implemented a quarterly whole service Quality Assurance and Performance Management Conference (known as the Good and Better Board) 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.

Continuous Improvement in Practice



Fig 4.1. Extended Leadership – Monthly Performance Board reviews exception-based updates from across services.



Fig 4.2. Example of operation dashboard.

4.2 Quality Assurance Framework

Our Quality Assurance Framework is fully embedded and has received positive external validation through a peer reviews, ILACS and SEND Pilot inspections. The collaborative audit approach undertaken by the operational managers within the service alongside practitioners facilitates improvements in the quality of practice. This is further strengthened by a moderation system that reviews the audits with the moderator 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 continue to work to increase the take up both within audit and as a wider service. We have developed a separate quarterly feedback report that enables 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 monthly and shared at a Quality of Practice and Action Group (QPAG) 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. A QA newsletter is in development which contains learning and findings from both audit and family feedback to be shared with wider workforce on a monthly basis.

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 all 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 APs to work alongside staff to deliver focused improvements from QA activity such as new practice or procedure changes. The thematic auditing is vital in gaining assurance that learning is embedded and to better understand practice challenges when these are identified to facilitate consistent quality of practice across the service. This is supplemented with scheduled dip sampling aligned to our strengthening services plan.

Our Principal Social Worker is driving quality of practice and keeping front line practice at the forefront of strategic improvements. She continues to report the key performance indicators linked to our strength-based restorative Dorset Children Thrive Practice Framework. The impact of our framework is monitored at QPAG through our dedicated performance indicators aligned to set outcomes for children. Over this last year the principal social worker has focussed on strengthening supervision which includes the development of practice standards, policies and procedures.

4.3 Audit Outcomes

The chart below shows a steady number of Good or Outstanding audits during 2022.

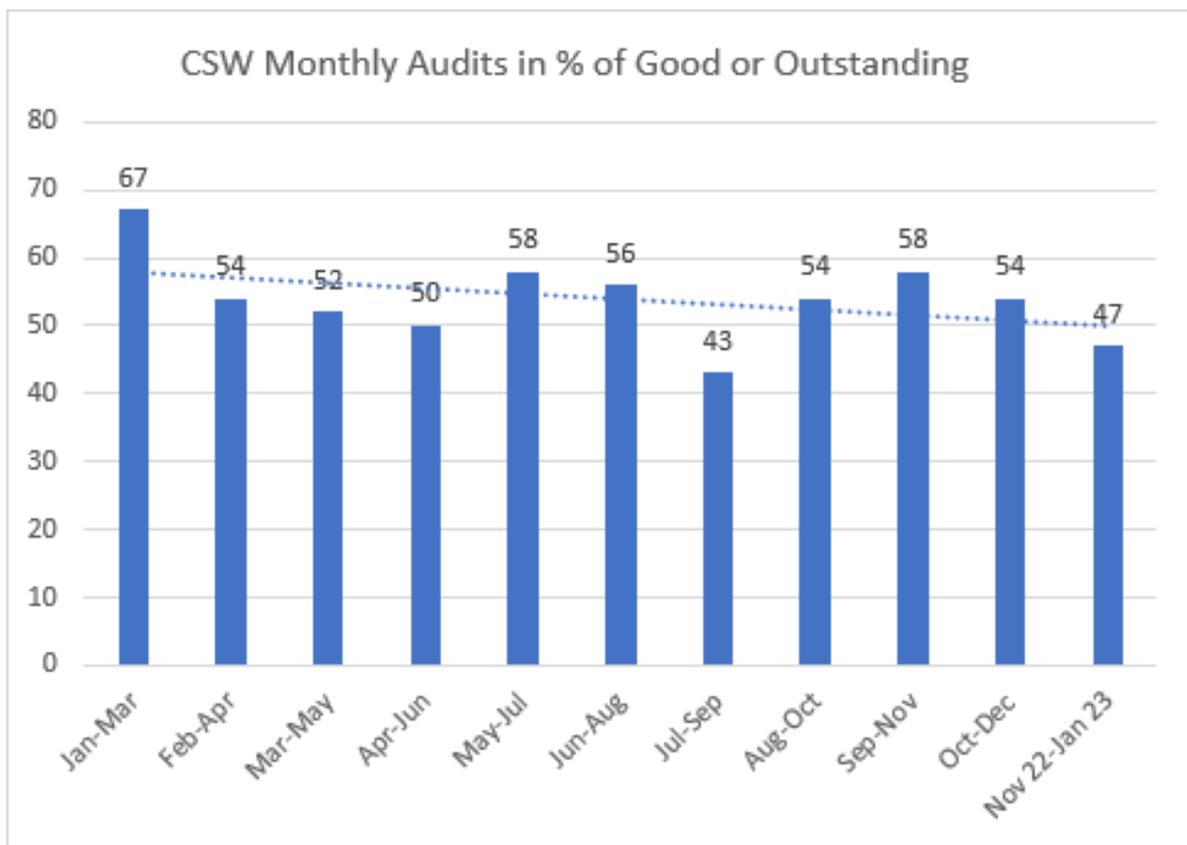


Fig. 4.3 Percentage of Good or Outstanding Audits 2022 (2023 audits are Jan 2023)

While audit findings are averaging around 50% good, this is due to an increased focus in areas where we know we have more to do to strengthen our practice in line with our improvement work. None of those requiring improvement were immediate safeguarding and despite this we have some consistent good practice identified in most of our audits:

- 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 in a planned way

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, summaries and genograms
- Ensuring that the child's voice is always reflected in our recording and informing our planning.
- Consideration of family group conferences

4.4 Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs)

We continue to learn from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, with recommendations from the CSPRs being monitored and tracked through the Multi-Agency CSPR Sub-Group (Sub-Group of the Multi-Agency Quality Assurance and Practice Action Group (MAQPAG)). MAQPAG reports progress against the recommendations into the Partnership Strengthening Services Board.

In 2022 Dorset published 2 reports on the [Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) site:

- [Thematic summary intra-familial sexual abuse](#)
 - [7-Minute briefing - Thematic Summary IFCSA](#)
- [The Siblings](#)

In addition to the CSPRs a Learning Review (Ashley) has been published

- [Final Report Ashley Learning Review](#)
 - [7-Minute briefing Ashley learning review](#)

Key learning events are then implemented through partnership conferences as well as internal reflection sessions. This year's annual safeguarding conference was to incorporate the learning from the Siblings review to support the partnership work around child sexual abuse. Specialist guest speakers facilitated this. Furthermore, we are sighted on the National Review by Annie Hudson in relation to how and why serious abuse occurred for children with complex disabilities in care and are undertaking a local review. The Review into children's social care has also been something we have already started to consider as our existing transformation work aligns with several the recommendations. To highlight this, we worked with the regional group to capture our thoughts and progress against all the recommendations so we could start to be prepared for the forthcoming changes.

4.5 Compliments and complaints

Our Compliments and Complaints team continues to 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 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 LGSCO have not approached us in 2022.

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, information on volume and learning from complaints and compliments are shared each quarter at our Performance and Good and Better Boards.

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.

Our care experienced young people have taken part in the 'Your Life Beyond Care' Coram Voice survey and this year we will continue this work with Coram, for our younger children in care.

These comprehensive surveys give us insights across several areas including:

- Use of evidenced based 'Bright Spots' - Partnership between Coram Voice & the University of Oxford supported by the Hadley Trust.
- 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 reports are considered by CSLT, Corporate Parenting Board, other relevant service areas and explored deeper in workshops across the workforce. Care leavers have prioritised some areas of work to be focussed on and shaped the Care Leaver Delivery Group action plan.

Dorset Youth's VoiceX works in partnership with our voluntary sector forum (a network of voluntary and community sector organisations who support children, young people and their families aged between 0 to 25 years) and has completed a survey which will be taken forward through our Children, Young People and families' Plan.



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

In 2023/24 we continue to grow 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 drive long term impact, and report this into the Corporate Parenting Board.
- We will increase the number of children and young people that benefit from Good or Outstanding provision through our SEND Capital strategy.
- We will continue to improve our care sufficiency through the further opening of internal residential provision, a greater level of foster carer recruitment and retention and the opening of our homes for Care Leavers.
- 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 will further develop our plans for Integrated commissioning working with the new Integrated Care Board to improve outcomes for all children in Dorset including those with complex needs.
- We will deliver a different approach to supporting children and young people with Special Educational Needs and or Disabilities into adulthood through our Birth to Settled Adulthood Programme.

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 Southwest ADCS programme of work on Leadership Development and are working to support several other Local Authorities.

Our extended leadership team continue their commitment and dedication to each other, and 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 2023/24 to deliver the Outstanding service we aspire to. Our Front-line staff have been extraordinary throughout the pandemic and in the pandemic recovery period and their commitment alongside a truly integrated strengths-based approach to working with families is showing strong evidence of making a positive impact on family's 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.