



Dorset  
Council



## Dorset Children's Services Self-Evaluation May 2024

This is a live document, a version of which was provided to Ofsted to inform the Annual Engagement Meeting 2024. Confidential case studies have been removed from this public version to comply with data protection requirements.



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# Dorset Children's Services Self-Evaluation

## Section One: Introduction and Context



# Introduction

Welcome to the 2023/24 Dorset Children's Services Self Evaluation of Practice. This document sets out our self-evaluation against the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Framework and articulates:

- What we know about the quality and impact of practice in Dorset
- How we know this
- Our plans for the next 12 months to maintain and improve practice

The document also provides our self-evaluation of education outcomes.

Our self-evaluation focuses on our performance for 2023/24, with the majority of the data and evidence provided relating to activity during 2023/24 and to a reporting period of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

This document should be read alongside our recent self-evaluation of SEND practice (February 2024) to provide a full view of Dorset Children's Services.

# Dorset a great place to live, work and visit

The beautiful landscapes, towns and villages of Dorset can conceal hidden challenges



Population: **383,274**

- 30% aged 65 and older (compared to 19% nationally)
- 6.1% population from black and ethnic minority groups

Population (0-25): **91,341**

- 24% of the total population
- Low birth rates
- Historically working age young people leave the area



**47,012** children from reception to Y14

- 12% of school-age children from BME groups

**158** schools

- Blend of academies, maintained and free schools
- 84% are rated good or outstanding
- 83% of academies are rated good or outstanding
- 86% of maintained schools are good or outstanding

**Disadvantage gap**

- Outcomes at Key stage 2
- Outcomes at Key stage 4
- Gap between disadvantaged young people and their peers is still not where we need it to be



**11** areas within **top 20%** of deprivation

- Ten of these are within Weymouth and Portland

**25%** of children living in poverty

- Rural isolation leads to difficulty accessing housing, transport and essential services



**Crime is low** in Dorset

- First time entrants of young people are also low
- 91 Serious sexual assaults investigated, 75% of occurrences were on a female aged 13 and over
- 20% of Occurrences were sexual assault on a child under 13 and rape of a child under 16, and sexual activity involving a child under 13

**Employment is high**

- Earnings are below average

**House prices are high**

- Affordability issues for many young people and key workers



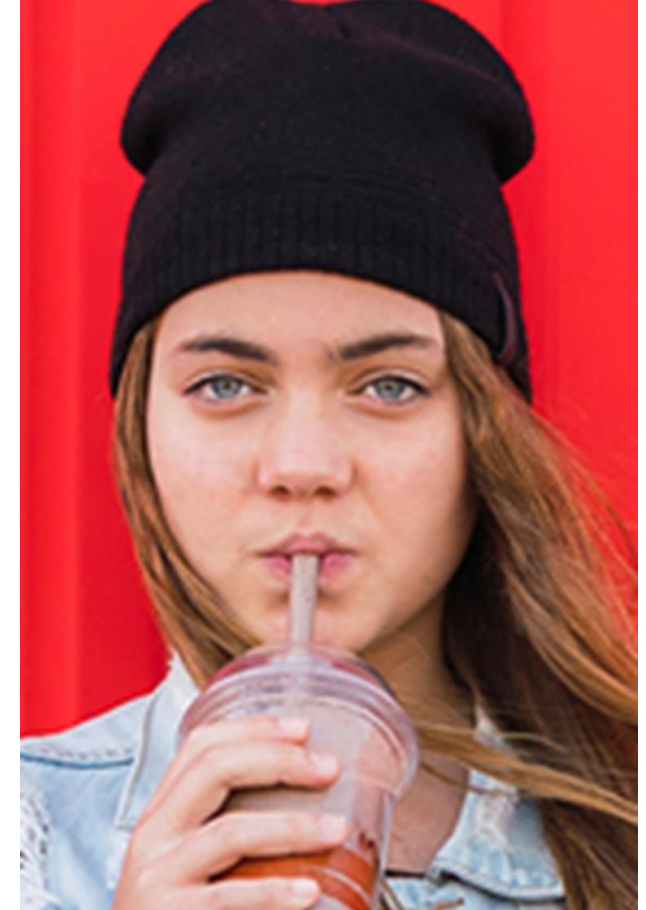
# Children in Dorset

Of the 383,274 Dorset residents, 73,013 are children and young people aged 0-19 representing around 19% of the total population (87,883 aged 0-24 years) (mid-2022 population estimates).

We have 158 schools in Dorset, 1 All through School, 36 First Schools, 2 Infant Schools, 2 Junior Schools, 79 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 94 different languages spoken in Dorset schools (Jan 2024 School Census). 10% (Jan 2023 school census) of school age children are from black and minority ethnic communities compared to 35.1% nationally (Jan 2023 school census). Children who are 'different' here tell us they can feel less included in their schools and in their communities.

Our services are primarily delivered through multi-disciplinary locality-based teams. They are resourced based on needs of communities and overseen by matrix management arrangements. We have some centrally based functions such as fostering and residential services; quality assurance, including workforce development and management of Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership; and commissioning. The Youth Justice Service and Adoption Service are shared with BCP council with local line of sight arrangements in place.

For more information on our local context: [Understanding Dorset - Dorset Council](#)



# Children in Dorset

**At the end of March 2024 (March 2023 included for reference), we supported:**

**1,551** (1387) children and young people being supported through early help

**1056** (1306) Children in Need

**296** (305) Children with a Child Protection Plan

**395** (401) Children in Care excluding UASC

**449** (435) Children in Care including UASC

**592** (516) Care Leavers

**3975** (3672) Children with an EHCP



# Strong Leadership and Strategic Partnerships

We have solid foundations in place recognised in our ILACS inspection and recent Local Area SEND Inspection

**Committed** Political and Corporate Leadership. Recent change in administration from Conservative to Lib Dem but cross party support

Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Arrangements with place-based arrangements  
**Strengthening Services Plan:** to strengthen services for vulnerable children

**Children, Young People and Families Plan 2023-33:** partnership plan to improve longer term outcomes – shaped by our children and young people

**Local Authority** chosen to be a Pathfinder for Families First for Children leading to Partnership Transformation Programme

**Experienced Children's Services Leadership Team and 'One Team' Council and Partnership approach:** shared values and principles

**Dorset Children Thrive:** our locality structure is making a difference to children, families and our teams

**A single ICB** progressing on a Dorset Council Place Based approach

**Robust Governance, Management Oversight and Performance and Quality Assurance:** frameworks embedded

**Fabulous Staff**  
Committed and largely permanent workforce with managed caseloads



# Headline achievements - 2023/24 has been another significant and successful year for Dorset

Building on our existing plan, we launched our ten-year Children, Young People and Families Plan

Launched our co-produced Belonging Strategy

Selected as one of only three local authority areas to participate in Wave One of the Families First for Children Pathfinder and successful partnership and stakeholder co-design work completed

Made good progress on developing our network of Family Hubs

Launched our 0 to 25 Birth to Settled Adulthood Service for children and young people with a disability/complex needs

Participating in the 'Re-imagining Pre-proceedings' pilot with The Family Rights Group and the local judiciary

Developing a refreshed Sufficiency Strategy, and further developing our in-house residential and outreach provision,

Establishing our 3rd, 4th and 5th Mockingbird Fostering constellations and being invited by the Mockingbird Society in Seattle to visit them in Seattle to share our implementation journey, our achievements and our learning

Secured positive outcomes at inspection:

- Ofsted Focussed Visit on our Care Leavers Service (May 23)
- 'Good' grading's in all children's homes inspections in year
- 'Grade 1' outcome in our very recent SEND inspection (May 24)

# Headline achievements continued

Implemented our Attendance campaign, alongside our Belonging Strategy receiving DfE and National media interest

Continuing our relentless focus on the quality of education and narrowing the gap - The Dorset Education Board has co-produced an Education Strategy for the next 3 years setting out priorities to ensure the Best Education for All.

We have implemented an additional education leadership group which includes DfE Regional Office, Diocese and CEOs of all Academy Trusts to take a strategic view of our educational estate, improve inclusion, and ensure comprehensive leadership and reach of our DEB projects.

On 31 January 2024 awarded Earned Autonomy status for the Supporting Families programme for 2024-25. We evidenced during assessment the required standard of maturity in the development of our Early Help System.

DCS continues to be a DfE Adviser and the team undertake Sector Led Improvement Work with fellow local authorities

DCs awarded MJ Corporate Director of the Year June 2023

Dorset Council shortlisted as LGC Council of the Year. Result due June 2024

Further progressed our work regarding Extra-familial Harm: Launch of new Assessment, Panel and Extra-familial Harm Strategy based on the 'Joining the dots' framework, adopting the 8 practice principles (Tackling Child Exploitation – Research in Practice)

We were delighted to receive a high response rate from our young people through the Bright Spots Survey providing us with a rich body of information to further shape our services

Delivered 21 independent living options for Care Leavers with a further 20 being progressed

# Headline achievements continued

## Successfully Secured Funding:

- £1m for Capital Assets works for Kinship and Foster Carers
- £324,000 for Care Leavers befriending and mentoring scheme
- £10.6m Safety Valve capital funding
- £2m from Council Reserves in 2023 to support residents with the impact of the cost of living. Funding has contributed to free school meal vouchers in school holiday; additional boost early education hours for children at risk of not being ready for their transition to school. Some parents have been able to access additional paid work because of this additional funding. We provided support to children starting school in September through Home Start, help with school uniform and additional learning support. Further funding has been allocated this financial year.

Our work on Integrated and Joint Commissioning with NHS Colleagues continues to develop in ambition and in practice. As part of the Mental Health transformation programme, our DCS is the SRO and we are exploring joint commissioning arrangements with a Section 75, as well as embedded integrated staffing with part of the access point for navigation within our Front Door and practitioners within our locality model. Integrated teams are growing e.g. Safeguarding Families Together, B2SA, Clinical psychology and SALT.

Inviting external scrutiny from Oxford Brookes University to review our Dorset Children Thrive locality model – Oxford Brookes reported positive impact of our locality model was evidenced well

Continued focus on growing our career development channels, leading regional work and the Staff College

Continued to build on our youth voice work for example recruiting a Youth Voice Practitioner to work with our children with special educational needs or disabilities and implementing Mind of My Own

# Our partnership ambition for our children and their families

## Our partnership vision for Dorset:

*"We want Dorset to be the best place to be a child, where communities thrive, and families are supported to be the best they can be.*

*Our Strategic Alliance has been working together since 2020. We have made real progress in many areas, despite facing a truly challenging few years. We are all too aware that the pandemic has disproportionately affected our children and young people who missed out on a lot to protect the health of the nation.*

*As a partnership, we are committed to building on what we have already achieved to create a bright and ambitious future for our children and young people. We have committed to working together and with our children, families and communities to ensure that Dorset is a place where all children thrive.*

*We passionately believe that strengthening families and communities - 'working with' not 'doing to' - is the key to unlocking potential and aspiration and this plan sets out how we will do that together.*

*Children and young people have generously given their feedback, shared their ideas and told us what it important to them. Their voices have shaped this plan, and we will work hard over the next 10 years to deliver their vision for Dorset."*



Our Children, Young People and Families Plan can be accessed here: [Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2023 to 2033 - Dorset Council](#)

Our strategic partners are Dorset Council, NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board, Dorset Police, 0-25 Voluntary Community Services, Schools and educational providers and the Dorset Parent Carer Council.

Collectively, we are ambitious for our children and young people and are committed to providing and supporting strong life outcomes.

# Our values and strategic priorities

We believe it has never been more important to focus on ensuring equity of outcomes for all children and young people. The pandemic disproportionately affected children and young people, widening the gap in outcomes. Our collective determination can be found in our ambitious partnership plans.

We know we are stronger together. Strong relationships and partnership working is key to delivering the best outcomes we all aspire to achieve for our families in our communities. We have co-produced and delivered a framework across the Dorset Council area for all key strategic partners to collaboratively work to achieve the best outcomes for Children and Young People.

Our partnership ensures that children, young people and their families have ongoing opportunity to codesign the decisions that affect them.

Our partnership works together to understand the needs of local children, young people and their families, so that we can commission and provide services that are inclusive and supportive, always keeping children and young people at the heart of all we do.



DORSET & WILTSHIRE  
FIRE AND RESCUE



Dorset



Dorset HealthCare University  
NHS Foundation Trust



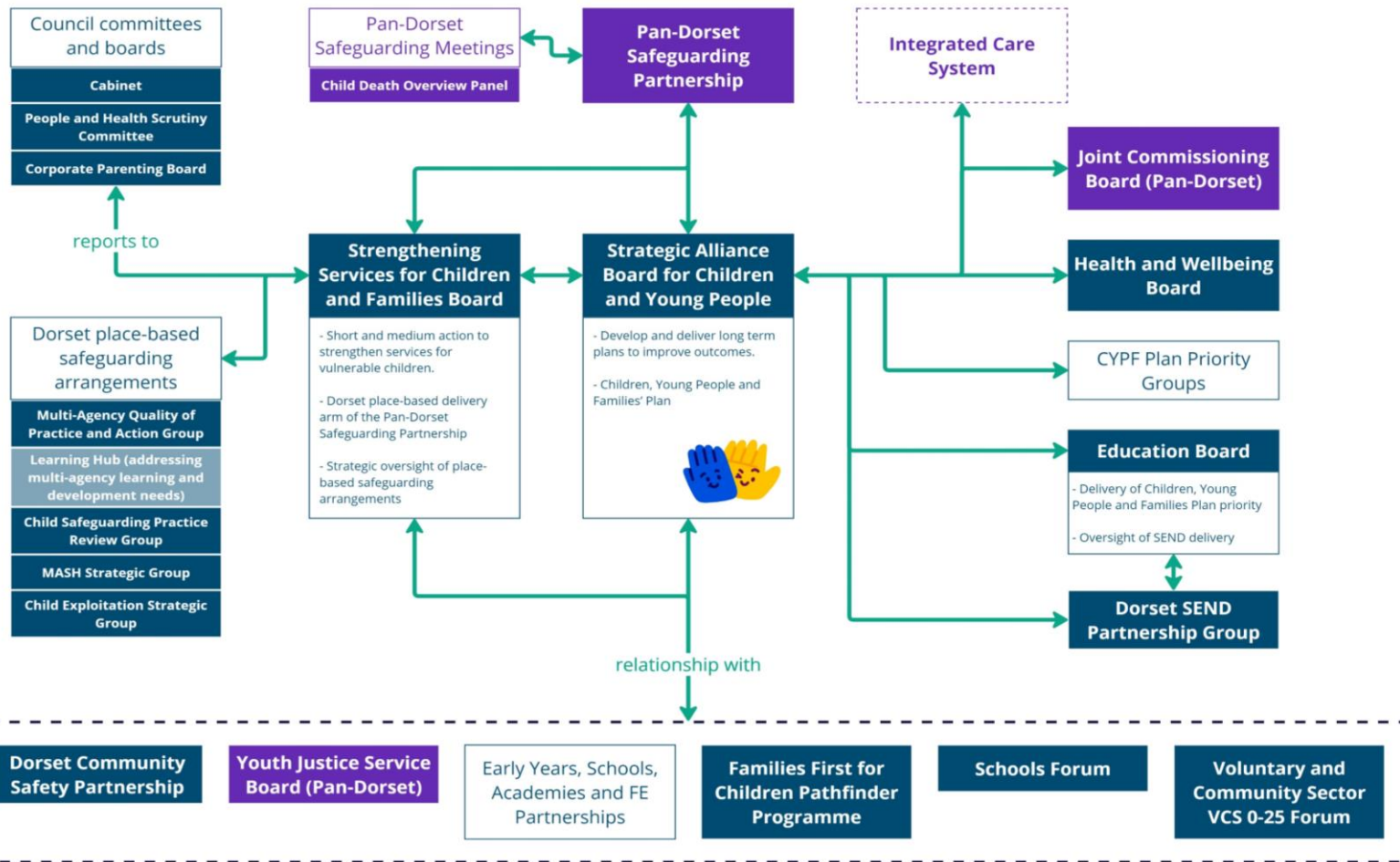
## Our strategic **priorities** as set out in our 10-year plan

- Best Start in Life
- Young and Thriving
- Best Education for All
- Best Place to Live
- Local Family Help
- Good Care Provision
- Safe at Home and in the Community

# A maturing local area partnership: led by our Strategic Alliance for Children, Young People and Families

## Dorset Children's Strategic Partnership Governance

Pan-Dorset  
Dorset Council area



There is a **Golden thread** in our strategic plans

- Children, young people and families' plan
- SEND strategy
- Belonging strategy and plan
- Sufficiency Strategy
- Education Strategy



Local, multi-agency services report into an established and embedded multi-agency governance structure

Governance provides member and executive assurance

# Stable and effective leadership

## Council Political and Officer 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 and on to Scrutiny Committees. Through their roles in supporting our strategic partnerships and contributing to our Quality Assurance Framework, the Chief Executive 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, is the current 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. There is strong Cross Party support for Children's Services priorities.

## 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. Our Corporate Director for Education and Learning has now been in post for 18 months (having been promoted from Head of Locality in January 2023) and has a wealth of experience in education, schools and an early help background to the role. Our previous Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships, has recently moved on from Dorset having secured a promotion as a DCS, and we have promoted internally our Head of Locality for Chesil as our new permanent Corporate Director of Commissioning and Partnerships, taking up their post from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2024. The Corporate Director for Quality Assurance has been in post since April 2022, leading on Quality Assurance across Children's Services, overseeing the wider Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership functions and leading on the DfE Sector Led Improvement Programme. Our Corporate Director for Care and Protection joined Dorset in May 2022 and represents Dorset on several regional groups as well as leading on the Families First For Children Pathfinder.

Our extended senior leadership team includes a stable and experienced Heads of Service group and Service Managers. Together they take responsibility for leading continued 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 meetings and performance frameworks.

# Stable Homes Built on Love: Families First for Children Pathfinder (FFCP)

**In Dorset, we believe that every child should have the conditions to thrive and meet their full potential, therefore, we are continuing to build on our existing foundations of success. As a selected Wave 1 FFC Pathfinder, we have been co-designing our enhanced Pathfinder delivery model. We will move into our new shape on 17th June 2024.**

- Children, young people and their families are currently supported well through our Locality model, and we want to expand our approach to include partners in more of our embedded decision-making forums to enhance integrated multi agency decision making practice into to our locality work
- Our involvement in the FFCP will enable us to enhance and build on our services and we are already building more deeply integrated multi-agency partnerships. A key focus will be on family led decision making with more family led meetings from early help through to assessment and intervention, and family group conferencing and standard practice for those requiring child protection and pre proceedings.
- We're implementing Pathfinder in a measured and thoughtful way. Changes are made steadily to ensure that we maintain the quality and impact of our practice. Management oversight, how we record and how we measure impact are key components of every Pathfinder workstream.

## **Our services will support children and their families from the very first point of contact:**

- An integrated front door that ensures families get the right support first time and includes: Children's Advice and Duty Teams, Educational Psychologists, Youth workers, Education colleagues, Birth to Settled Adulthood colleagues, Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) services. Ultimately, providing whoever contacts the Front Door the ability to speak with a member of staff who will have the relevant skills and knowledge and advice.

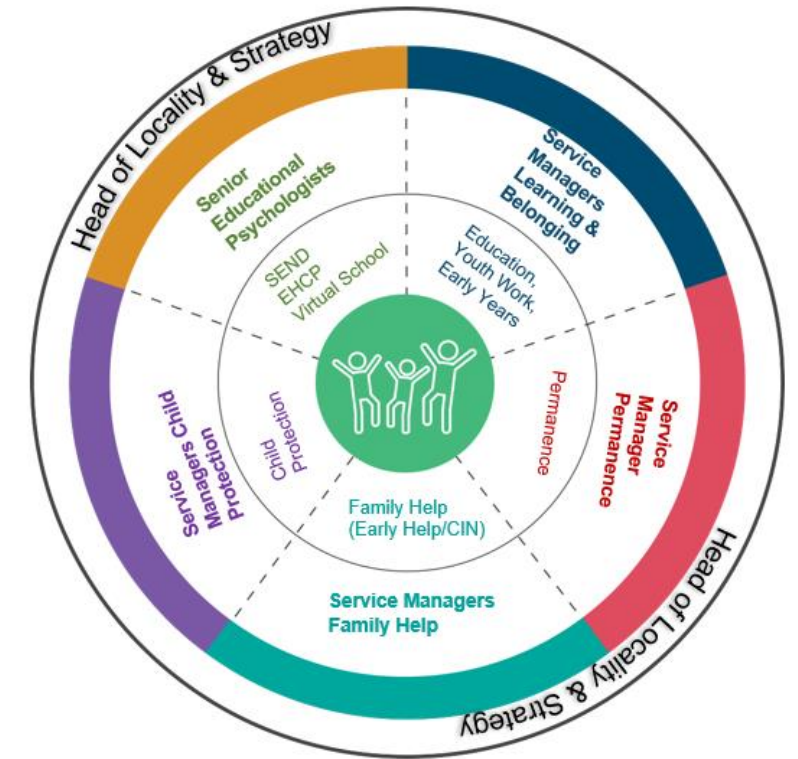


# Our multi-agency locality model

Our established and embedded “Dorset Children Thrive” locality model seeks to meet need at the right time. The Thrive locality model’s ability to provide this in practice has been confirmed through independent evaluation by our Academic partner, Oxford Brookes.

*Families benefit from a broad range of Early Help services, tailored to their needs and in the places where they live. Partnership working is well-developed, offering a range of options that build on families’ strengths and can be provided without delay.*

The locality teams are led by a single Head of Locality and Strategy and are comprised of colleagues from across Early Help, Children’s Social Care, Educational Psychology, SEND, Detached and Targeted Youth Work and Inclusion services under the leadership of Heads of Locality and Strategy that link together with our ICB Primary Care Networks and public health nursing partners.



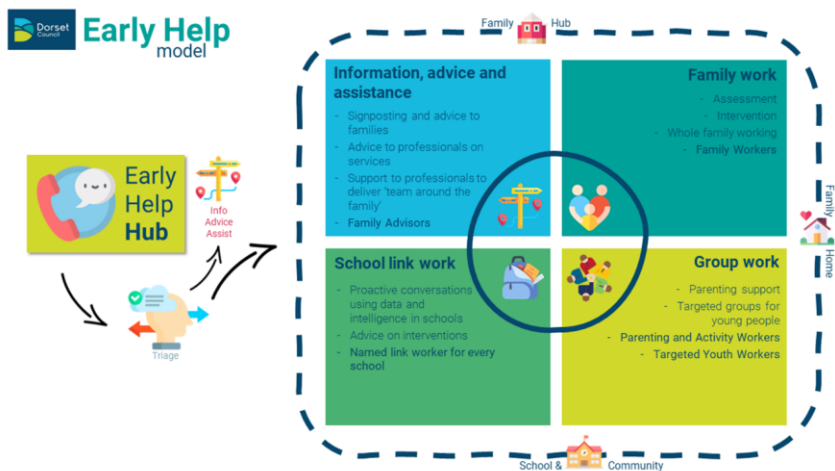
Matrix management arrangements (where staff report and consult with more than one person) are used so everyone in the team has access to the specialist support they need. Underpinning the model are our design principles that align to the partnership’s shared values and principles.

We are investing further in our locality model through the Families First pathfinder to increase capacity and to deepen integration with partners, including CAMHS, in our locality Family Help offer and Family Hubs and our child protection teams.

Our locality teams work alongside a wide range of centralised services including our fostering and residential services; our children who are disabled service, our service for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, our education support services and our commissioning services.

# Our practice model

We operate a strengths-based and restorative approach to our practice. The independent review undertaken by IPC Oxford Brookes of our locality model has identified that strengths-based practice is a key part of the Dorset vocabulary across Dorset Council staff and partners and that it is delivered enthusiastically. Persistent, relational practice is evidence in case files and there is strong engagement with fathers/male carers and wider family members to seek solutions within the family network. This is a strong foundation for delivering the pathfinder ambition of unlocking the power of family networks.



We have continued to invest in quality assurance. Our Principal Social Worker is now supported by specialist Practice Leads, this additional capacity will further help us to continually improve and strengthen practice

## Dorset Children Thrive Practice Model A Strengths Based - Restorative Approach



Here in Dorset we are passionate about building positive relationships with families. Our model is based on a strengths-based approach with restorative practice that will deliver positive impact and change and places children at the very heart of what we do.

- Our Core principles:**
- 1 Best start in life
  - 2 Young and thriving
  - 3 Good care provision
  - 4 Best education for all
  - 5 Delivering locally
  - 6 Best place to live
  - 7 Safe at Home and in the Community

- Voice and experiences of children and young people**
- Children and young people are empowered to have their voices heard, and their wishes and feelings understood.
  - They will know and understand why we are involved and our role to support them.
  - We will listen and respond to their views.

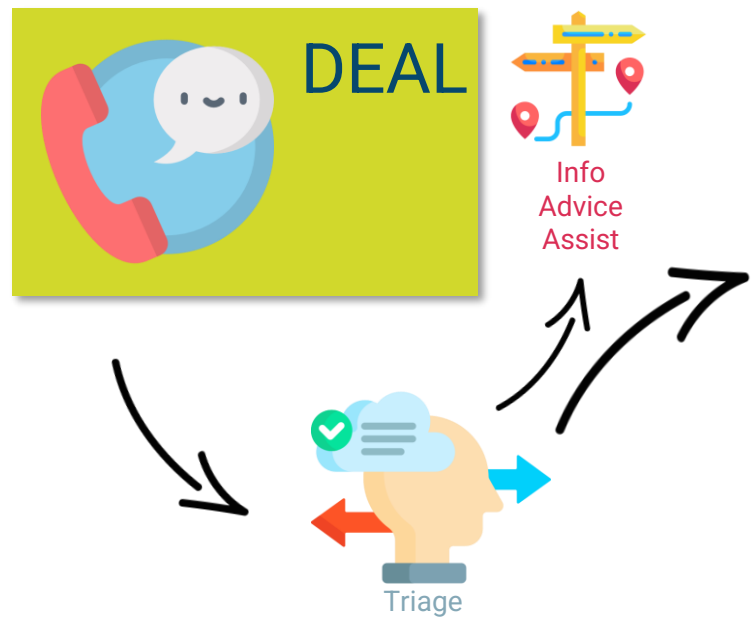
**Our commitment** is that all children and families will experience quality and purposeful interventions that is right for them

- Working with families**
- Create and maintain trusting and respectful relationships.
  - Work with families, rather than doing to them or doing for them
  - Families are empowered to make decisions and shape solutions.
  - We will provide person centred meetings and strength based conferences that enables the family to lead what needs to change for them.

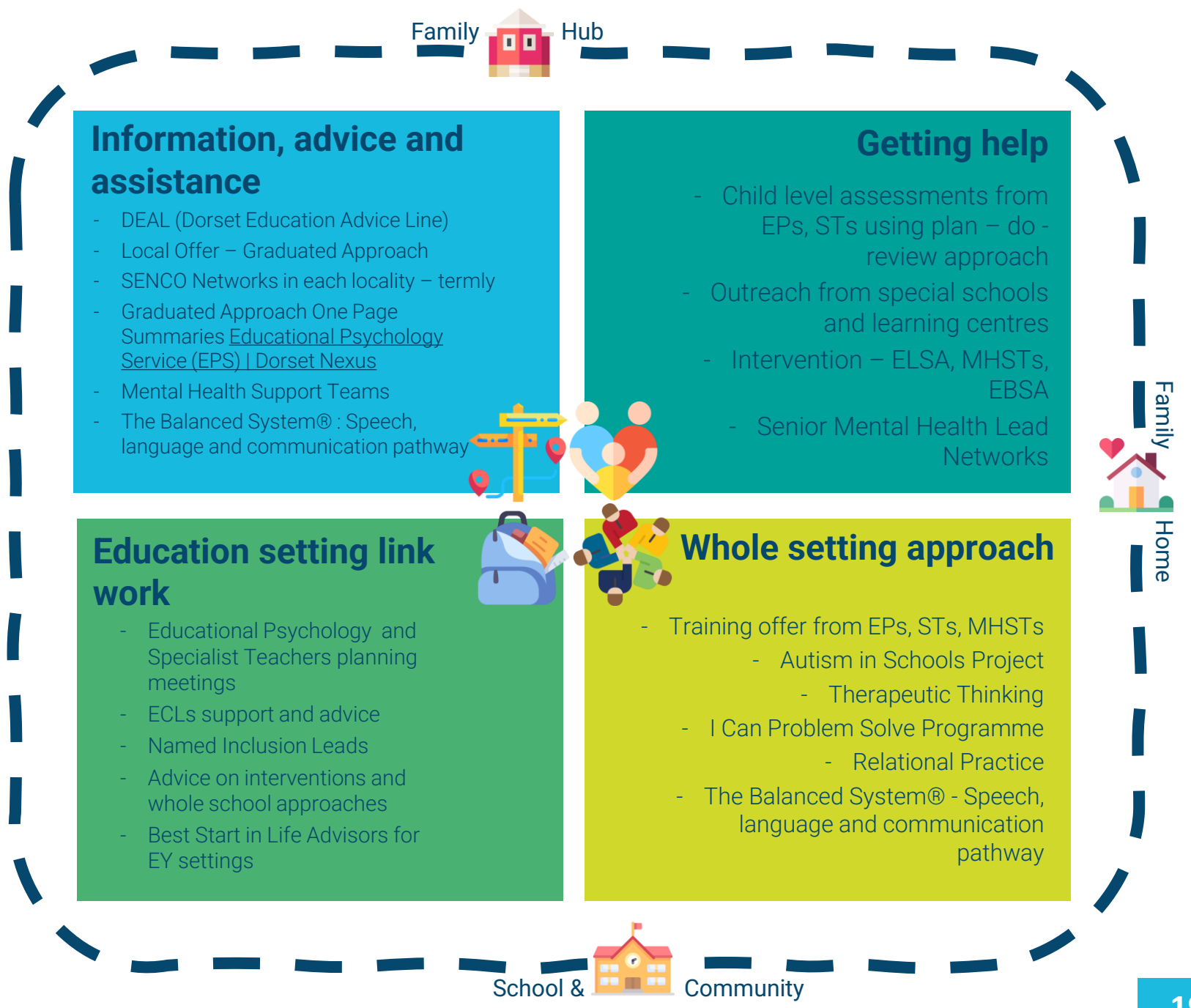
- Our top five priorities:**
- 1 Children and families receive the right support at the right time.
  - 2 Keeping families together and where this isn't possible ensuring children have the right permanence and forever homes.
  - 3 Proportionate interventions that are focused on outcomes for the child.
  - 4 Children in our care have loving and stable homes.
  - 5 Children leaving our care will be supported to independence.



**More information:** People - Children's staff can access further resources on The Children's Hub and book training via Nexus  
For all other agencies, please visit the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership website ([www.pdsocp.co.uk](http://www.pdsocp.co.uk)) where you can find further information on Restorative Practice

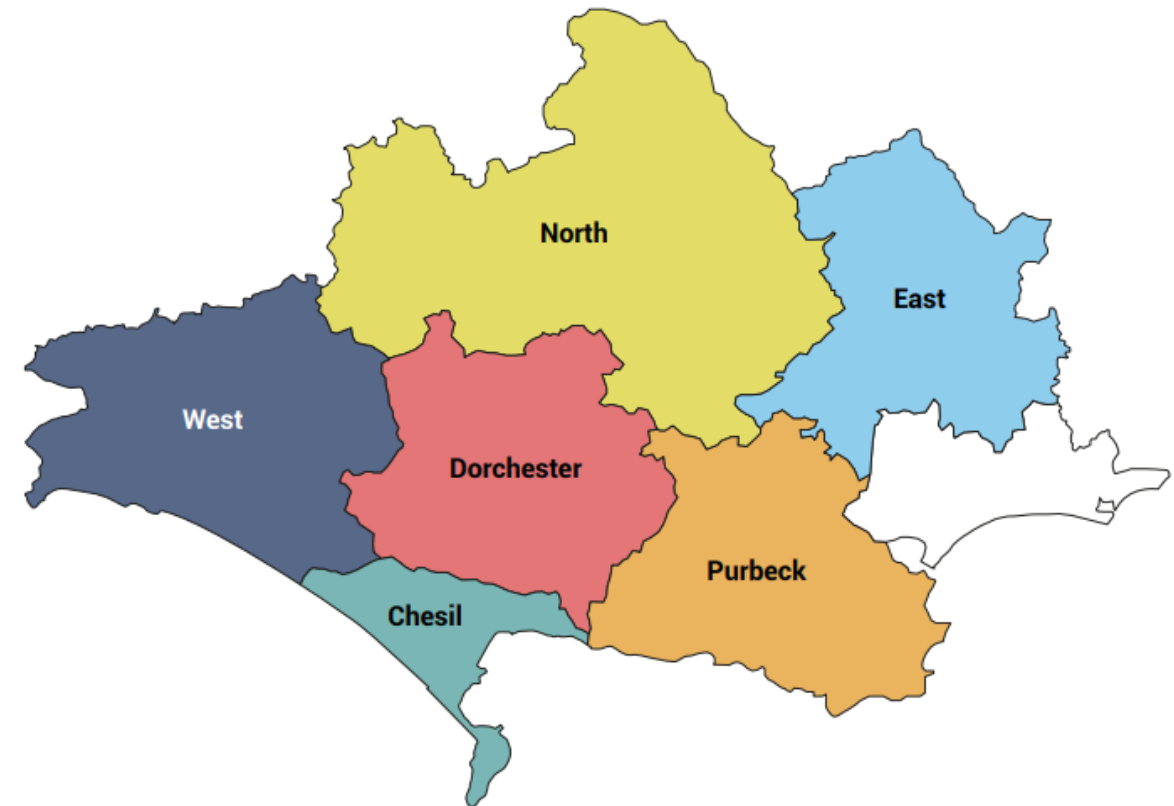


The functions provided by DEAL will now be offered through our Integrated Front Door.



# A mature place-based approach: Local Alliance Groups

- We coordinate our Early Support work through six Local Alliance Groups (LAGs) across our localities that bring together local partners to understand local needs and develop local plans that make the most of collective resources and address issues that are important to local communities.
- Each LAG has an independent chair and representatives from across the partnership including, local authority, health, police, VCS, schools, colleges, early years and other educational providers.
- Each LAG has a 'Rights-Based' approach to its local plan.
- Each of the 6 locality areas have been allocated £100,000, in 2023/24 from Covid recovery funding and the same allocation has now been built into mainstream budget for 2024/25. the beneficiaries have been determined by the LAG's and include projects and activities run by organisations across the partnership to deliver improved attendance at school, promote belonging and improve outcomes for children and young people in their community.
- LAG's will also receive funding to support the distribution of Family Network Support Packages as part of the Pathfinder



# Financial position

- The Children's Services outturn in 2023/24 was £83.129m compared with a net budget of £80.803m, an overspend of £2.326m (2.9%).
- While our care placements budget was overspent by £1.5m, we know that this is a significantly lower overspend on this budget than most councils nationally. We know that local authorities across England spent approximately £4.7 billion on children's social care placements in 2022/23, compared to a budgeted figure of £4.1 billion – an overspend of almost £670 million (16 per cent) Source: [LGA](#) . Although Dorset are not immune to this challenge, we are not facing the financial difficulties some other LAs are experiencing.
- This is because our careful reduction of our children in care population (excluding UAS children), investment in in-house provision, and placement cost management **has enabled us to secure cost avoidance of £6.3m a year.**
- In 2023/24 **the Directorate also delivered £3.4m (90%) of targeted transformation and tactical savings** during the year.

# Financial position: Designated Schools Grant

In 2023/24 the DSG was overspent by £23.655m. The grant is split into four blocks, with the High Needs Block (HNB) overspending by £23.62m, and the Early Years Block (£0.092m) with an underspend in the Central Services to Schools Block (£0.06m). The Schools Block had no variance. The cumulative deficit is now £59.57m. The DSG is a ring-fenced grant handed out by the Department for Education (DfE) for local authorities' school budgets.

As a result of the financial position in April 2023 Dorset Council has been working with Department for Education (DfE) as part of the Enhanced Monitoring and Support programme. The Council is continuing negotiations with DfE SEN practice and financial advisors and developing a revised plan that has been both supported and scrutinised by external parties. This work seeks to identify a future in-year HNB break-even point and therefore cumulative deficit position.

The DfE announced in March 2024 that Safety Valve payments towards funding the historic deficit would be temporarily paused until Ministerial agreement of a revised plan. Dorset Council has submitted revised draft plans for scrutiny during the course of the 2023/24 financial year and awaits recommendations from advisors. In the absence of feedback officers continue to deliver the improvement work outlined in the plan & have commissioned external expertise to support the continued improvement.

In January 2024, Dorset applied for additional £13.684m of SEND capital funding from the DfE which would deliver new assets to improve provision and in turn support the required outputs of the Safety Valve. Dorset have been awarded £10.6m, announced in April 2024.

The historical DSG deficit is a long and well-documented risk stemming from a change in government legislation in 2014. The number of children who require an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) continues to rise and coupled with Dorset Special Schools reaching capacity, has seen an increase in the use of generally more expensive special school places. This is a national issue. 'SEND provision and funding' was debated in parliament on the 11 January 2024.

Below is an extract from the Local Government Association, published on the 9 January 2024 ahead of the debate:

*Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and high needs funding pressures are one of the biggest challenges that councils with education responsibilities are currently facing. This is the result of an ever-increasing demand for SEND support and the growing number of children and young people who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Department for Education (DfE) statistics show that at January 2023 there were over 517,000 children with an EHCP, an increase of 9 per cent on 2022. The number of EHCPs has increased every year since they were introduced. We do not believe that the proposals set out in the Government's SEND and Alternative Provision improvement plan will result in this increase either slowing down or stopping.*

Although the reforms will take time to implement, Dorset Council and partners continue to be ahead of the curve, especially regarding the Safety Valve and for our children and young people. The financial position has not affected the quality of service.

# Impact of our transformation so far

## Key Points

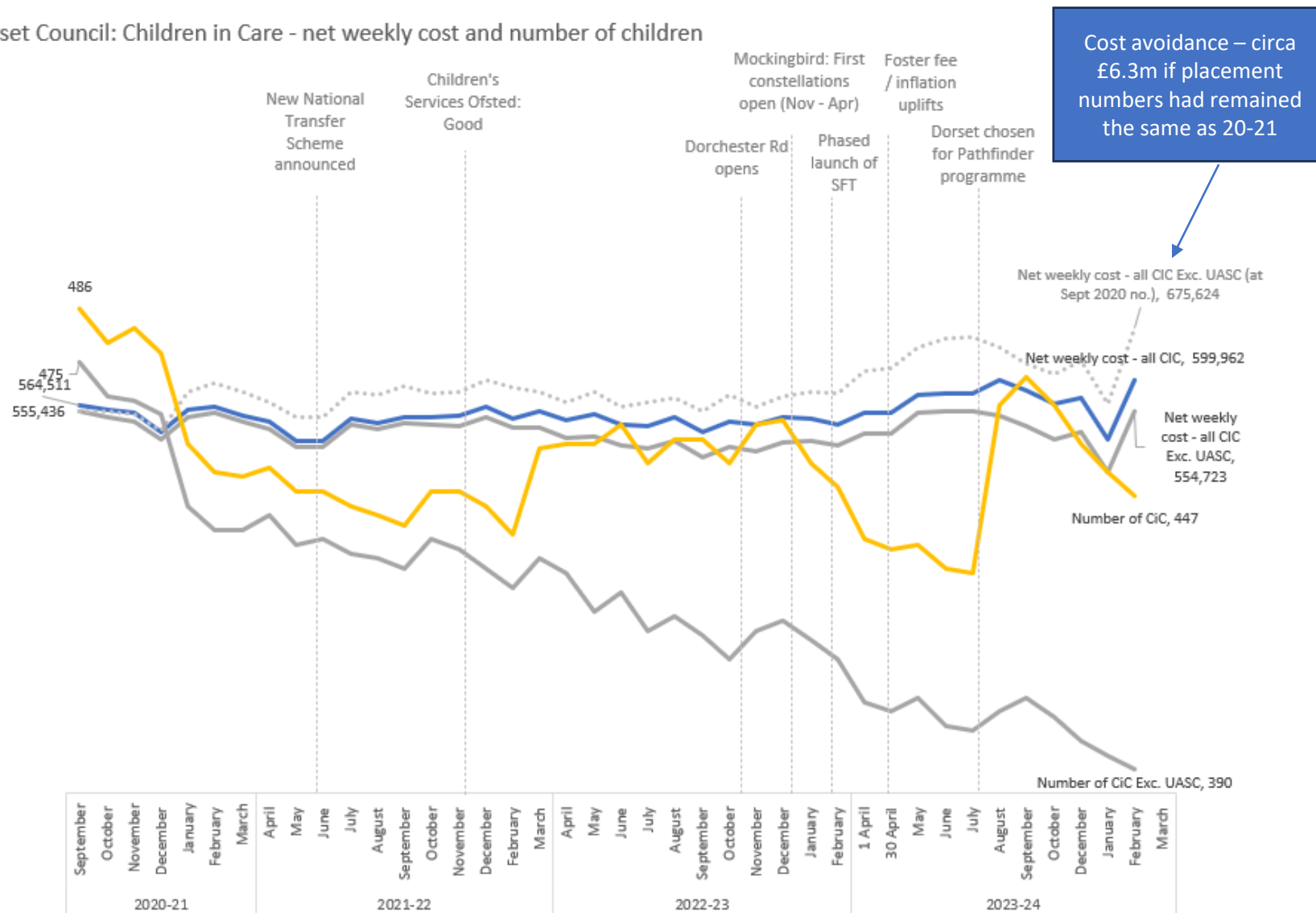
The investment we have made in our model and transformation work we have undertaken means:

- We have been able to reduce our Children in Care numbers
- Maintain the total cost of our placements at the Sep 2020 figure

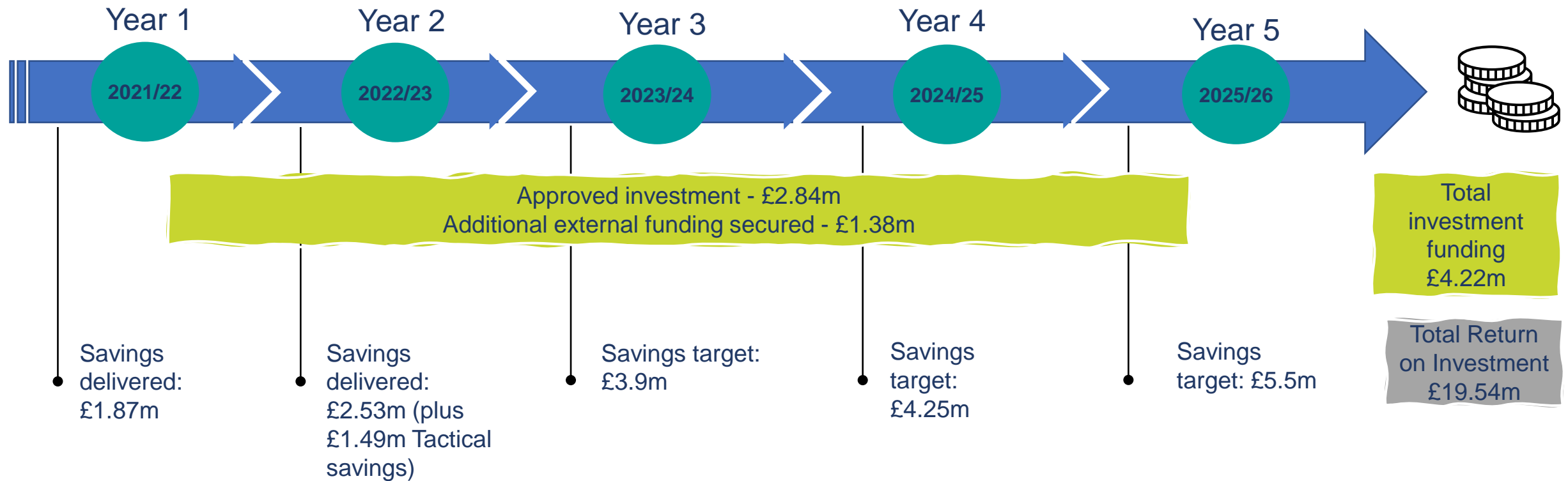
This financial stability stems from whole system change and is a function of the management of high-cost placements and investment in early help

Many local authorities will have seen numbers and placement costs increase year on year.

Dorset Council: Children in Care - net weekly cost and number of children



# Transformation journey



Dorset has a track record of transforming services to meet the needs of our children and young people



# Transformation Capital and Invest to Save

## Coombe house

As part of our capital investment strategy to increase specialist school places, Dorset Council purchased the Coombe House School site to establish an independent special school for children with complex SEMH and social communication needs. Our SEND Teams identify suitable young people who are either in high-cost ISPs placed outside of Dorset or receiving education through EOTAS; to reduce travel time, increase a sense of belonging to Dorset, improve their educational outcomes. This enables them to benefit from the rich environment and links with the local community. Currently Coombe House School provides education for 83 pupils and growth continues.

## Children's homes

- Chestnut House - 3 bed - children who are disabled
- Hayeswood -2 bed - Overnight Short Breaks
- College House - 3 bed - for children with social emotional and mental health needs – No Wrong Door
- The Rowans - 1 bed - social emotional and mental health needs

## Care Leavers

- Clarence House 3 bed
- The Leon Centre 6 beds
- Kirtleton Avenue 12 bed/8 flats care leaver accommodation

## Coming on line

- Brackenbury
- Sunnyside
- Rebuilt and re-purposed Cherries
- The Chalet

## Fostering and Adoption

- £1m pot established to fund extensions and adaptations to foster carer and adopter homes to expand capacity and promote stability and permanence

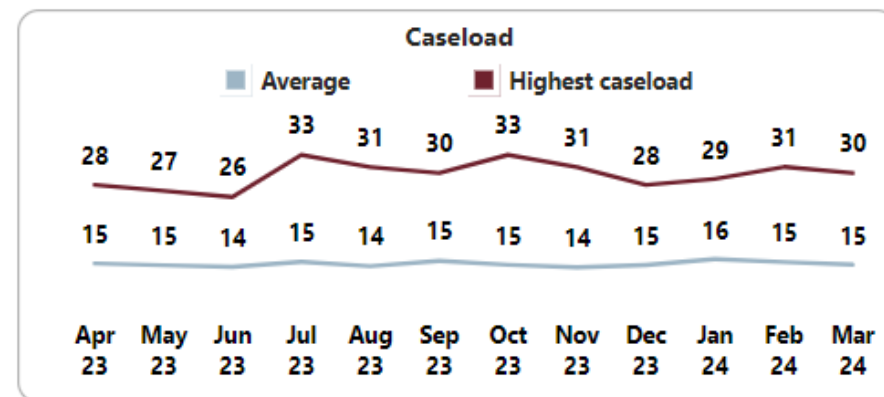
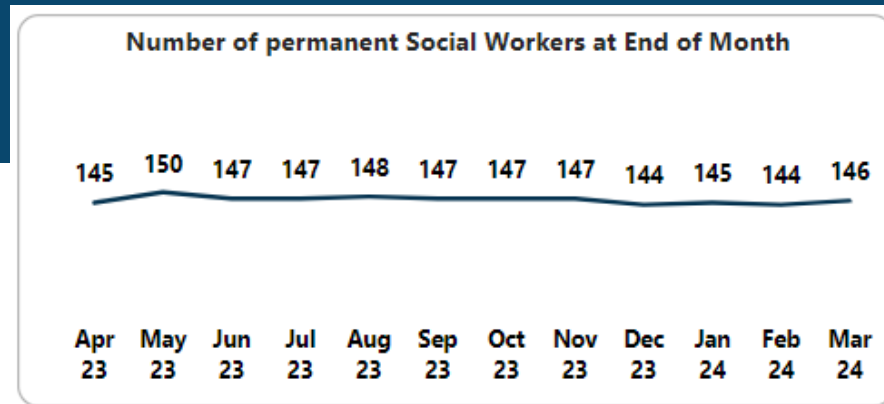
# Skilled and stable workforce

The number of permanent social workers in our workforce has remained steady, with consistent caseloads allowing our workers to build strong relationships with the families they serve. Exceptions to higher caseloads have been rare and typically due to specific reasons. Our recruitment efforts, 'grow our own' initiatives, and retention plans are yielding positive results. As of March 2024, each social worker supports an average of 15 children, enabling them to foster meaningful relationships with the children under their care.

Our social workers are integrated into multi-disciplinary localities, collaborating with family workers, family help workers, education professionals, police, and health colleagues. In the Dorchester and Chesil localities, we also include adult practitioners as part of the Safeguarding Families Together model.

We regularly hold staff engagement events to bring colleagues from across children's services together to hear key messages and motivational speakers. During one event, colleagues shared their thoughts on working for Dorset and what makes them feel like they belong by placing their 'leaves' on the tree. Workforce Development uses these insights in our regular communications, including team briefings and weekly 'Workforce Wordout'.

Additionally, we have our Employee Voice Group and frontline managers' team meetings to ensure continuous engagement and feedback. The appointment of our new Principal Social Worker in April this year, along with two lead practitioners as part of the Pathfinder initiative, is further supporting workforce development and enhancing the quality of our practice.



# Skilled and stable workforce

Post pandemic and in light of the cost of living crisis we have seen increased need in our families, we have expanded capacity across our teams as part of our Early Help strategy. Recruitment has proved more challenging this year due to ongoing national shortages, the allure of agency work driven by the cost-of-living crisis, and neighbouring authorities offering incentives. To address this, we are reassessing our recruitment and retention strategy, intensifying our social media presence, exploring staff development opportunities, and optimizing our 'grow our own' initiatives. We regularly review exit interview data for feedback and have successfully recruited 12 international social workers, building on the success of our 2020 International recruitment initiative.

Sickness continues to pose challenges to our workforce, aligned with national trends during and post the Covid period. As of March 31, 2024, our social care teams experience an average 9-day sickness absence rate per Full-Time Equivalent. Sickness data is routinely monitored through our monthly Performance Board. We have an established health and wellbeing focus group and have rolled out our next 2-year wellbeing strategy and action plan for 2024-2026, following the success of initiatives such as 'Take Care Time' and mindfulness sessions under the 'Thinking Thursday' program. Regular wellbeing messages and resources are also communicated through our Workforce Wordout and Team Brief.

Collaborating with Human Resources and Occupational Health providers, we've strengthened support for staff facing health challenges. We offer a robust corporate wellbeing support system, providing evidence-based therapies like cognitive behaviour therapy, mindfulness, and counselling, which is actively promoted to managers and teams through regular communication.

In our efforts for recruitment and retention, we have successfully converted some agency staff into permanent roles, increased the cohort of practice educators, expanded the intake of Student Social Workers until 2026, taken on 5 Step Up to Social Work students for 2023-2024 and collaborated with the head of locality to identify opportunities to increase the uptake of ASYEs. We have also mapped leadership and management training pathways for social workers.

# Promoting and celebrating diversity



- Our children and young people have asked us to truly see them and consider what makes them “one of a kind”. This is the theme of our annual conferences later this month, where we will celebrate uniqueness and highlight the things that unite us.
- Some of our children are currently recording what makes them one of a kind and asking, “Are you ready?” of educational settings and communities, to ensure what makes them great is understood, celebrated and supported.
- LGBTQ+ young people made a film communicating their experiences for the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Conference. As a result, a gender identity task group has been formed and has recently drafted a practitioner toolkit. This will be shared with the corporate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Board.
- One of our Executive Headteachers provides leadership in celebration of racial heritage and hosts learning walks to see a rich curriculum that celebrates racial diversity, in action.
- Our schools in Weymouth have welcomed children from the ARAP scheme on Chickerell Camp into their learning communities and local people have supported with donations of clothing, toys, bikes and scooters.
- MOMO (Mind Of My Own) - seeks to offer children and young people, with and without SEND a more interactive way to capture their thoughts and views
- Our Digital Family Offer (ODFO) - ensures that families alternative accessibility needs are met

# Leaders have an accurate, shared understanding of the needs of children and young people in their local area

## Case Study

### Gaining an Understanding – Chesil Youth Pride 2023

In response to feedback from the LGBTQ+ youth community in the Chesil locality, a team from Dorset Council Children's Services alongside partner agencies, including education and local youth work organisations, planned the inaugural [Chesil Youth Pride event in Weymouth](#). Services and organisations attended to demonstrate what they can offer the LGBTQ+ youth community, and to sign post to others.

From receiving reports of this vulnerable group feeling 'unsafe', 'unwelcome' and that they 'had no space to be themselves', feedback following the event included comments such as:

"Today is the first time I feel proud of being me"

Plans for Chesil Youth Pride 2024 have followed the request to be bigger and better. They include inviting a wider range of services and organisations that will follow a young person through their life from early years to employment and volunteering opportunities, a key speaker delivering a talk and discussion on empowering LGBTQ+ young people in holding challenging conversations regarding their identity, hosting Primary Pride and offering music performances.

"This is one of the best days of my life to be safe among other people like me."

"The Pride event today makes me feel welcome. I felt a small group of people understood but now I feel I can rule the World."

"It is the first time I felt safe being me. I had so much fun!"



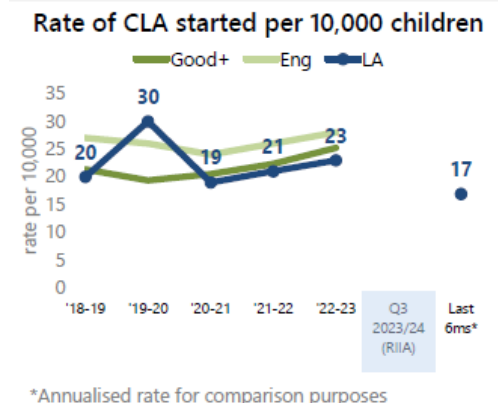
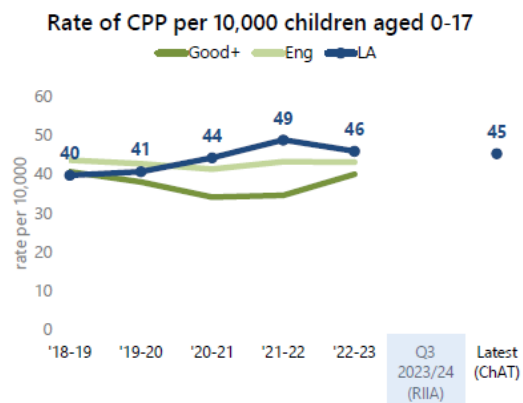
# Dorset Children's Services Self-Evaluation

## Section Two: What we know about the quality and impact of practice

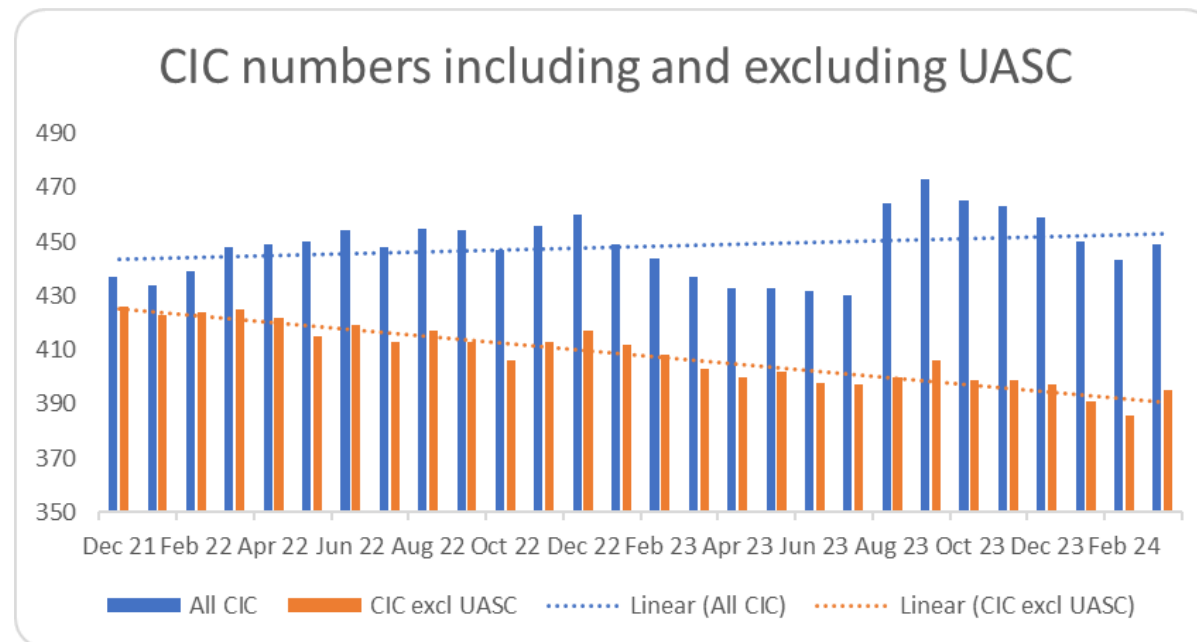


# Rebalancing the system

- We are striving and succeeding in rebalancing the system. Our conversation based Front Door, integrated locality model, and innovative edge of care work at the Harbour, is delivering the right services and support to families and their children, and at an earlier and therefore lower level of intervention.
- We have decreasing numbers of children in need and increasing numbers of children receiving an early help service and have reduced the rate of children subject to child protection plans.
- Discounting the significant increase in Unaccompanied Minors, we have reduced the number of children and young people in care and the vast majority come into our care in a planned way.



Extract from Dorset's March CHAT



# Our 'Direction of Travel' over time



## Children's Activity: March 2021 to March 2024

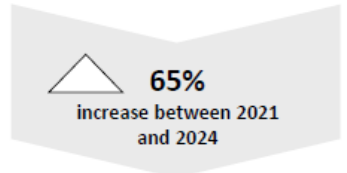
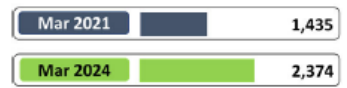


### National Trends

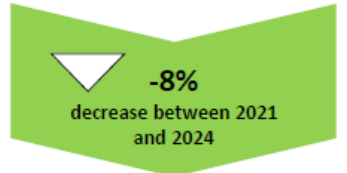
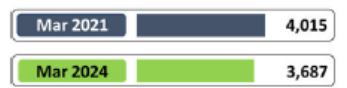
- ▲ **Early Help Assessments in Year\***  
169% increase 2013 to 2022
- ▲ **Contacts Received in Year\***  
105% increase 2008 to 2022
- ▲ **Referrals in Year\*\***  
10% increase 2021 to 2023
- ▲ **CIN (incl CP and CIC) at 31 March\*\***  
7% increase 2021 to 2023
- ▲ **S47 Enquiries in Year\*\***  
21% increase 2021 to 2023
- ▲ **CP Plans at 31 March\*\***  
5% increase 2021 to 2023
- ▲ **CIC at 31 March\*\***  
10% increase 2021 to 2023
- ▲ **Care Leavers (19-21) at 31 March\*\***  
7% increase 2021 to 2023

Sources:  
 \*\*Annual DfE Published Official Statistics  
 \*ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Phase 8  
 November 2022

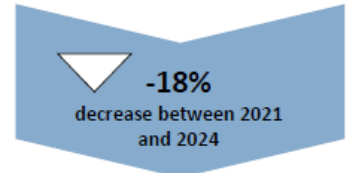
### Early Help Assessments



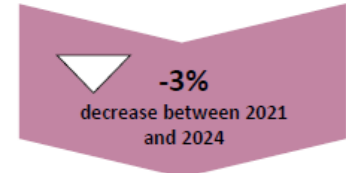
### Contacts



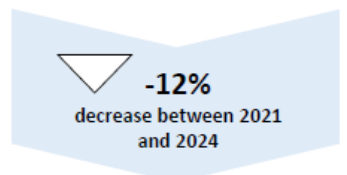
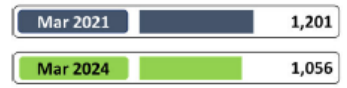
### Referrals



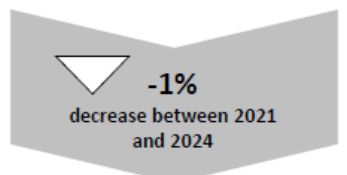
### Section 47 Enquiries



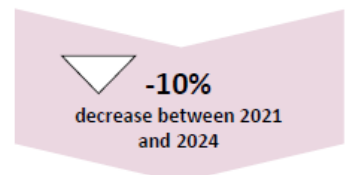
### Children in Need (Excl CP and CIC)



### CP Plans



### Children in Care (Excluding UASC)



### Care Leavers (Receiving a Service)



Meeting the needs of our families early, supplying the right help at the right time



# Integrated Front Door

## 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 other practitioners, 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.

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.

An independent review by Oxford Brookes found that there was high confidence in our decision making at the front door and good partnership understanding of needs.

"The social worker was professional, he was friendly, he clearly explained the concerns, he wasn't judgemental, he was compassionate and so easy to talk to".



# Integrated Front Door

## Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) commenced in July 2020.

Our partners report 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 Group, which feeds into our Strengthening Services Board. 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 who are reported missing 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 placed based 'Dorset Safeguarding Hub' which brings together officers from across the Police in a co-ordinated, child focused service and includes specialist staff for children reported missing and those at risk of extra-familial harm.

There is 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.

# Integrated Front Door

## 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. Our embedded Family Workers and Family Advisors provide strong connections between the Early Help Hub and locality teams as well as locality-based community services.

An area for development identified in the Oxford Brookes feedback was the impact of rotation of employees within the Early Help element of the front door which can affect consistency of decision making. Our plan to address this, which we have now implemented, was to focus on increasing permanent capacity in the hub for decision making. We now have 4 full-time Family Workers, alongside the Family Advisors who are consistently part of the hub to improve the consistency of decision making.

As from May 2024 we have integrated our Dorset Education Advice Line into the Front Door to enable a more responsive approach to parents, carers, young people and practitioners who may need support at the early stages of identifying special educational needs, where those needs will be considered alongside the broader child's and family's needs.

"I felt totally listened to and heard and felt included with the decision making. I felt that the social worker made exactly the right decision for my family. The decision making processes must be hard as he has to judge me on my responses and then consider our family history and any agency information. The social worker got it just right for us". *(parent)*

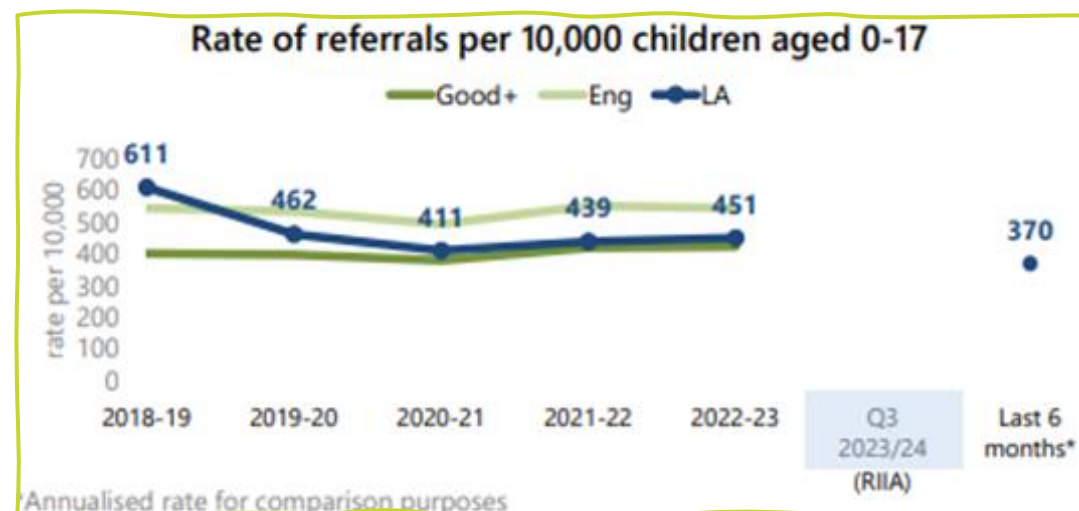
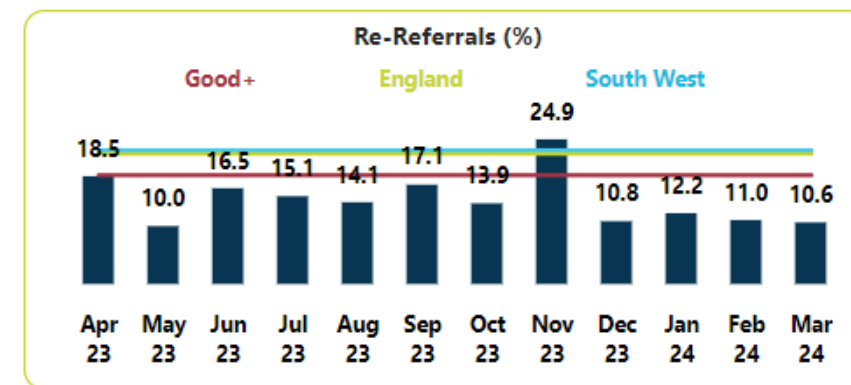
"I could not fault the social worker and I appreciate you calling to find out my views on your service".

# Integrated Front Door

## Number of Contacts and Referrals

During the last 6 months there were 3659 contacts, with 1201 resulting in a referral. Over this same period, our rate of referrals per 10,000 are below our good performing statistical neighbours. Our front door is supporting good decision making to ensure that children and families are getting help from the right part of the system, promoting 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.

Over the last year, our rate of re-referrals has remained below our comparators (with the exception of Nov 23).



# Locality Case Study

Supporting a young person identified as a child in need and was receiving services from the Youth Justice service, working as a partnership to best support the young person and prevent the child getting into the criminal justice system or family breakdown

CASE STUDY REDACTED FOR DATA PROTECTION PURPOSES

"I don't feel like I am I in trouble, I feel like I am being helped"

## Impact and Outcomes:

The young person has secured a job and aspires to work in childcare in the future. They have shown motivation to stop using drugs and is being supported as part of the plans. The young person is now back in education and presents as a happier young person.

Multi-agency planning was coordinated through the SW to support young person using trauma informed practices, building relationships and working with them to agree a safety plan and build on their strengths. Speech and Language Therapist completed an assessment with the young person, producing a one-page 'Communications Passport' to show how best to communicate with them. A YJS Nurse carefully built a relationship with the young person, building trust, restoring their confidence in health professionals, and helping them to understand how past experiences affect their current feelings and behaviour. Through strong locality working and with the YJS and the Education Officer they achieved getting the young person back into education. Within the plan support was put in place with their parent to build a more positive relationship and the communication plan also contributed to this

# Early Help/Family Help



Early Help is an intrinsic part of our 'Dorset Children Thrive' model. Our now established locality teams were built on the geographical outline of 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.

# Early Help/Family Help

- 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. 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 local places and neighbourhoods where children grow up.
- Our Early Help model 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. Early Help includes but is not limited to: Direct work with Children and Families, Delivery of Group work, Supporting partners to undertake Early Help, Focus on Early Years.
- Early years activities to strengthen the early help includes maintaining the quality of early years provision; ensuring capacity and supply of childcare; sustainability support for settings, partnership support for our youngest children with additional needs and/or disabilities; improving Social Mobility through Dorset Families Matter (Supporting Families); ensuring there is targeted support available for children and families through the Household Support Fund and Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programmes (beyond Early Years).

**Ensuring family decision making is at the heart of all we do is a key priority for the next 12-months**

# Early Help/Family Help

## Family Hubs

We are further strengthening our Early Help offer through our Family Hubs, which provide multi-agency support and services to families. Family Hubs are seen as a significant vehicle in which we will deliver much of the Strategic Alliance for Children, Young People and Families Plan and the Family Help element of the Families First for Children Pathfinder; enabling non stigmatised Family Help to be delivered within localities.

We are participating in DfE Family Hub Transformation Programme 1 and have committed to have at least one Family Hub open in each of our localities by the end of the programme. We currently have 5 Family Hubs open and plans for a further 4 to 5 by the end of 2024.

Our family hubs are being developed using an asset-based community development approach, identifying and building on existing community assets and recognising the important role played by the voluntary community sector in the delivery of information and support for families within communities. Each Hub is unique and is being developed in partnership with local communities, through innovate partnership approaches such community asset transfers aiming to build capacity and resource at a hyper local level. This has led to a mixed model of Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and Dorset Council led family hubs designed to meet the needs of each locality.

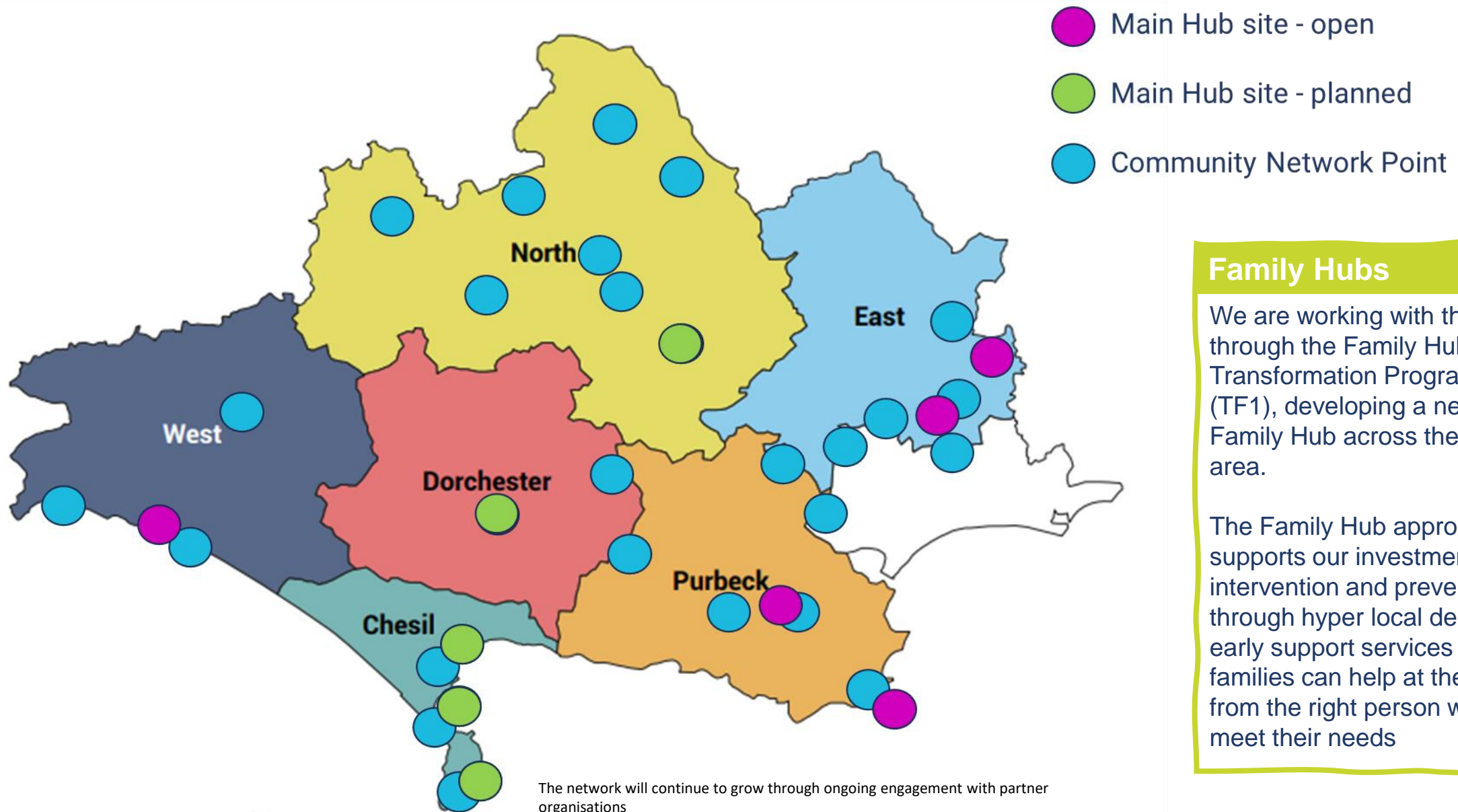
As part of the pathfinder reforms, we are building capacity and resource to enable delivery of community and parent led provision through our Family Hub Network and are implementing a new commissioning model to enable this. This will also include partnership delivery of Family Network Support in the community.

We will have a range of Family Hub buildings with outreach points across the county, creating a network model and supported by an online Family Hub.





# Family Hub Network Map



## Family Hubs

We are working with the DfE through the Family Hub Transformation Programme 1 (TF1), developing a network of Family Hub across the council area.

The Family Hub approach supports our investment in early intervention and prevention through hyper local delivery of early support services that mean families can help at the right time from the right person who can meet their needs

# Early Help – Youth work

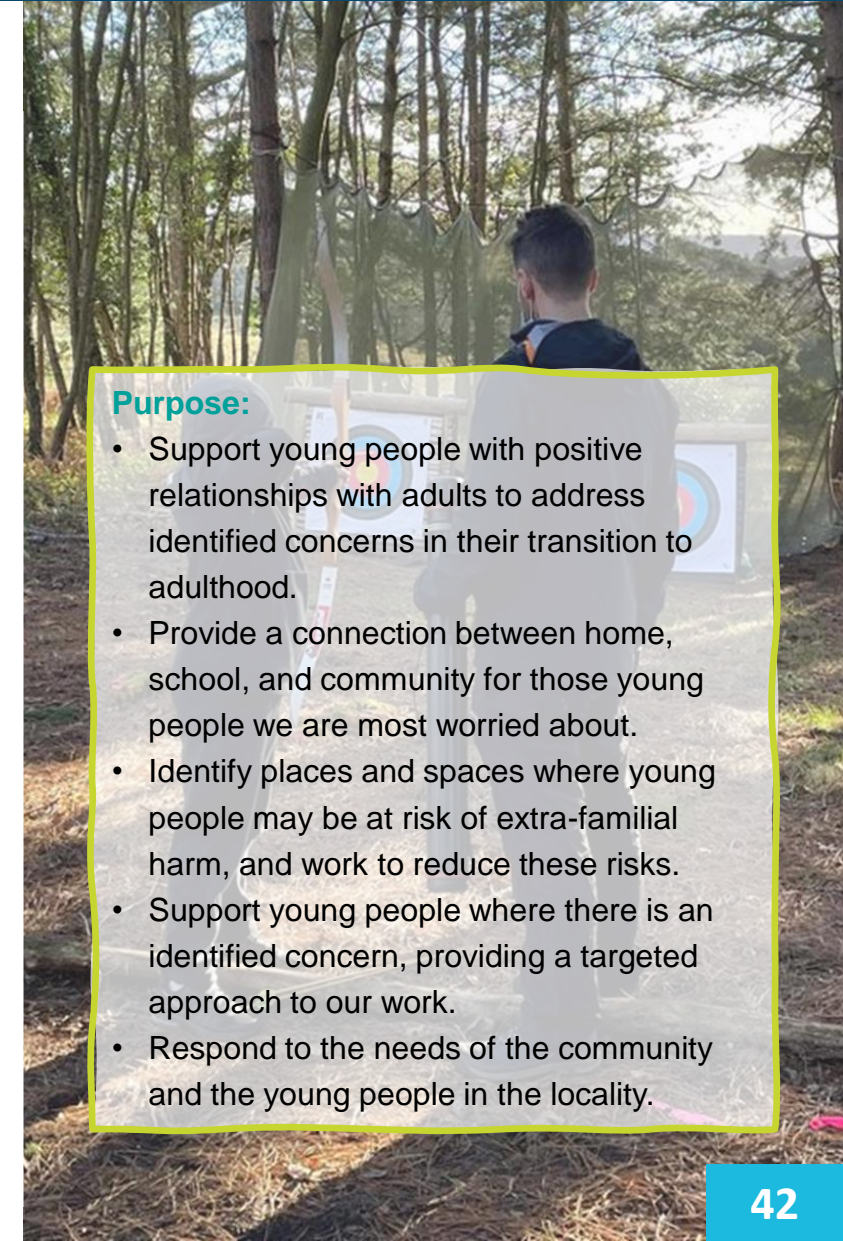
**Targeted youth work** is a distinct and essential part of the wider family help offer.

We recognise the importance and value in youth work approaches and have invested in the expansion and enhancement of the current offer to further develop our ability to respond to young people's needs. Building further connection between Home, School and Community.

Each locality will have an Assistant Team Manager, a Targeted Youth Worker, and Youth Support Workers to support young people identified as vulnerable to engage positively in their community and within their education, training or employment.

- They will deliver detached youth work
- They will provide group work and targeted planned work in schools
- Our youth workers will take on the lead role with families where the concern is primarily with the young person, and support others where the need is for whole family working. Some of the groups of young people that we want to work with will include but are not limited to:
  - Young people at risk of extra-familial harm.
  - Young people whose school attendance is of concern or who are not attending school.
  - Young people who are excluded from school.
  - Young people at risk of becoming NEET.
  - Young people at risk of entering the youth justice system.
  - Young people who are missing from education.
  - Young people who are electively home educated.

The principles and values of our youth work practice build on the wider principles of the Dorset Council approach of being collaborative, strength-based and restorative



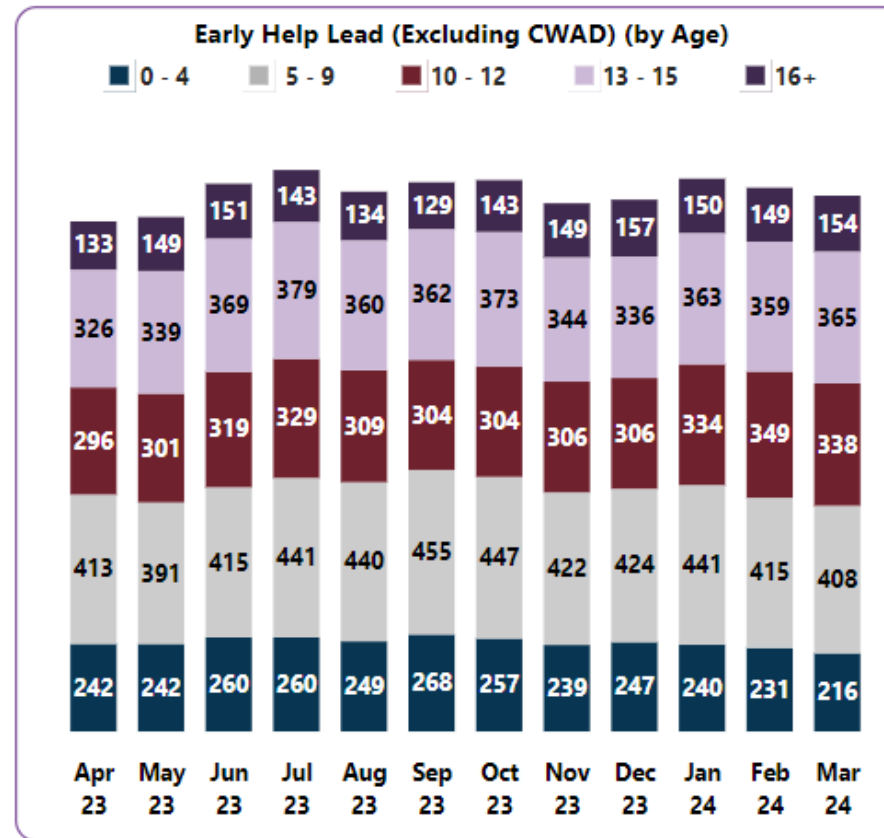
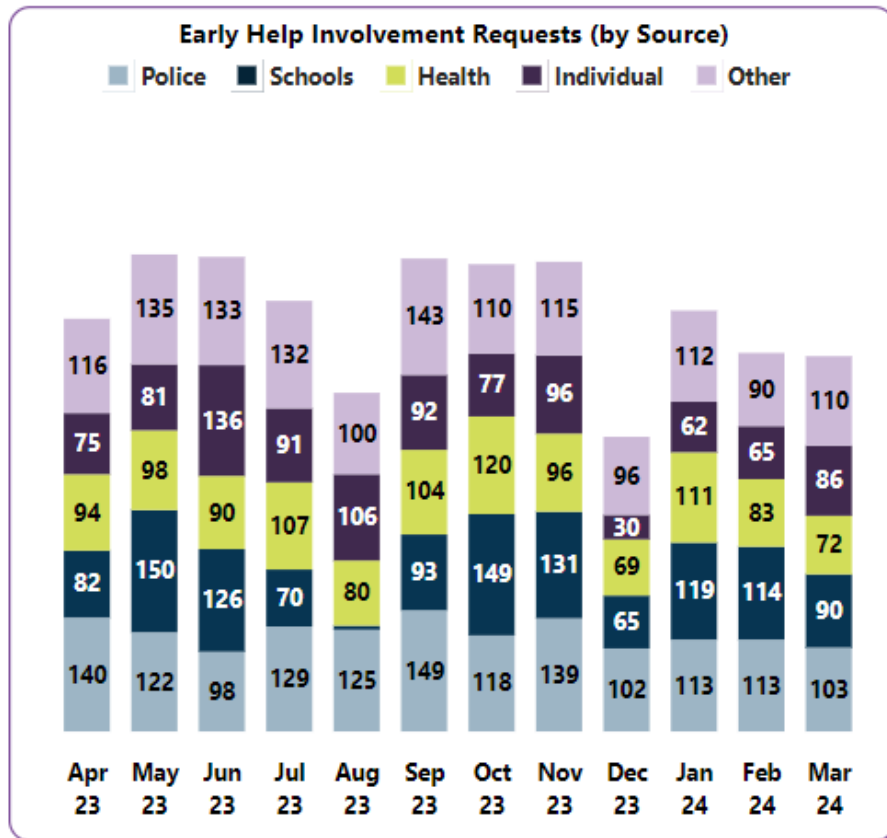
## Purpose:

- Support young people with positive relationships with adults to address identified concerns in their transition to adulthood.
- Provide a connection between home, school, and community for those young people we are most worried about.
- Identify places and spaces where young people may be at risk of extra-familial harm, and work to reduce these risks.
- Support young people where there is an identified concern, providing a targeted approach to our work.
- Respond to the needs of the community and the young people in the locality.

# Early Help

## Partnership

We are seeing good partnership participation in early help leading to requests for early help support and to work across all ages of our community, leading to earlier support and improved outcomes for children, young people and families.



# Children in Need and Child Protection

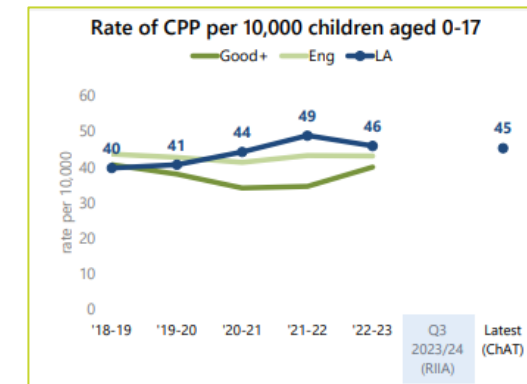
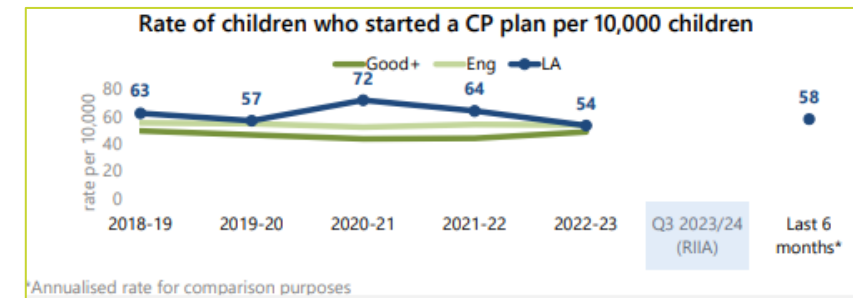
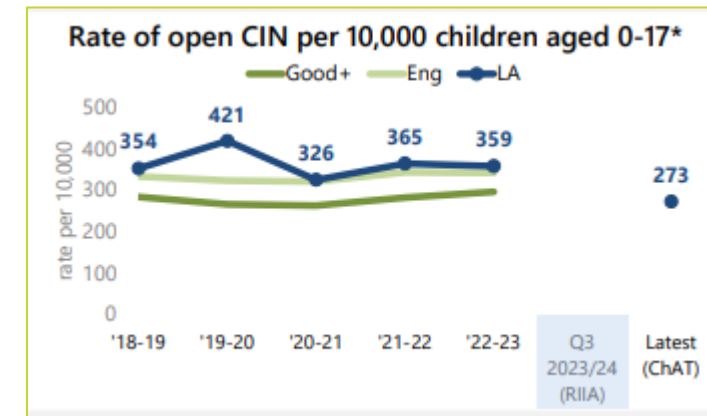
Our Children in Need and Child Protection social work is delivered by our six locality social work services as part of our Thrive locality model, enabling closer working with partners and minimising hand-offs between social workers by reducing transfer points. Significantly, it further develops our understanding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

Our Children in Need (CIN) numbers have continued to decrease during 2023/24 and data indicates we remain 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.

We are rolling out a new approach to 'Family Help' as part of the Pathfinder, bringing together targeted early help and children in need work so that we can ensure that we maintain relationships with families as their needs change or emerge as part of building trusting relationships.

Our child protection numbers have decreased during 2023/24. We are also seeing the impact of our Safeguarding Families Together programme on child protection numbers, with better management at lower levels of risk.

We continue to give conspicuous care to timeliness of child protection visits. At the end of March 2023, 92% of children were seen in the previous 4 weeks.



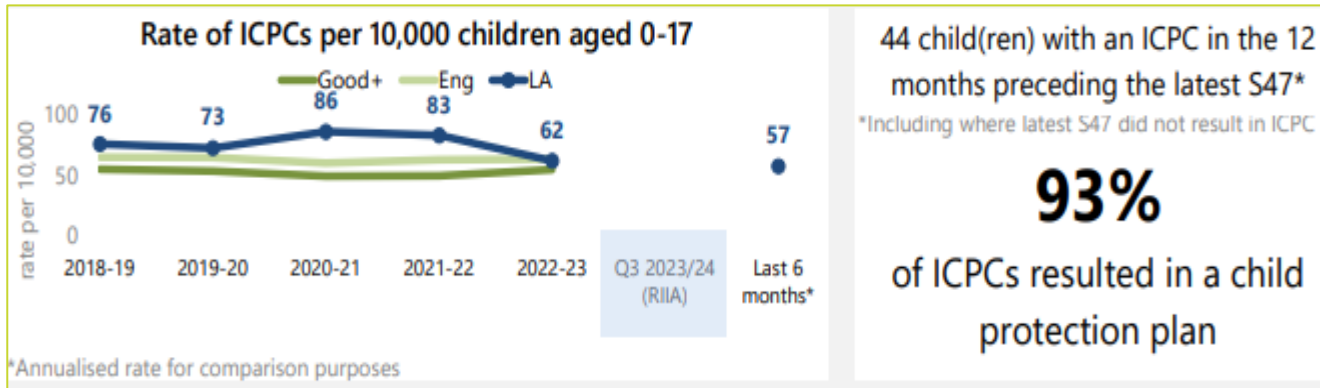
# Right support at the right time

## Section 47 enquiries

We have added a quality assurance process where the Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer (QARO) and the Team manager discuss the outcome of the Section 47 investigations to agree the most appropriate way of supporting the child and their family. This provides assurance that we are making the right decisions about which children should be considered at an initial conference.

To further support this for individual young people we continue to deliver Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings chaired by a QAROs. This is for children where there are significant child protection concerns that are primarily from Extra Familial Risks and Harms 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.

In the last 6 months, there were 501 Section 47 enquiries, with the rate of Section 47 enquiries per 10,000 being 152. This is in line with national rates and good and outstanding rates. A high proportion (68%) of Section 47s did not lead to an Initial Child Protection Conference. We continue to monitor and review this.

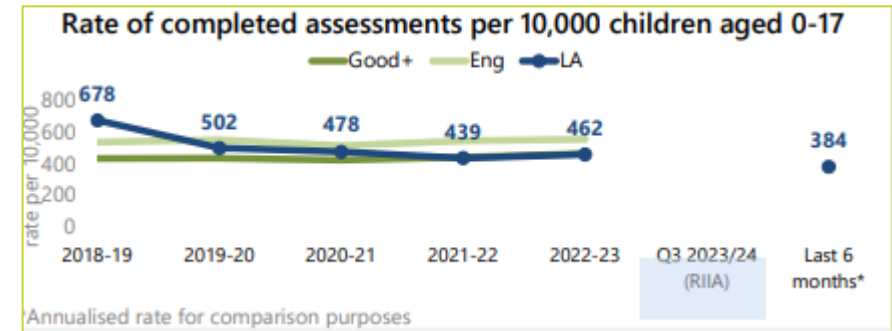
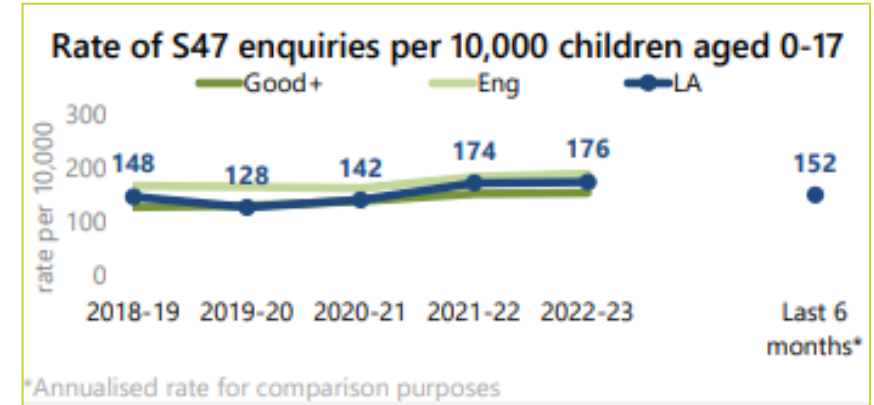


44 child(ren) with an ICPC in the 12 months preceding the latest S47\*

\*Including where latest S47 did not result in ICPC

**93%**

of ICPCs resulted in a child protection plan



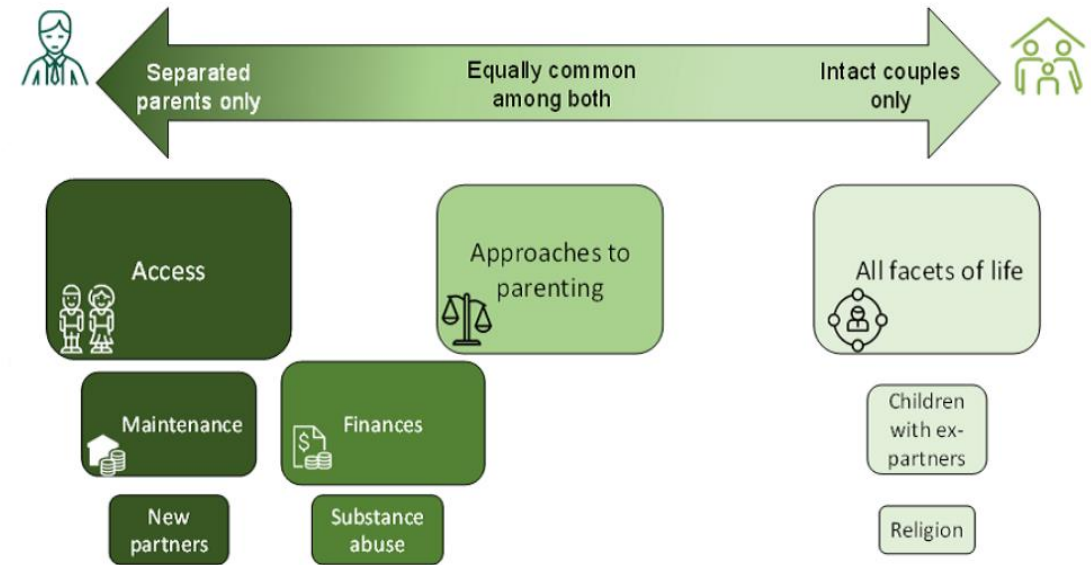
# Parental Alienation

Parental alienation is an area of support we have had a dedicated focus on for some time and have a strong early help and family hub offer that supports separated and separating families.

We utilise validated assessment tools that are designed to capture the voice of the child and understand the wider context of the conflict to help determine the right support.

We have staff trained in the family hubs who can undertake this work and part of our right support right time is also well understood in the front door.

Interventions support and reduce issues around possible alienation include Getting it Right for the Children training, Separating better training, Parenting agreements and the Supporting Interparental Conflict Programme



Size of shapes indicate the number of parents reporting each cause of conflict

## Court Pathfinder: Dorset was identified to be part of the pilot of the integrated domestic abuse court in 2022

- Built on a foundation of early preventative work through our Family Hub Model
- Taking a less adversarial and more investigative approach
- Reducing the re-traumatisation of domestic abuse victims/survivors, including children with specific domestic abuse support being offered
- Engagement in child participation from the start.
- Pathfinder has concluded and is now BAU.
- Partnership QA of our Child Impact reports is showing good quality
- Providing good analysis of strengths and risks is providing a more balanced outcome earlier for families

“You listened to me and I felt you were on my side (I am aware you don’t pick sides) but I felt you were doing everything you could to protect X and do what was best for him. So thank you!” *Parent*

“I get to spend more time with my mum since I haven’t been able to since 2020”

# Dorset Local Alliance Group Funding Project - Dads

**Dorset Parent Infant Partnership (DorPIP)** is a charity who provides support for families in Dorset, from conception to two years old. They offer community-based, specialist attachment led, trauma informed therapeutic parent infant relationship specialist services. Empowering parents, helping them and their little ones to build safe, secure foundations for healthy, happy and fulfilled lives.



The DorPip **Dads and PeaPods** Project has been successful in securing £3.8k from the Chesil Local Alliance Group and aims to provide support to 75 families within the Chesil community.

**PeaPods** a 6-week on-line daytime course, run by a specialist safeguarding neonatal midwife, is from pregnancy to 6 weeks post birth, teaching new or expectant parents, knowledge and skills in a warm caring non-judgmental environment.

**Dads** a 6-week online, weekday evening course hosted by an expert in father's mental health and supported by a parent infant relationship specialist, who may also be a midwife, health visitor or psychotherapist, is designed to help Dad's prepare for parenthood, to ensure they are emotionally present and available for themselves, their partner and their baby. The course offers a safe space for fathers to share their experience and learn more about themselves, contributing to the well-being of the whole family.

**Local Alliance Groups across all localities are funding similar projects.**

# Pre-Proceedings and Proceedings

- Our court proceedings work is well managed with strong performance on timeliness.
- We are working with the Family Rights Group on the 'Reimagining Pre-proceedings' project alongside families, the Judiciary, and partners.
- The aim of the programme is to co-produce an approach to early work and pre-proceedings 'with' families. This approach supports effective partnership working with children and families, embedding key policy and practice messages.
- This work aligns with our practice developments and changes being embedded through the Families First for Children Pathfinder.
- To strengthen the quality of this work we are increasing our Quality Assurance offer with dedicated oversight of the progression of court work, tracking and providing support to social workers who will progress through the careers framework to undertake court work.
- This role will also ensure that the learning from the Family Rights Group pathfinder is embedded into best practice.





# Children and young people with specific vulnerabilities

## Extra Familial Risk and Harm (EFRH)

- Our Extra Familial Risk and Harm Panel has been in place since September 2023 and a new extra familial risk and harm risk assessment was launched in February 2024.
- The extra familial harm risk assessment enables a wider lens to identify, understand and analyse different forms of risk outside of the home and includes serious youth violence and high harm and contributes to ensuring children and young people get the right help and the right time.
- We have developed a new multi-agency Extra Familial Harm Strategy which is based on the 'Joining the dots' framework and has adopted the 8 practice principles. (Tackling Child Exploitation – Research in Practice).
- A multi-agency action plan has been formulated from the strategy and was presented to the EFRH Tactical Group May 2024.
- Specific training has been delivered across Children's Services to increase awareness and understanding of EFH
- We have had an increase in context assessments and contextual safeguarding conferences held to identify and address risks within locations and agree actions that will positively impact all young people within those contexts.
- Data from the Extra Familial Risk and Harm Tactical Group in March 2024 indicated that 14 children were identified at 'significant' risk of Extra Familial Risk and Harm. This has reduced from the previous high number of 28 children in September 2023.
- 70 children overall are at risk of EFRH (13 emerging ,43 moderate and 14 significant) . This breaks down in to 19 children at risk of CCE and CSE, 36 at risk of CCE , 11 at risk of CSE and 4 none/other type of EFRH.
- The Police Safeguarding Hub identify that there are active County Lines operating within Dorset (May 2024)

# Children and young people with specific vulnerabilities

## Transitional Safeguarding

- We recognise that the extra familial harm that young people can experience does not stop when a young person turns 18 and can at times increase with reduced support and changes to how young people are viewed. We have a working group jointly with Adult Services which is developing our approach to transitional safeguarding.
- We have developed a draft flowchart and practice guidance to support improved transitions from children's services to adult safeguarding where there are young people at risk of harm where Care Act eligible needs have not been clearly identified but there may be a prevention duty under s.2 Care Act 2014.
- We have agreed Adult Services representation at our Extra Familial Harm Strategic Group and Extra Familial Risk and Harm Panel.

## Prevent

- Dorset work closely with BCP through our Pan Dorset Prevent Partnership Board, promoting awareness raising and training.
- Dorset have an established joint child/ adult channel panel chaired by Children's Services/ Adult Services.
- Over the last year we have seen a similar number of referrals to previous years, 54% of these referrals come from education providers.
- There has been an increase in incel ideology (up to 7% of referrals). Primarily referrals relate to mixed, unclear or unstable ideology or vulnerability with no ideology.
- Over the last 12 months there has only been one active channel panel case relating to a young adult which was linked to mental health needs.

## MAPPA

- Further demonstrating our good multi-agency working, MAPPA, led by our police colleagues, has strong participation and attendance from relevant agencies within the partnership.
- MAPPA has improved how risks for associated children are considered and this leads to proportionate intervention and support, where we support our partners, namely probation and police, in making joint decisions regarding child safety.
- Good joint multi-agency MAPPA training offered to all partners in October 2023 following SAR completed by Probation Service.
- Continued MAPPA quality assurance work is being completed across the partnership to meet the recommendations of the SAR.

# Children and young people with specific vulnerabilities

- We have invested in the provision of Targeted Youth Workers across our localities to work directly with young people and to link with and support schools.
- Due to the effectiveness of this, as part of our Pathfinder developments we are investing in a further 14 targeted Youth Worker posts to enhance this approach further.
- In the Pathfinder model we will have 4 Assistant Team Managers for contextual safeguarding across the localities to lead the teams of youth workers.
- The Assistant Team Managers will lead on contextual safeguarding across the localities and are currently reviewing and updating training along with strengthening our existing Contextual Safeguarding toolkit, which was launched in 2021 and based on research from the University of Bedfordshire and the Contextual Safeguarding Network.
- Our Targeted Youth Workers lead on Youth At Risk Meetings in the Locality.
- Quality Assurance Officers continue to provide independent scrutiny and oversight by Chairing the MACE meetings.

# Children and young people with specific vulnerabilities

## The Pineapple Project

The Pineapple Project is a project which seeks to address hidden harm that young women may face outside of their homes. This is an innovative project that focuses on Dorset Children's Services partnering with non-traditional safeguarding partners to create community guardianship in certain towns in Dorset.

*"Fireworks nights are the most dangerous nights because there's so many people we don't know .....it's so nice to know that you are out tonight and that there is somewhere to go if I need help"*

*'I love the idea of safe spaces for young women in the town. I have daughters myself and I would want to know that if they felt vulnerable when out of the house that they could go to a safe space for help and support'.*



The Pineapple Project has been successful in securing £10k from the Serious Violence Duty intervention fund to do some focused group work with a young women's group and develop a peer mentor scheme.

30 Dorset Council employees have expressed interest in becoming community guardians.

There are currently 10 community guardians fully approved, and a further 12 being progressed through checks and training.

The project is expanding to other localities.

# Children and young people with specific vulnerabilities

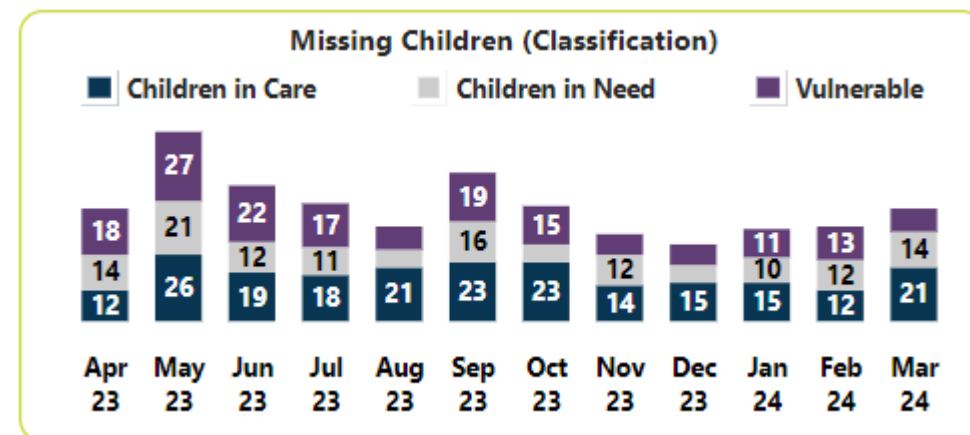
## Missing children

We continue to strengthen our work through daily 'Missing' meetings with police who now have a dedicated missing persons team. The daily Missing meeting reports themes and trends to the EFRH Champions meeting and the Child at Risk of or Linked to Exploitation (EFRH) Tactical Group. All of our most frequently reported missing young people are having their needs considered at extra familial harm or youth at risk panels. 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 a small increase in the number of our Children in Care having a missing episode in the last 12 months, 18 in March 23 against 21 in March 24. At the time of writing this reduced to 19 children. **Positively however, the overall number of missing incidents for all children has reduced from 95 in March 23 to 66 in March 24 and for children in care this number has reduced from 43 to 38 in the same period.**

**Whilst still higher than comparators, it is also positive to see the percentage of children in care (at any point in the last 6 months) with more than one missing episode has reduced from 10.3% in March last year to 8.8% in March this year.**

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. Audits have been undertaken on the 20 children with the most missing incidents recorded to ensure we are appropriately interpreting and recording missing when children's whereabouts are known. Quality of Practice and Action group gives oversight to this.



Missing children in Care, in Need or Vulnerable

# Children and young people with specific vulnerabilities

## Children in the 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 'Best Start in Life Advisors'.
- Implementing [Operation Encompass](#) in the early years to ensure all children experiencing domestic abuse receive timely support in their setting.

We have further strengthened our work for our youngest children and have redesigned services based on feedback from families, stakeholders and staff. We have re-shaped our approach to supporting children under 5, their families and early years settings and our team of locality-based Best Start in Life Advisors will use the Portage Principals to support children with additional needs and their families in the home and their settings. Each 'Advisor' will have a caseload of settings and will support them to meet the needs of all children identified as having specific vulnerabilities.

Due to the success of the pilot in Chesil locality we are embedding the Team Around the Setting (TAS) initiative in our offer. 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 collective strengths. This 'OneTeam' approach to how we offer support, information, advice, and guidance to EY providers includes multi-agency professional development opportunities for staff and supports early years practitioners in their practice and decision-making.

We are currently working with IMPOWER and a specific cohort of children in the early years who are believed to require specialist provision, to ensure robust and effective phase transfer to school. This project engages parents and carers, settings and our teams to enhance the readiness of the system to meet the needs of these children.

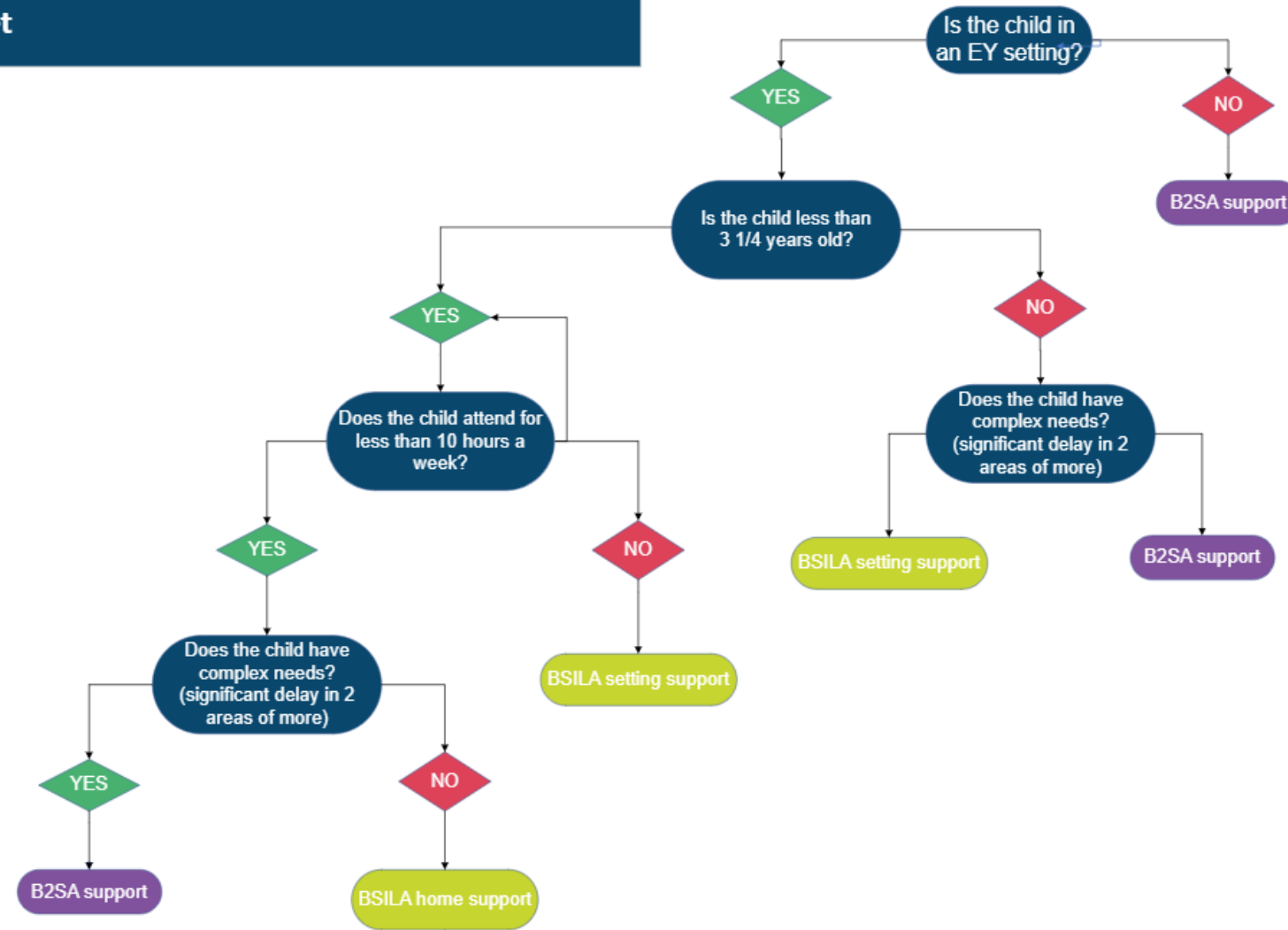
# Children and young people with specific vulnerabilities

Early years: Child, family and setting support  
Best Start in Life Advisors  
Dorset

## Key

BSILA - 'Locality' Best Start in Life Advisor (13 positions)

B2SA - 'Birth to Settled Adulthood' BSIL Advisor (2 positions)



**BSILA home support**

- 1 or 2 home visits per month
- Up to 5 months of support
- Monthly Play & Learn session

**BSILA setting support**

- IP target setting support
- Support for individual strategies for child

**B2SA support**

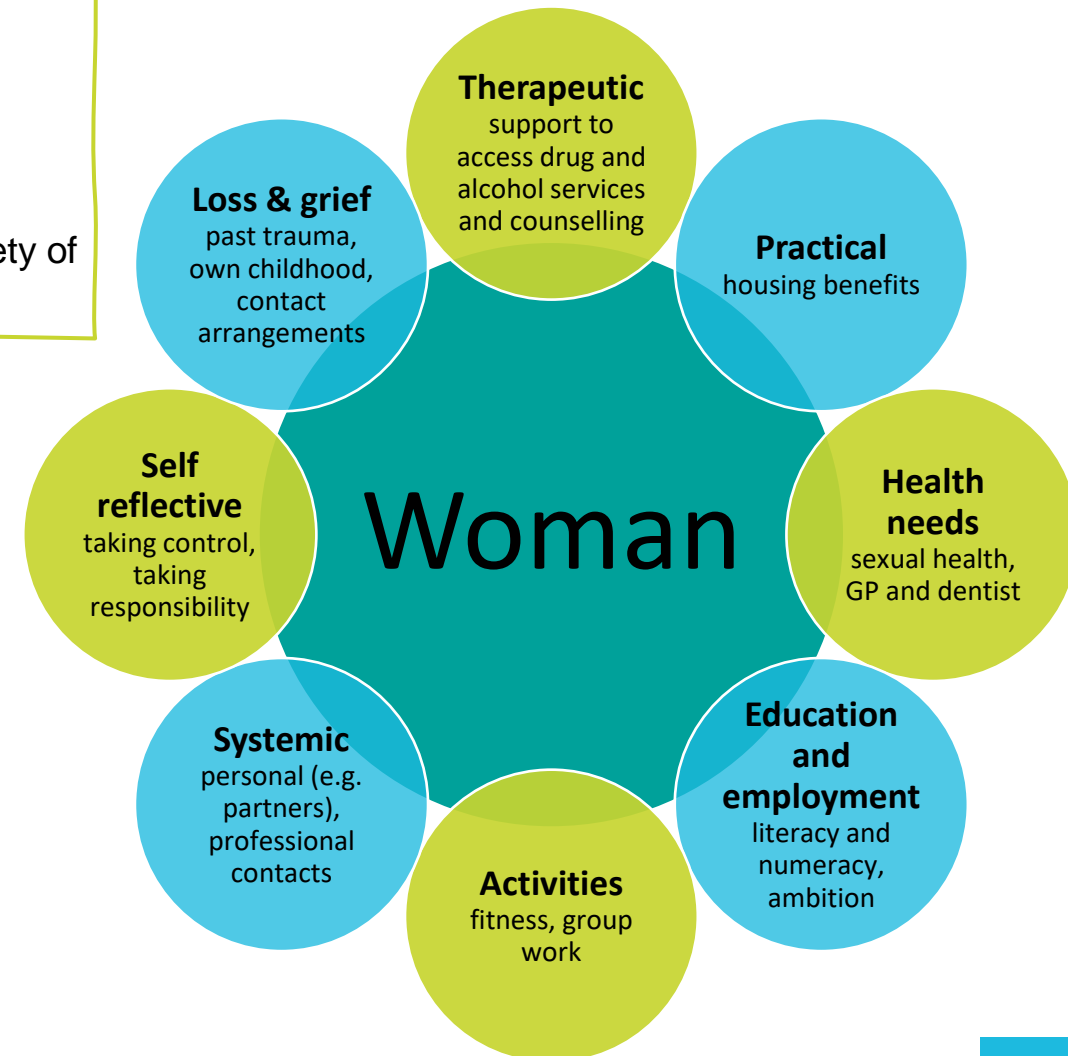
- Phase 1: 12 x fortnightly home visits
- Phase 2: 3 x 3 weekly visits
- Phase 3: 2 x monthly visits
- Up to 9 months of support
- Monthly Play & Learn session

# Pause

- Pause was launched in Dorset in July 2022. The Programme is designed to improve the lives of women who have had – or at risk of having – more than one child removed from their care.
- Dorset Pause is working with a cohort of 19 women who have collectively had 57 children removed from their care
- The programme provides a tailor made 18-month programme of support to each woman to meet their individual needs and their hopes for the future across a variety of areas, from housing to improving relationships with children.

## Two areas of ongoing focus

- Many of the women had specialist assessments as part of family court proceedings that recommended treatment that was not ongoing post care proceedings. Pause to support with strengthening the links with independent assessments as part of care proceedings with ongoing post removal of children from these women.
- When women have their children removed, they become eligible for bedroom tax on the social housing they live in or are at risk of being homeless or being rehoused. Housing are members of the Pause Board and have made a commitment to working with each woman within the Pause cohort where challenges with housing arise, so they are not disadvantaged.





# Chickerell Camp

In November 2023 Dorset Council was advised of immediate plans for Chickerell Camp to be used to provide temporary accommodation to support people from Afghanistan. We welcomed children and families who are **entitled persons** under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) in December 2023.

The intention of initial plans was that Chickerell Camp would be an RSOM (Reception, Staging and Onward Movement) Site with families arriving on short notice and leaving after different intervals of time, according to when longer-term housing is sourced for them. The site has a maximum capacity of 250 People (mixed ages in family groups), housed in barrack style accommodation. The Home Office and Ministry of Defence have given an estimated length of stay of six weeks for each arriving family, however once a family leaves the site, a new family may be flown in. The length of stay has not been as expected and families have been staying much longer due to challenges in sourcing onward accommodation.

We continue to lean in and provide high levels of support and challenge to ensure quality of service is delivered to those on camp. We also continue to provide vital staffing support on site through the Resettlement Team, Locality and wider Children's services and provide connection across to services in the community.

Children have been allocated school places and we are continuing that process for those children on Camp of school age on a rolling bases according to length of stay on site, the priority has been the placing of those children who have been resident on site for more than ten weeks.

We have been advised that the site is now expected to be operational until winter 2025.

## Multi Agency Forum Arrangements in place:

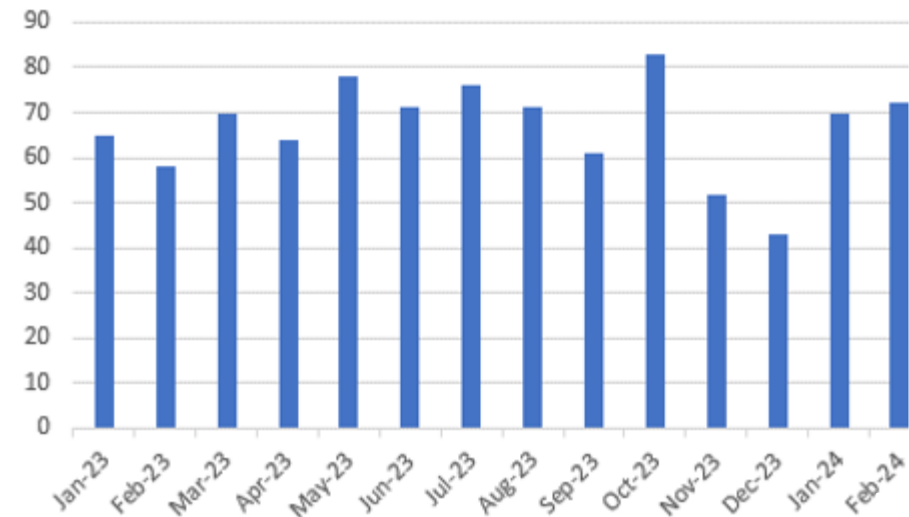
- To ensure a multi-agency strategic line of sight to support and services provided to families' resident at the Chickerell Camp
- To provide support and challenge to each other to ensure that services provided are of good quality, meet statutory requirements and deliver good outcomes for children and families
- To unblock barriers and support with solutions to ensure a good service is provided to families
- To ensure links between Chickerell Camp and the community
- To ensure appropriate communications regarding Chickerell Camp

# Quality and Impact of Assessments and Plans

% of Audit Gradings - CSW & EH - Jan-23 - Jan-24



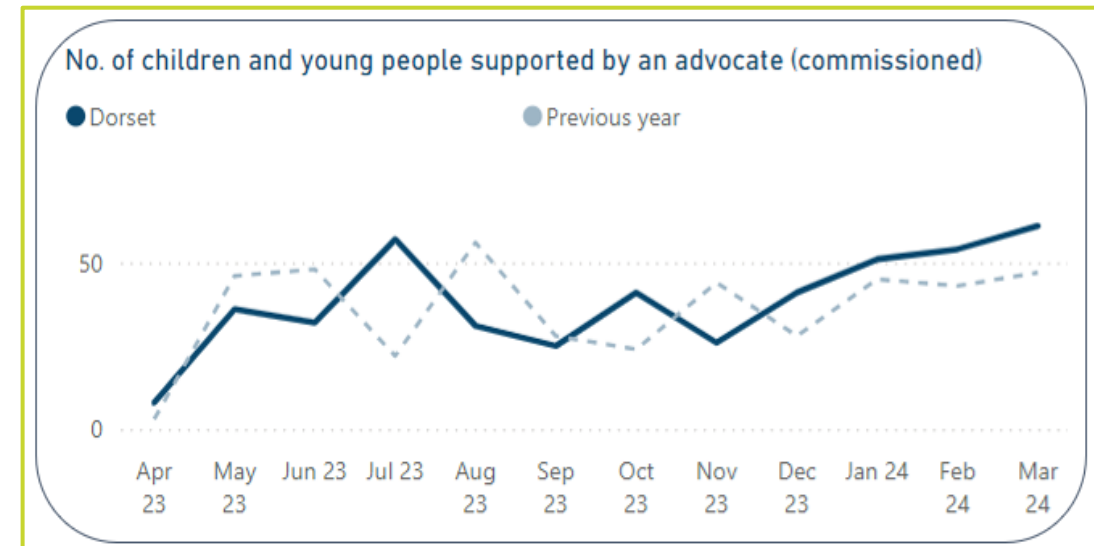
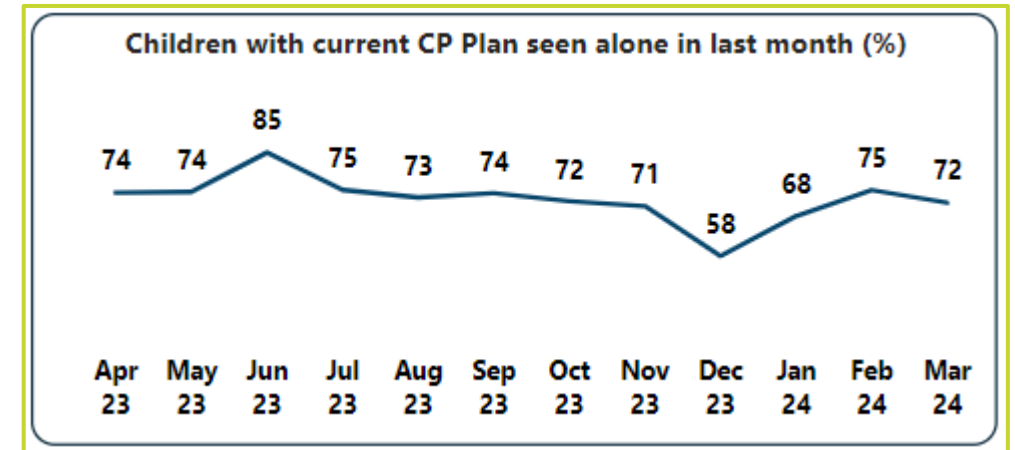
CSW & EH - % Good and Outstanding



- Overall, the quality and impact of our assessments and plans are consistently Good
- Some identified work being done with teams to improve up to date recording on files.
- March inspection impacted and agreed due to external review and this would be paused.
- March and April was also utilised to create a Pathfinder base line and so a slightly different audit was undertaken
- Areas Requiring Improvement for the months detailed above relate to our work in Early Help, we have been bringing supervision requirements in line with our practice in social care and also have clear expectations around chronologies that had not been met. Actions identified through audit have been progressed and supervision records have been updated and required actions completed.

# Engagement and direct work with families

- We have created and trained a team of Family Group Conference (FGC) co-ordinators to deliver FGC's. We have identified and trained facilitators of Family Network Meetings.
- Visiting children and children seen alone - our practice standard for children being seen in a minimum of every 4 weeks, subject to age and understanding.
- We are strongly committed to advocacy - we are expanding our approach to advocacy across the system for children, young people, parents and carers. We are thinking of advocacy as a continuum, from self-advocacy through to commissioned advocacy.
- Let's Talk – we have introduced an online event every six weeks, based on themes suggested by parents and carers of children with SEND. A panel of practitioners respond live to questions and comments, ensuring there is a feedback loop to continuously strengthen relationships and practice. The frequency of this has increased due to overwhelming feedback that this provides helpful support and information to families.



# Safeguarding Families Together

- Our Safeguarding Families Together model forms part of our locality offer and is based on the innovation designed in Hertfordshire County Council as part of DfE Children's Social Care Innovation Programme
- The aim is for children to remain living with their families where it is safe to do so
- SFT focuses on supporting parents and carers in relation to specific safeguarding concerns – there is a growing evidence base relating to positive outcomes across domains
- We've implemented in three pilot localities in Dorset and there is an implementation plan underway for a full council roll out by the end of the year
- All child protection work will have multi-agency group supervision utilising the principles of Safeguarding Families Together model of working



We will offer the right support at the right time, to improve family life

# Safeguarding Families Together

- Safeguarding Families Together practitioners are currently working with 110 families (205 children). There are currently 265 adult practitioner relationships with adults within these families as they have one or more adult practitioners as part of the SFT model enabling wrap around holistic support.
- 125 parents or carers are receiving help from Mental Health practitioners, 70 are receiving help from Drug and Alcohol practitioners and 70 are receiving help from Domestic Abuse officers – victim and perpetrator.
- Since the commencement of the pilot, **338 children** and their families has received help from SFT
- Out of the 133 children who have closed to SFT we are now seeing evidence of families successfully stepping down from Child Protection plans or Child in Need plans and sustaining change.

## Our families have told us....

*"I wouldn't have turned my life around without you guys and I'm determined to carry on"*

Parent March 2024 on completion of SFT work for substance recovery

*" Having SFT Reach and MH workers at the same time was brilliant, it really helped having everyone working together with me"*

February 2024: Substance recovery and Mental Health Support delivered as part of the SFT model - The parent attributes her success in being able to parent her child safely and see improved outcomes for him to this approach.

# Safeguarding Families Together

## Case Study – March 2024

### CASE STUDY REDACTED FOR DATA PROTECTION PURPOSES

*The family were referred to SFT. At this stage we were worried that an application to court may be required as if things could not change at home the children would not be safe to remain within their family. The children had been on a CP Plan for 2 years with little progress from parent. Since being referred to SFT Drug & Alcohol Intervention, the client is now on a methadone script and has returned to work. At the Review Child Protection case conference in 2023, the level of risk reduced resulting in the children being stepped down from CP to CIN. At the review the family were closed to CSC and to SFT Reach due to the progress that parent has made.*

*The parent engaged exceptionally well and is now abstinent from drug use. As a result, the parent's ability to provide basic care, encourage safety, emotional warmth, stimulation, routines and stability is significantly improved. The has improved the outcomes for the children. The children's attendance at school has improved significantly and they are not only achieving their age-related targets but in some areas of academia, they are exceeding them. The family have provided extremely positive and impactful feedback.*

# Key messages from the formative evaluation of Safeguarding Families Together pilot

- ✓ Successfully implemented
  - ✓ Shared aims and hopes for longer term preventive impact
  - ✓ Created a new shared value-based language across professional groups and with families
  - ✓ Improved information sharing and understanding of disciplinary perspectives for professionals
  - ✓ Provided a more holistic, accessible and responsive service for parents
  - ✓ Opportunities to expand geographically and towards a wider partnership
- 
- High demand, recruitment challenges, social work caseloads and statutory deadlines create logistical barriers

It seems like they're looking at the whole, how everything interrelates, so the domestic abuse and then the mental health and then your children are part of that...not everything's separate? ... It's enabling almost, yes, that word "holistic", to look at everything and around?

(Parent)

The whole concept really is for fewer children to be taken into care which is what everybody wants.

(Domestic abuse professional)

# Safeguarding Families Together – Case Study

Supporting a parents Recovery Journey overcoming addiction and rebuilding their family through the support of our Safeguarding Families Together Team

**CASE STUDY REDACTED FOR DATA PROTECTION PURPOSES**



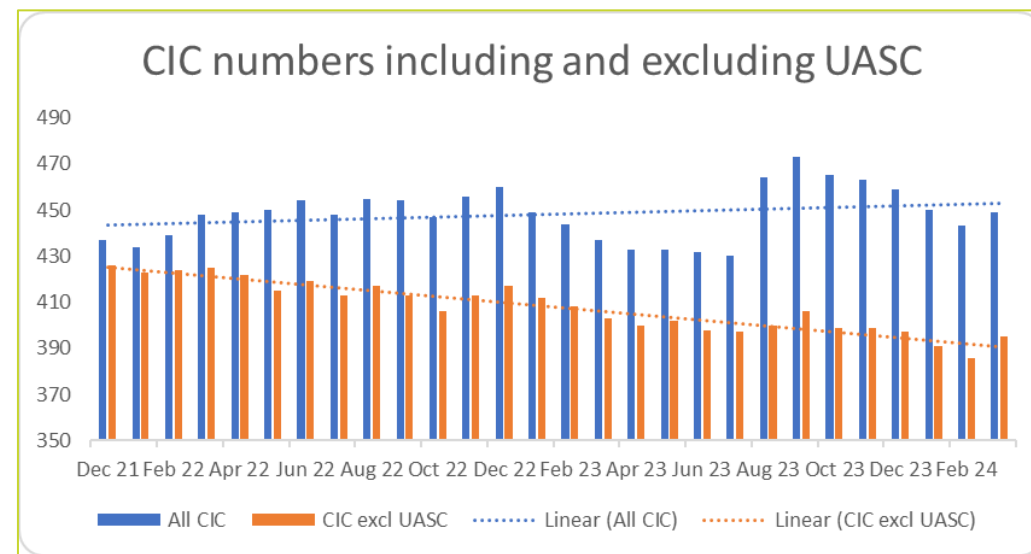
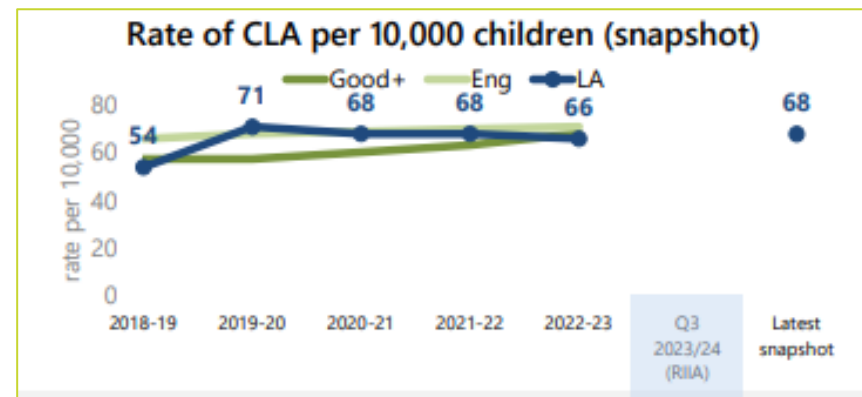
# Children In Care

Children in Care are supported by social workers across locality teams, and by the Birth To Settled Adulthood Service for children who are disabled. Within the Locality Teams the 4 locality-based Permanence teams support our children in care from 0-18 years of age where it is clear children are not returning home. The Permanence Teams are embedded within our place-based structure ensuring improved 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.

We have seen a reduction in the number of children from Dorset in our care during 2023/24, 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 68 per 10,000 population. Children continue to mostly enter care in a planned way through the oversight of weekly Line of Sight Meeting and Leadership Oversight and via planned court intervention.

At the end of March 2024, we had 449 children in our care, with 395 children from Dorset and 54 unaccompanied children.



# Placement Sufficiency

We have refreshed our Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2024-27

[Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers 2024 to 2027 - Dorset Council](#)

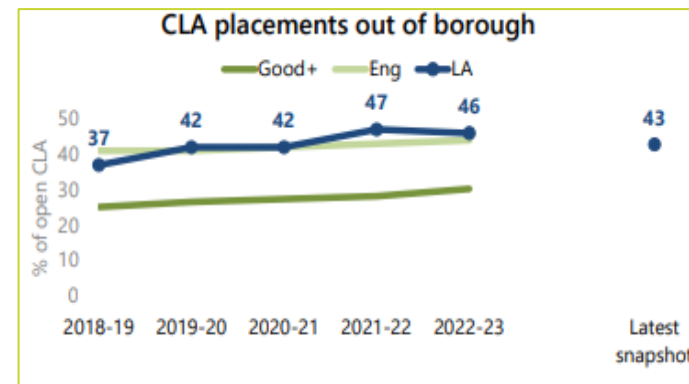
We have continued to move at pace to address our sufficiency gaps so that more of our children and young people can stay close to their homes and families. We are increasing placement sufficiency, including expanding in-house residential provision, and implementation of a plan to increase our fostering 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. A focus on peer-support, meaningful engagement, accessible training and the deployment of the Mockingbird model will support the resilience and retention of our existing carers.

We are participating in the Southwest regional pilot trialing a regional fostering recruitment and retention hub.

**A higher proportion - 69% - of our children in care are placed in foster care compared to our good or outstanding statistical neighbours and the average nationally.**

**Unregistered Provision - we continue to have no under 16s living in unregistered provision.**

Although we continue to make improvements, we still have too many children placed out of area. This is a particular issue for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, where we have been unable to secure sufficient local provision.



# The Harbour - our in care and edge of care service for young people

## Harbour and in-house residential provision

The Harbour multi-disciplinary team has grown steadily under consistent and committed leadership. The Harbour offers a combination of outreach, fostering and residential provision. The duration and intensity of support varies according to the needs of children. The **impact** of the Harbour Model includes:

Supporting young people to safely remain at home – Of the young people who were on the edge of care who were supported by Outreach, 93% of them remained at home.

Reduction of children age 13+ entering care

Reduction of new child protection plans for children age 13+

Improved family relationships.

Improved placement stability.

Following the impact of The Harbour in Weymouth, we are launching Harbour East in September 2024.

# In House Residential Provision

We have continued to expand our in-house residential provision and are continuing to develop further accommodation spaces.

## These include:

The Cherries, Weymouth – 2 bed home for children who are disabled - Latest inspection - Good

Chestnut House, Weymouth - 3 bed home for children who are disabled – registered December 2023

College House, Weymouth - 3 bed home for children with social emotional and mental health needs – Latest inspection Good

Hayeswood, Wimborne – 3 bed short break home for children who are disabled – registered October 2023

## In development:

The Rowans, Wimborne – single occupancy for a child with social emotional and mental health needs – registration submitted

Sunnyside Bungalow, Weymouth – single occupancy for a children with social emotional and mental health needs

The Chalet, Wimborne – short breaks

Brackenbury, Portland – lifelong home

The Dorset Centre of Excellence, Shaftesbury

# Mockingbird Family Model of Fostering

We launched our first Mockingbird Constellation in November 2022. We currently have 5 Constellations, Draco, Orion, Gemini and Pegasus, and our fifth one recently launched still to be named. We will be launching our sixth constellation in August 2024, making us the largest in the South-West region and on par with Leeds in the country. We aim to have a total of 10 Constellations over the 5-year programme. Children and young people continue to select the name of each constellation.

**The Mockingbird Society in Seattle (creators on the model) have been so impressed with our progress that they have invited us over to Seattle to share our learning and achievements**

We are seeing a real **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 and  
young people  
within the  
constellation.

Supportive  
relationships  
formed  
between  
foster carers.

Recognition of  
hidden talents  
within our  
young people.



# Placement Stability

- **69% of children in care are living in a foster home** which is higher than national average and good+ statistical neighbours.
- Mockingbird has made a significant contribution to short term and long-term placement stability both of which continue to be strong and above national average and good + statistical neighbours.
- We remain ambitious to enable our children to live in settled and stable placements. **The proportion of children in care with 3 plus placements moves in the last 12 months at end of March 2024 was 10.6%.**
- **The proportion of children in care for 2.5 years who were in placements of two years or more was 70.4%.** We are pleased that this is a significant improvement compared to March 2023 when performance on this indicator was 64%.
- As part of our strategy to improve placement stability and permanence outcomes, **the Council has approved a capital pot of £1m to fund foster carer and adopter home extensions and adaptations** to secure additional capacity, and to enable sibling groups to be placed together where accommodation space might otherwise be a barrier.



# Permanence Planning – A Forever Home Built on Love



- From the moment we start working with children we think about the range of permanence options. We already have a strong emphasis on family networks and potential kinship options and expect to enhance this work through the Pathfinder work. We maintain a strong focus on the importance of sibling relationships, potential lifelong links and reunification pathways.
- Our pre-proceedings and care proceedings work is undertaken within the Locality Teams, and we have 4 Permanence Teams who undertake the work with children in care following the conclusion of proceedings.
- Our desire to continue to promote and secure permanence for as many of our children as possible has resulted in the creation of a new Permanence Service Manager role. The postholder will line manage the Permanence Teams and provide matrix management across the system. This will allow for even more focused attention to be given to securing permanence for our children.
- As well as routine Permanence Planning Meetings, all children in pre-proceedings, care proceedings and in our care are considered at monthly permanence tracking meetings. These meetings are chaired by a senior manager and include representatives from Aspire (Regional Adoption Agency) and Birth to Settled Adulthood in relation to transition planning.
- Currently Aspire assess and provide support to Special Guardians . As part of our new Family Network Strategy and Pathfinder developments we are in the process of bringing Special Guardianship work back in-house to create a specialist 'kinship care ' service to improve and streamlines the approach to permanence for children with kinship carers – for example undertaking just one proportionate assessment for both Fostering Panel and Special Guardianship Court requirements and developing a tailored support offer for kinship families.

# Permanence Outcomes



- The proportion of children who have an up-to date Permanence Plan was **93%** at end of March 2024.
- We continue to deliver strong performance for the number and proportion of children in care achieving permanence through Adoption, Special Guardianships, and re-unification. Improved pathways for reunification are being embedded to ensure that children remain in our care only for as long as is necessary.
- The proportion of children in care who left care via adoption in 2023/24 was 11%. Although a reduction from the 15.3% in 2022/23, 11% is higher than the latest national average performance
- Adoption timeliness has improved significantly. The most recent data, April 24, shows the **number of days between coming into care and being placed for adoption on average for children adopted in the previous 12 months was 426 days.**
- **The latest data from April 2024 shows the number of days on average between a Placement Order being granted and a decision by the ADM on a match was 115 days. This has improved from 236 days in April 2023.** Both of these timeliness measures are now in line or better than the previous national target for adoption timeliness.
- Early Permanence Placements – we made a total of **19 Early Permanence Placements in 2023/24**, a significant improvement on the 2 made the previous year
- Special Guardianship – The proportion of children who left care via Special Guardianship was 11.8% in 2023/24, an increase on the 9.3% the previous year. As part of our Pathfinder developments, we will be bringing the Special Guardianship Service back in house from Aspire to create a specialist kinship care service tailored to the needs of kinship carers
- Re-unification – the proportion of children who left care via family re-unification was 20.9%, a decrease from 28.3% the previous year.
- While the reduction in the proportion of children adopted from care is following a national trend, we do know that the increase in our UASC population in Dorset has contributed to the performance data in relation to permanence. The proportion of our children in care population who are UASC is now larger. Almost invariably none of these children leave care via adoption, SGO or family re-unification, impacting on the overall proportion of children in care who leave via these routes.



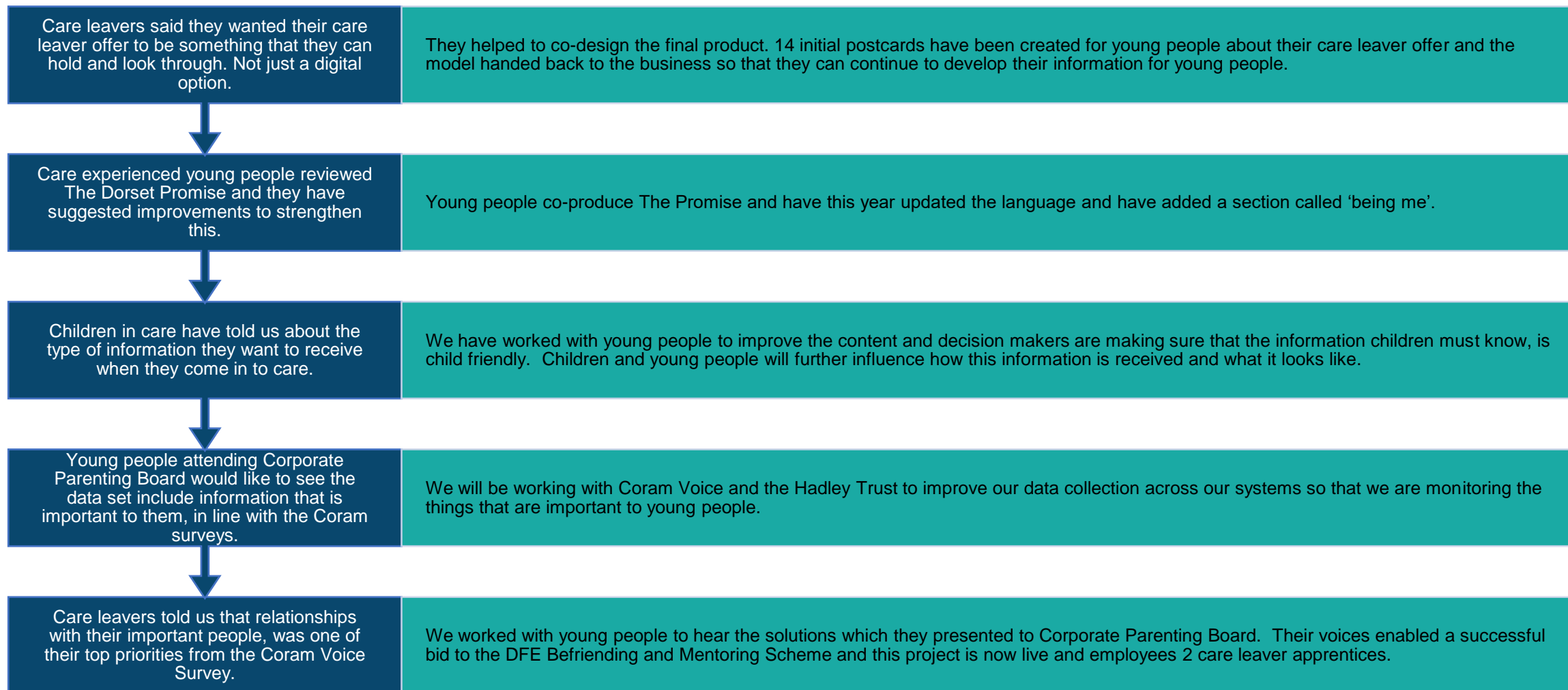
# Voices of care experienced children and young people

- The Network, replaces the 'Children in Care Council' and 'Care Leaver Forum'. Children and young people have said that the names of these groups can act as barriers to them taking part.
- We want children in care and care leavers (our experts by experience) to feel a sense of belonging as a member of The Network. A place where they can show up as themselves and use their voice at different times and in different ways.
- An annual survey, is one of the ways that our children and young people lead the Youth Voice priorities and activities. The surveys, which focus on wellbeing, are conducted in partnership with Coram Voice ([Bright Spots Programme - Coram Voice](#)). The Youth Voice Team have conversations across 'The Network' to work with children and young people to understand their priorities from the results. The team continue to work with The Network to co-design solutions, presenting these to Corporate Parenting Board for consideration and action.
- We will be working with the Hadley Trust to consider how we can embed the data from the Brights Spots Programmes across our data collection systems, making sure that we are also reporting on the areas that are most important to children and young people.
- Another way we hear from younger children, is by hosting Fostering Family Days with the Virtual School and Fostering teams. These are held 6 times a year across the county and always involve a fun activity combined with a voice activity.
- The Virtual School and the Care Leavers Team have heard how children and young people want their achievements to be celebrated. Celebrations happen all year and in personable ways, with annual celebrations also offering an opportunity for everyone to come together. National Care Leavers Week is also a time of celebration.
- Our children are seen regularly. In March 2024 85.52% of children in care had an up-to-date visit and at the time of writing, this has improved to 92.76%.
- NYAS deliver our advocacy and independent visitor service in Dorset, supporting our children and young people to have their views independently represented. They are also supported to self-advocate and make formal complaints when needed.



**Happiness jars from a Fostering Family Day in February 2024 - exploring what to do on a difficult day**

# Care experienced voices



*'help children and care leavers to go back and visit friends they may have lost touch with when they have moved as a result of being in care'*

*'Allow us to keep in touch with staff when they move on (with consent from both sides)'*

*'Staff allowed to keep in touch with care leavers on social media once past the age of 25'*

*'Some friends you can be really close to. It's important to me. You need friends you can trust to keep your information safe'*

# Children in care: health

**The latest data indicates that performance on all health indicators has improved, in most cases significantly, between April 2023 and April 2024.**

## 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.

## Initial Health Assessments

Until recently we had seen a continued underperformance which was due to several factors and challenges which include children placed out of area.

**Performance has improved between April 2023 and April 2024 from 33% to 79% undertaken within 20 days.** A formal review of the service has been undertaken by NHS Dorset and this will be a continued area of focus for the Strengthening Services Board and pan-Dorset Safeguarding Partnership.



# Children in care: health

## Annual (review) health assessments

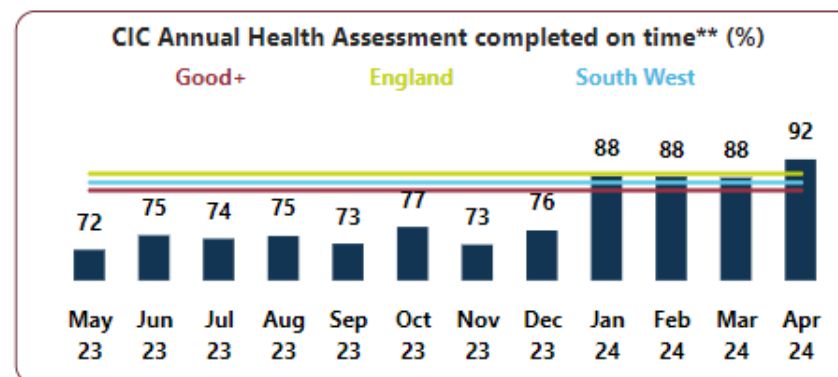
It is positive that the timely completion of review annual health assessments has improved significantly over the last 4 months and has **increased from 76% in April 2023 to 92% in April 2024**. This will continue to be an area of focus for the ICB Designated nurse.

## Dental health

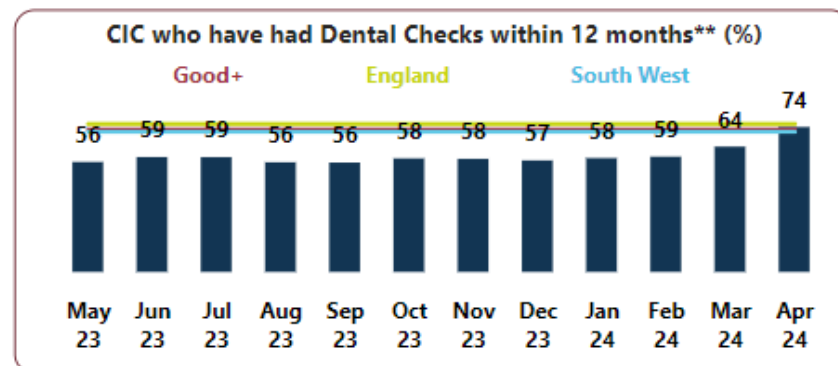
We recognise the importance of good dental health and that this has been a real area of challenge for us in Dorset. We continue to work with our foster carers, carers and health colleagues to ensure that timely dental appointments are made for our children. **Children in care who have had a dental appointment has increased from 57% in April 2023 to 74% in April 2024**.

## Immunisations

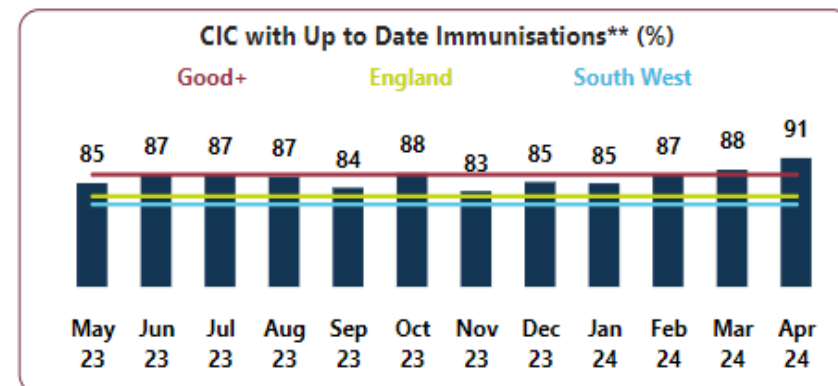
Completion of immunisations has **increased between April 2023 and April 2024 from 87% to 91%**.



\*\* for CIC 12+ Months



\*\* for CIC 12+ Months



# Children in care: health



## Emotional wellbeing and mental health

We are working to improve the completion rate for Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) and we have seen a recent increase.

Positively the average score of those completed has reduced from 16.2 for 22-23 to what we predict will be 14.8 for 23-24 for our children in care aged 4-16. 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.

This year has seen the start of the development of a Psychology Hub located at The Harbour under the oversight of the Service Manager for Residential Services, with clinical line management being provided by Clinical Lead - Specialist CAMHS for Care, Adoption and Permanence. The Hub enables the co-location of clinical psychologists who deliver services to Adoption, Fostering and Kinship Service, alongside the embedded Harbour psychologist, creating flexibility across the system and the potential to develop extended roles of assistant psychologist and mental health practitioners.

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.

# Children in care: health

Our Foster Carers have identified an increased level of need for support, advice, and guidance from 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 partnership agreement was implemented in April 2022 which we continue to review alongside the remodelling of CAMHS, to ensure that it is bringing about the positive impact we require for our children and young people. Early Help staff also support with children's mental health and advise on the availability of other local support for families. Professionals or families can make a request for support directly. Future development plans to embed CAMHS into our locality model are being progressed through the Families First for Children Pathfinder.

We have been working with our Health colleagues to mitigate the lack of Tier 4 provision locally and nationally by developing and delivering multi-agency outreach support and health commissioned CQC and Ofsted registered (SC1 submitted) care provision for one of our most complex young people.

# Children in care: education

## Dorset Virtual School

- The aim of our virtual school is to ensure that all Children in Care, Care Leavers and children with a Social Worker feel they belong in their educational setting and thrive in their learning. We aim for our children to have their needs met and to aspire for their futures whilst feeling safe in education and their lives.
- Our ambition is to ensure that all our children thrive and achieve through the targeted monitoring of and challenging of attendance, progress, attainment and exclusions within the Virtual School. This includes the reduction of children missing education, a reduction in the number of persistent absentees and exclusions. The Virtual School aims to deliver targeted interventions for schools and settings to support inclusion and raise aspiration for their Children in Care and Care Leavers.



# Children in care: education impact

- The Virtual School has developed a Dorset Virtual School Toolkit for Belonging and Inclusion in collaboration with UCL's PALAC Project (Promoting the achievement of Children in Care). The Virtual School are in its 3rd year of collaboration with UCL's PALAC Project to encourage sharing of best practice on a knowledge exchange programme. This has supported 19 settings to undertake action research within their settings to improve outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- The Virtual School have built upon its support for our increasing numbers of unaccompanied young people during 2022- 23. Our specific handbook has been translated into 4 different languages based upon the cohort of children within our school and this has been shared at initial PEPs as an opportunity for language learning and support to settle into new communities.
- The Virtual School have focused on attendance for children this term using fortnightly scrutiny meetings to ensure that the team are aware of patterns in attendance.

**Currently, (May 2024) attendance for our school aged children is 88%. However, all year groups are above 90% attendance with the exception of year 10 (84.9%) and year 11 (75.87%)**

- **There has been a reduction in permanent exclusions this year within our Dorset schools (1 PEX).** Significant work has been undertaken this term to prevent further permanent exclusions including workshops at the January 2024 Designated Teacher Conference and targeted CPD for the Virtual School team around alternatives to Suspension.
- A targeted intervention for children with an EHCP or SEN need seeking a school place has been introduced that includes a programme of learning for our children, to ensure their right to an education is realised whilst searches are carried out.





# Children in care: education impact

- We have seen an improvement in achievement rates at GCSE with **28.57% of our cohort achieving a grade 4 or above in maths (13.64% in 2021/22) and 21.42% achieving a grade 4 or above in English (22.7% in 2021/22)**. Targeted tuition and an online learning platform have been offered to our young people in year 11 to help close gaps and enhance learning.
- There has also been a marked increase in the number of young people achieving 5 grade 4's and above at 30.95% compared to 13.6% in 2021/22 with 16.67% achieving 5 grade 4s and above including English and maths (9.1% in 2021/22).
- Children in year 6 are performing well for reading, writing and maths in comparison to the previous year.
- The school had seven young people in year 13 undertaking their final year of their level 3 qualification. 100% passed with all progressing to a university course or higher apprenticeship, ranging from a Degree Apprenticeship in Engineering, degrees in Wildlife Conservation and Ecology, Agricultural Business Management and media to Foundation degrees at local colleges
- The number of Good or Outstanding PEPs has been maintained and there has been an **increase in timeliness for PEP completion from 63% to 92% since the Autumn Term**. There has been an increase in attendance at PEPs for children, social workers, Personal Advisors and Designated Teachers compared to Autumn 2023. This ensures that the child's voice is heard and at the centre of our work. It also ensures that progress, attendance and outcomes are scrutinised.
- In the early years, we recently delivered a training session for practitioners working with children in care, or children who have experienced disrupted early years relationships. The aim was to support practitioners to understand the impact of strong attachments for our youngest children. This is planned to be an ongoing programme of support.



# Children in care: education impact

- During this academic year, the Virtual School have undertaken two residential visits to Jamie's Farm in Wales with targeted groups of children and young people. The impact of these events have seen an 18% change in children's well-being from start to end of the week and 7.4% increase on emotional well-being scale 6 weeks after the event.
- Dorset Virtual School have undertaken a piece of work to explore the extra-curricular activities of our children and young people with 84% of our children (statutory school age) being involved in at least one after school activity. This work guided our offer of widening opportunities during this academic year and has included:
  - A one-day creative writing course in collaboration with Dorset history Centre to explore writing styles through history, becoming detectives to uncover the past and craft activities including making their own quill.
  - A Digital day in collaboration with Bournemouth University and Arts University Bournemouth, with young people undertaking workshops in digital coding, digital photography and creating artwork in virtual reality.
  - An outdoor learning day in collaboration with Weymouth Outdoor Activity Centre where young people have taken part in stand-up paddle boarding and kayaking.



"I learned that true happiness is possible"

**Dorset Child  
in Care**

# Children in care: education

## What do we need to improve?

Two of our children in out of county settings have had permanent exclusions

Significant work has been undertaken this term to prevent further permanent exclusions including workshops at the January 2024 Designated Teacher Conference and targeted CPD for the Virtual School team around alternatives to suspension to reduce the risk of permanent exclusions occurring for our cohort.

To date, 15% (49 children) had at least one suspension during the academic year. Whilst this is almost exactly the same as the previous year there is a higher propensity of children in out of county schools receiving suspensions. Effective work undertaken in county will be expanded to out of county schools.

We will focus on reading standards in Key Stage 1 to ensure that more children are working at expected levels. The Virtual School have focused on literacy interventions and PEP targets to focus schools on this aim.

## Dorset Virtual School

Toolkit for Belonging and Inclusion



# Children in care: education

## Future focus

The Dorset Virtual School will be expanding this term to further improve our work for children with a Social Worker. This is alongside strengthening of the locality teams and building on existing inclusion teams and targeted youth support that will enhance our support and challenge with education providers. The Virtual School will also be able to build on professional development work with early years settings, schools, colleges and locality teams to create a culture of high aspirations, so that all children with social workers make educational progress.

Further focus on our support for children in kinship care arrangements, to provide support with the kinship care forum and consider the activities offered in collaboration with our youth voice team to ensure that all children have access to a breadth of learning opportunities.

Focus on children in out-of-county schools who are suspended/ permanently excluded through preventative work with settings.

Focus on mentoring for young people who are considering higher education with a year-long programme planned.

Focus on mentoring for young people from year 10 upwards where professionals are finding it difficult to engage with education.

# Birth to Settled Adulthood Service

- In April 2024 we launched our new 0 to 25 Birth to Settled Adulthood Service for Children with a Disability and complex needs.
- This is a partnership between Children's Services, Adult Services, the Health Service, and Dorset Parent Carer Council, and managed within Children's Services.
- It is designed and committed to the provision of a consistently good service for disabled children and young people and their families, which continues seamlessly from childhood to young adulthood.
- We're seeing the immediate benefits of co-working improving knowledge and understanding across areas and implementing changes alongside the service re-design.
- A dedicated workforce plan is supporting with development, training and co-production.
- We have worked closely with the Dorset Parent Carer Council and our children and young people, to both formulate our plans and vision.



# Birth to Settled Adulthood Service

## Phase 1 launched on 30 April 2024

- Creation of a flexible 0-25 service model for Dorset Council
- Right workers supporting the child, young person and family at the right time
- Early planning to support transitions
- Improved support for parent carers to build resilience, knowledge and confidence in caring for their child or young person
- Practical support to build skills for independence
- Support to navigate the Local Offer, information advice and guidance
- Education Health and Care Plans play a key role in joint working and have a stronger focus on Preparation for Adulthood outcomes
- Maintains and enhances statutory Safeguarding and Short Breaks functions.

## Internal changes

- Management of the service hosted in Children's Services
- Shared responsibility for Key Performance Indicators
- Embedded specialisms within the service including early years Best Start in Life Advisors
- Ability to draw in expertise from other teams
- Appointment of a dedicated Head of Service for Birth to Settled Adulthood who will also hold the DSCO role.
- Align funding decisions



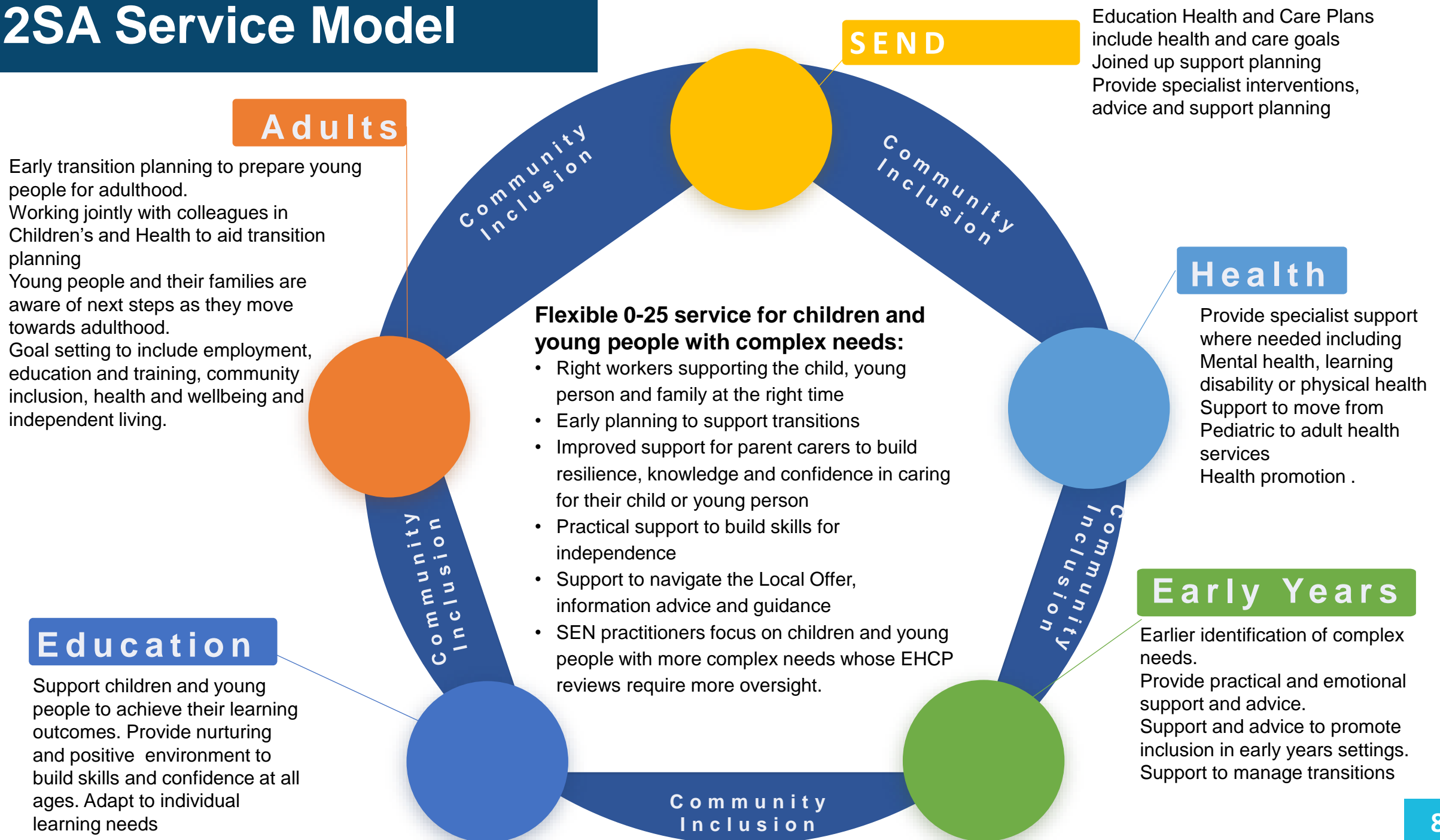
### Outcomes Framework

We have co-produced 'I Statements' with children, young people and parents and are developing 'We Statements' as the basis of our outcomes framework.

### Links

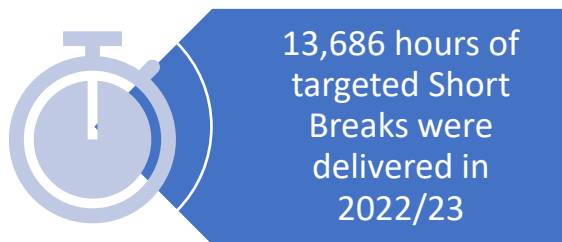
Joint Declaration video [Birth to Settled Adulthood declaration \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)  
Birth to Settled Adulthood webpage [Birth to Settled Adulthood - Dorset Council](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/...)  
Committee Report [Birth to Settled Adulthood report September 2021 V2 Final.pdf \(dorsetcouncil.gov.uk\)](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/...)

# B2SA Service Model



# Short breaks

We commission targeted group based Short Breaks, as well as specialist and overnight Short Breaks



Providers collect feedback from young people and their families to tell us about the impact of Short Breaks, here is some of what they tell us:

'I made friends with new people'

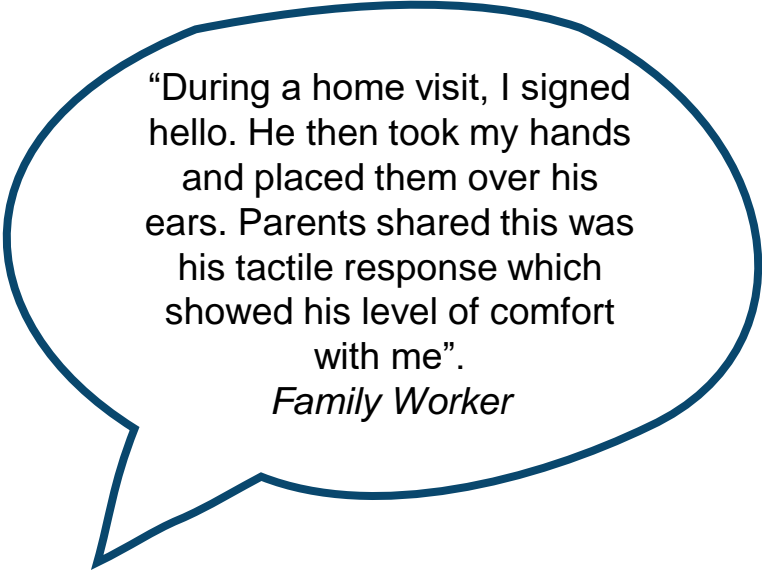
'This group has allowed our son to take part in a group setting with children that allows him to feel like he fits in. A safe and welcoming environment with good activities. Thank you!'



# B2SA – Case Study

Case study regarding a child with diagnoses of ASC, learning difficulties and Global Developmental Delay who is non-verbal, and opportunities to grow independence and build relationships with others through access to a Short Breaks package with support from the B2SA Early Help team.

**CASE STUDY REDACTED FOR DATA PROTECTION PURPOSES**



“During a home visit, I signed hello. He then took my hands and placed them over his ears. Parents shared this was his tactile response which showed his level of comfort with me”.

*Family Worker*

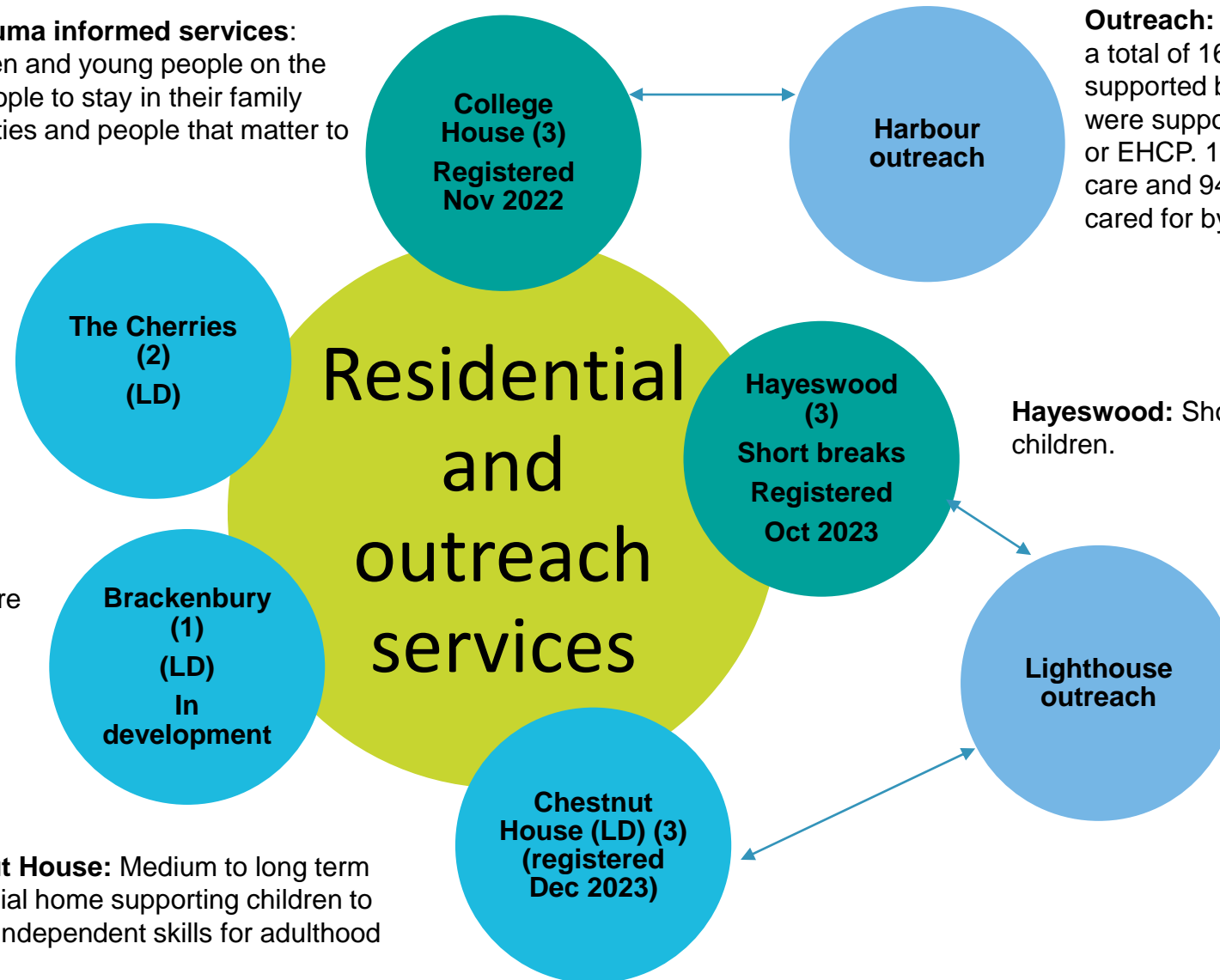
# In-house residential and outreach services

**College house: multi-agency trauma informed services:** Residential and outreach for children and young people on the edge of care. Supporting young people to stay in their family settings and local to their communities and people that matter to them.

**Cherries:** Close down plan underway. Children being supported with their move on plans

**Solo homes:** planning for the future and developing forever a forever home for children, to reduce the need to move on.

**Chestnut House:** Medium to long term Residential home supporting children to develop independent skills for adulthood



**Outreach:** As at the end of September 2023 a total of 166 young people have been supported by the Harbour. 50% of children were supported either through SEN support or EHCP. 108 children were on the edge of care and 94% were supported to remain cared for by their family.

**Hayeswood:** Short break home for children.

**Outreach:** Support is provided for children and young people with disabilities. The aim is to support families and young people within their family home.

## Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service

- Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service is a Pan-Dorset partnership comprising Dorset Council, BCP Council, NHS Dorset, 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 last inspection report for the YJS was published in January 2023, rating the service as 'Good'.**
- The YJS prioritises strong relationships with children, responding to each child using assessments by the YJS Speech and Language Therapists, and trauma formulations by the YJS psychologist and CAMHS nurses.
- 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 works closely with 'The Harbour' (Adolescent Residential and Outreach Service). The service is also represented on the Extra-Familial Harm Strategic, Tactical and Champions groups and participates in the locality-based Youth at Risk and Extra-Familial Harm meetings.
- **The number of First-Time Entrants in the Dorset Council area has dropped from 106 in 2018/19 to an average of 47 in the 3 years to March 2024, reflecting partnership work to divert children from formal justice outcomes.**
- **Dorset continues to see low levels of custodial sentences. No Dorset children were sentenced to custody in the period from April 2020 to March 2023. Just three Dorset children have received custodial sentences since April 2023.**
- The YJS and the Targeted Youth Service have jointly delivered the MoJ 'Turnaround' programme to strengthen local diversion options.
- More than 50% of school-age children on the YJS caseload in April 2024 have experienced school exclusions in the past 3 years and have been assessed needing an EHCP or SEN Support.
- The YJS Partnership is funding a 2-year pilot programme to provide SALT assessments and support for children at risk of school exclusion. The aim is to reduce school exclusions and prevent future offending, meeting partnership priorities to improve education outcomes and reduce contact with the justice system. The programme starts in July 2024.

# Care Leavers: accommodation

The Ofsted full ILACS inspection in September-October 2021, had one recommendation which was to improve “Oversight of arrangements when care leavers move in and out of emergency or temporary accommodation.” The focussed visit in May 2023 stated, **“there have been notable improvements in the quality and standard of accommodation.”**

**96% of our care leavers have suitable accommodation.** This remains a priority for Dorset Council, and we continue to work at pace to ensure that all our care leavers have safe, stable, and permanent homes. Very few live in unsuitable accommodation and if, (or when) they do, there are systems to ensure that additional management oversight is in place. This helps to ensure that more appropriate housing is provided as quickly as possible.

We have been able to further support our care leavers through the **appointment of 2 housing officers within the Care Leaver Service.** 1 supports those living in care leaver accommodation and the other to support maintaining tenancies and reducing the risk of homelessness. Both posts are joint funded between housing and children’s services which further strengthens the collaborative approach to meeting our care leavers housing needs.

**Dorset Council commissions 87 local supported accommodation places (up to 18 months duration) for young people aged 16-25 through its Supported Accommodation Framework, of which 15 are for unaccompanied young people seeking asylum who are in care; 30 places are for children in care or care leavers and 40 are for young people aged 16-21 who are at risk of homelessness.**

For those young people in unsuitable accommodation (such as B&B, custody or staying with friends on a temporary basis), their pathway plan is updated and there is a higher frequency of visits by the PA, an offer of practical support and exit planning. Consistency in the quality and timeliness of supervision has improved over the last year, ensuring our management oversight is driving forward our planning for children. We are consistently at 100% for supervision held every 4 weeks to review and reflect on the impact of unsuitable housing or circumstances for these young people.

# Care Leavers

Dorset Council aims to provide care leavers with the same level of care and support that other young people receive from their parents. We continue to strengthen support and services for our Care Leavers.

At the end of March 2024, we had 592 care leavers in our family. 298 were former relevant care leavers (aged 18-25 and previously an eligible child) and were receiving a service.

On 17 and 18 May 2023, HMI Ofsted inspectors undertook a focused visit to Dorset Children's Services, considering the arrangements for care leavers. The visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. The headline finding from the visits was that

**“Leaders have significantly strengthened support and services for care leavers and have made notable improvements in the quality and standard of their accommodation.”**

We have consulted with care leavers and stakeholders and developed a 'local offer' which provides detailed information about the service and support available to care leavers, including information about both their statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support we provide. This is provided to young people leaving care at age 16 and can be accessed via the internet. Ofsted considered our local offer as strong and were supportive of the plans to continue to grow and develop commenting in their focused visit in May 2023

“Personal advisers are proud to be able to deliver a plethora of services to help and support young people. There is a determination to make the offer even stronger.”

# Care Leavers



We are consistently in touch with 98% of our care leavers

## Personal Advisors

We have high expectations and aspirations for all our care leavers. When young people are preparing to leave care, we want to ensure that they feel as ready as possible and know what to expect.

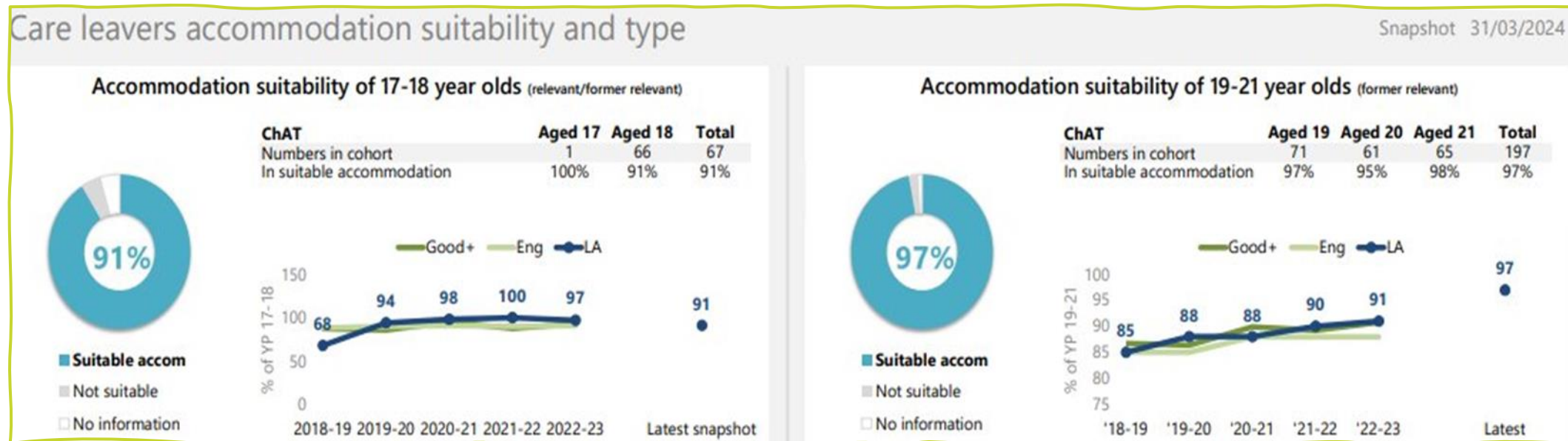
Our model of interdependence aims to ensure that our young people have the support of the Personal Advisor (PA) to guide them around key areas. Personal Advisers are secondary allocated to young people as soon as possible after their 16 birthday. This is to enable a smooth transition from their social worker to the Care Leaver service once they are 18.

Relational practice is at the heart of our work with young people, building trusting, supportive relationships. Our care leavers consistently tell us that they have a positive relationship with their PA which is evidenced through the records of visits, calls, and communication. This was highlighted as an area of strength in the feedback from HM Ofsted inspectors in May 2023.

We continue to contact all our care leavers at least annually to share information on what they are entitled to and the support we can offer them, at any point until they are 25. Over the last 12 months we have continued our focus on pathway planning. **On 31 March 2024 90% of care leavers had an up-to-date Pathway Plan.** This is a continuing area of focus for the team as we need to ensure that all our young people have an up-to-date Pathway Plan that is ambitious and supports our young people to move towards independence.

# Care Leavers: accommodation

## Care Leavers accommodation



# Care Leavers: accommodation

## Staying Put

- There are 30 care leavers in a Staying Put arrangements with their previous foster carers, this is an increase from 22 since March 2023. 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 are actively recruiting supported lodging hosts as we know this is an area of growing need for our care experienced young people.

## Supported Lodgings

- 27 care leavers are in supported lodgings homes.

## Staying Close

- In 2022 Dorset was successful in being awarded a 3-year DfE grant to pilot 'Staying Close', This is helping young people stay in touch with and get ongoing support from Children's Home carers after they move on. Our Staying Close project has seen young people retain links through formalised support arrangements. We are actively supporting 12 young people under Staying Close arrangements. We are anticipating an additional 12 care leavers accessing staying close over the next 12 months.

## In-house accommodation provision

Kirtleton Avenue: 12 self-contained flats

Clarence Road: a shared house for 3 care leavers

Leon Centre: flats for 6 unaccompanied care leavers

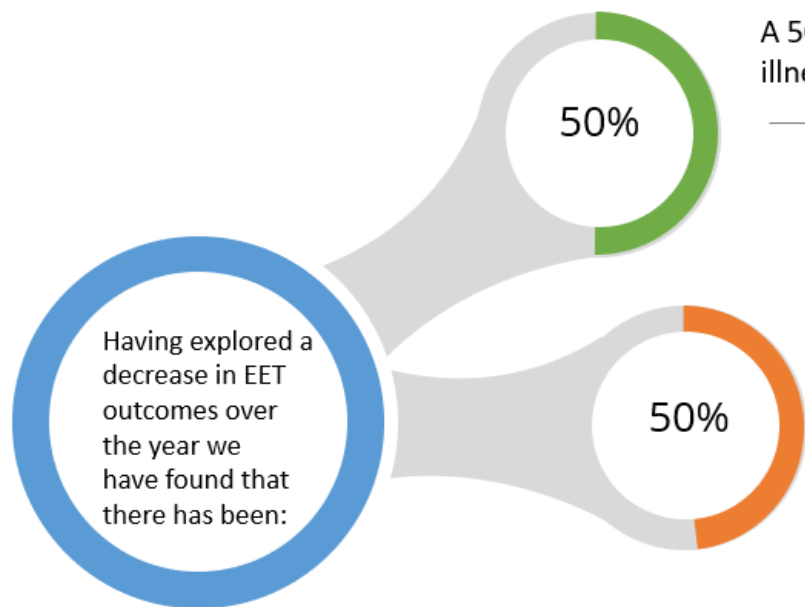
- All of these are in the Dorset area and close to the Hub. The hub provides a base to provide support to care leavers with personal advisors, care leaver nurse and other professionals regularly providing drop-ins for care leavers.
- The information packs, created to support young people requiring emergency accommodation, a recommendation from ILACS inspection in 2021, are fully embedded in practice.
- As a team we have reviewed our financial support available to care leavers when they are needing to privately rent. We will provide rent deposit, rent in advance, act as a guarantor and in some situations "top up" rent so they are able to maintain employment or further education.



# Care Leavers: education, employment and training

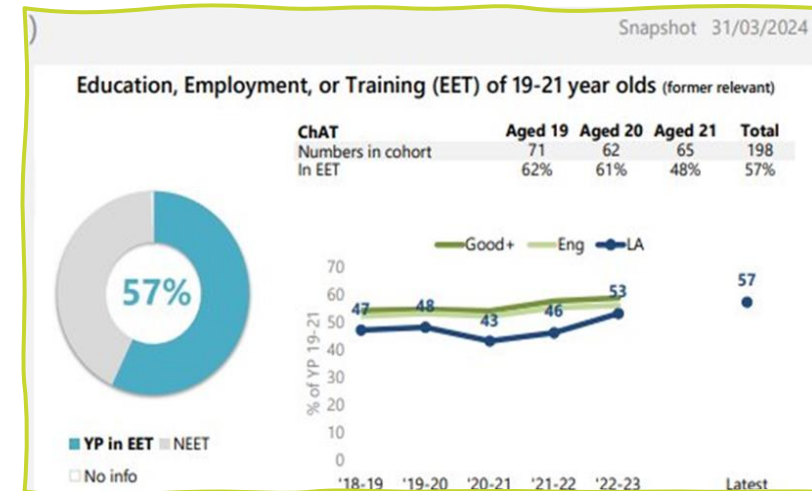
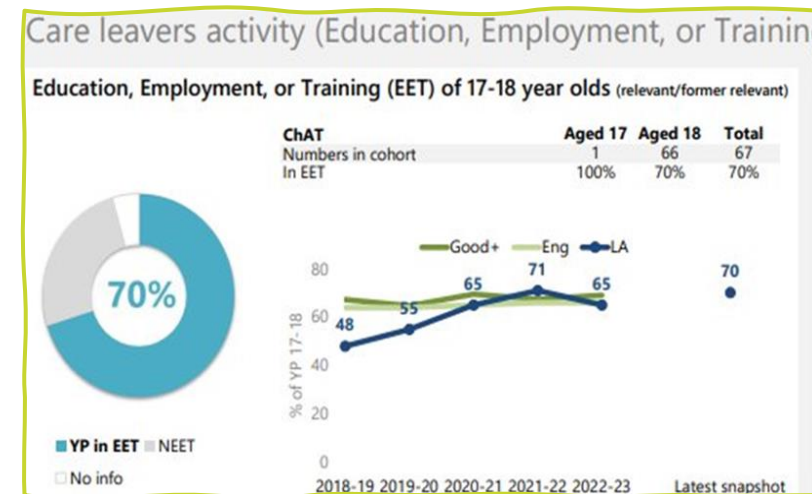
We continue to have high expectations for our care leavers to access education, employment, or training as they move into adulthood.

- During the academic year 2023/24, we were supporting **21 care leavers at university**.
- Based on latest activity data at the end of March 2024 70% of 17/18-year-olds and 57% of 19-21 year-olds were accessing education, employment, or training.



A 50% increase in care leavers who are NEET due to illness or disability (26 to 39 young people)

•Almost a 50% increase in care leavers who are NEET due to pregnancy or parenthood (13 to 19 young people)



# Care Leavers: education, employment and training

## Our strategy for improving EET outcomes includes:

- A lead champion for Education, Employment and Training in the Care Leaver Service
- Pathways to Employment – now supporting **9 care leavers in Council apprenticeships**
- Development of corporate partnerships – **Hall and Woodhouse, John Lewis, and Wessex Water** all offering apprenticeships, employment, and work experience and **Sky** providing free broadband packages
- Delivery of new DfE funded mentoring scheme – delivered in partnership with voluntary and community sector
- Development of Safeguarding Families Together model into Care Leaver Service to address mental health, domestic abuse, and substance abuse challenges
- Improved financial support to remove barriers and incentivise engagement

# Care Leavers: health

As corporate parents we continue to work closely with our health partners to consider what support is being put in place to maintain physical and emotional wellbeing through effective prevention and promotion.

Improved access to health support is one of our key priorities. We have a Care Leaver transition nurse which offers signposting and wellbeing support to care leavers up to the age of 21, up to 25 years with an EHCP.

We know that around 33% of Dorset care leavers identify with high anxiety levels. To help with this we have a dedicated care leaver nurse, 126 care leavers have signed up and 66 have accessed “Ask Jan” which is a counselling support service for care leavers. In Dorset we have worked with Everyone Active so all our care leavers can have free gym/leisure membership.

We have worked with the Dorset Insight and Intelligence Service to build a specific page for care leavers, pulling in data from NHS and social care, which helps to identify where care leavers are registered with a GP and allows for the breakdown of population health data.

We are working on developing a care leaver app which will be a national app bespoke for care leavers, with detail around the geographical area in which they are living, and the health support services available .

NHS Dorset signed up to the care leaver covenant and is one of the pathfinders to implementing a vocational scholarship for care leavers wanting to pursue a career in the NHS.

Our 'Local Offer' sets out the range of support and services available to care leavers. This includes access to the leaving care nurse, help to register with GP, dentist and opticians, support to attend medical appointments, access to specialist substance misuse services in Dorset, support to access sexual health clinics, free sanitary products and provide information about a variety of wellbeing services that are available locally.

# Education and Inclusion

We firmly believe and aspire to the Best Education for All (BEFA).

We have undertaken significant partnership activity to achieve this aim, overseen by The Dorset Education Board. This has included co-production of the following strategies, aimed at increasing attendance, attainment and further strengthening safeguarding:

[Education Strategy](#) – a comprehensive strategy to improve outcomes, covering the next three years of the broader 10-year BEFA plan.

[Attendance Strategy](#)

We are due to publish our Belonging Strategy in the summer of 2024 following co-production with our children, young people and educational settings.

Our Virtual School has a range of plans, strategies and tools to support children and young people in their education.

[Virtual School Belonging Toolkit](#)

Closing the gap in outcomes is one of our main priorities over the next 12-months. A particular focus is girls' maths and boys reading and writing.

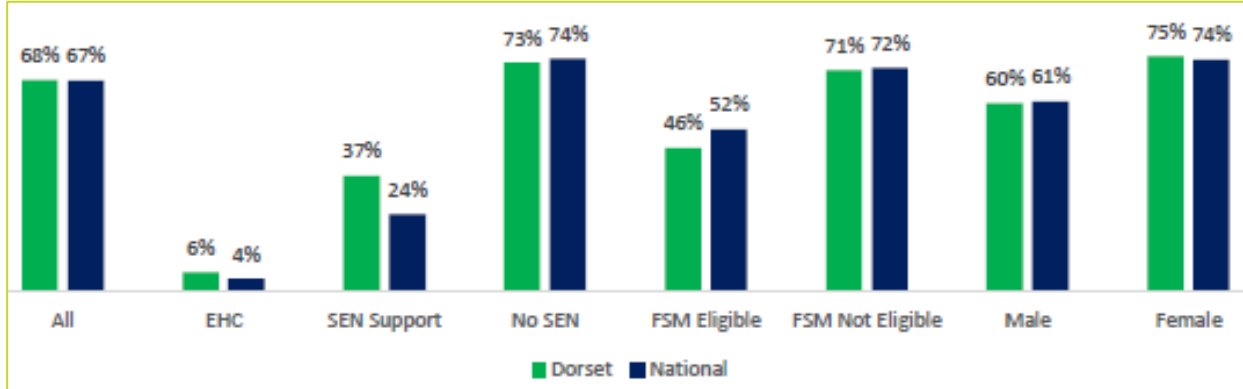


# Safeguarding in Education

## Safeguarding Standards Advisors

- We have made significant investment into our Quality Assurance Service area including implementing Safeguarding Standards Advisors to support our schools and settings
- The team provide comprehensive support and advice to enable all education providers to create and maintain a safe learning environment for children and young people.
- The Safeguarding Standards Advisors have extensive safeguarding and child protection experience with a Social care background. The Quality Assurance and Partnerships team also has access to a wide range of professional expertise and professional relationships with other agencies.
- The team can provide guidance and support to all education providers to become and remain compliant with their statutory responsibilities.
- Through Pathfinder we are strengthening this further as we implement the Dorset Safeguarding Education Board, which will form part of our Safeguarding Partnership arrangements

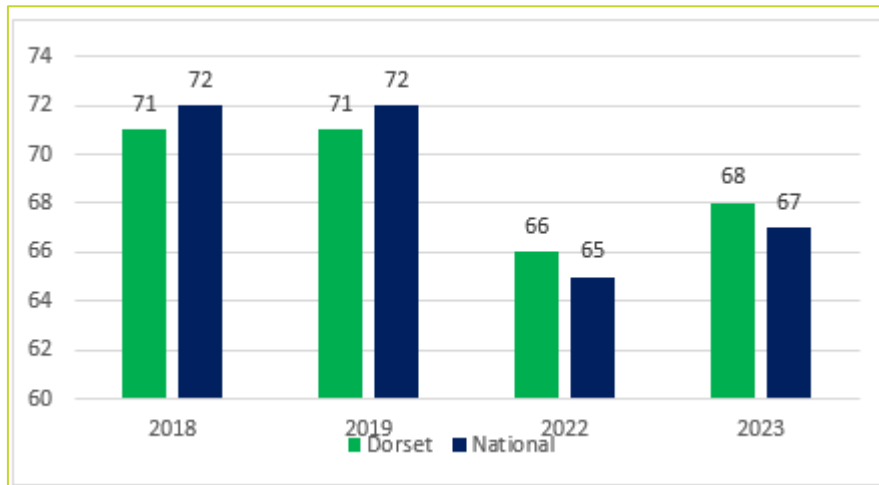
# Early Years



2022/23 EYFS Good Level of Development outcomes for groups.

Our children make a relatively good start, although the gap for children eligible for free school meals is below national. This continues to be an area of focus and has informed our development and further strengthening of our early years offer.

The stark contrast for Good Levels of Development after COVID has informed our continuous endeavours to enhance the experiences of our youngest children.



EYFS Good Level of Development over time.

Our Family Hubs programme, new arrangements for our locality-based Best Start in Life Advisors, use of HAF funding, links with Health Partners and enhanced phased transfer for children into school are examples of how we are seeking to improve early learning and attainment.

# Educational attainment

Dorset's children start their early education on or ahead of their peers but through the Key Stages, fall behind their national peers. We are determined to narrow attainment gaps for vulnerable groups.

## Particular areas of focus:

**Mathematics:** Dorset is in the lowest 20% of local authorities for Maths attainment at Key Stage 2. In the early primary years performance is stronger (3% above national at the early years foundation stage and in -line at Key Stage 1). By Key Stage 2 however, achievement is 5% below (and 7% below for girls). Progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 fell in 2023.

At Key Stage 4 Dorset is 4% below national for those achieving grade 5 or higher, 44% of Dorset girls achieve Maths at grade 5 or higher – 6% below national, boys are 2% below national. Girls progress in maths remains below all comparators.

**Writing:** Dorset is in the lowest 20% of local authorities for Writing attainment at Key Stage 2. Writing at the expected standard was 4% below national, 5% below for boys, 3% for girls. Progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 fell in 2023.

**Languages:** At Key Stage 4 attainment in languages is in the bottom 20% of local authorities. Whilst entries to languages have been declining in Dorset, attainment continues to be lower than elsewhere.

Focused and dedicated work through the Education Board and collaboration with the Department for Education is tackling these attainment gaps, with emerging evidence of impact.

# Education: Impact of focused work

Girls and Maths, in partnership with local education leaders, Dorset Family Learning and the Jurassic Maths Hub.

This task and finish group commissioned 3 projects, drawing on evidence-based practice:

- early years and block play
- pre-teaching and assigning competence
- family maths learning

Block Play – 50 settings received a set of blocks – training and support were given to encourage early mathematical language and girls seeing themselves as competent with shape, space and mathematical-based play. Focused girl learners were selected for evaluation purposes and were offered opportunities for regular block play.

A positive impact has been evident on little maths learners, the wider setting and all adults involved, with adults reflecting how they approach mathematical learning with girls and encourage competence.

More settings have now joined the project, and we will ensure this links in with the enhanced opportunities for family learning and confidence.





# Further impact of focused work for Girls and Maths

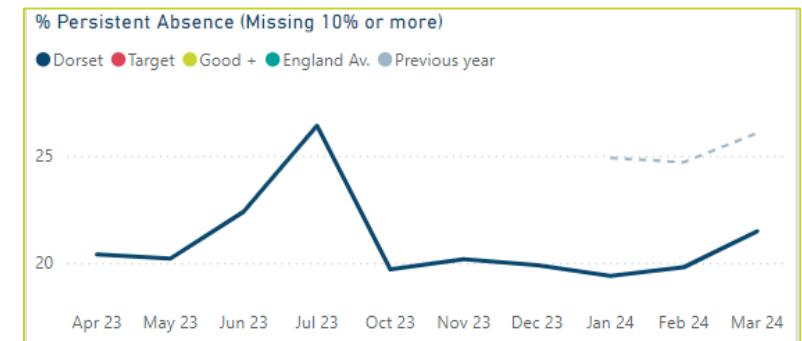
## Pre-teaching and assigning competence

- 20 teachers involved in this test and learn project.
- Focused girl learners were selected by schools for the project – at least 3 for each teacher.
- Teachers were looking for opportunities to assign competence to learners through pre-teaching.
- In one school, the impact has been so evident this programme is being embedded across the school.
- Teachers express being extremely and pleasantly surprised by the difference made in a short space of time
- CEOs of MATS are supporting us in taking this further to expand reach and impact.



# Attendance

- Good school attendance as a key part of our inclusion work and we maintain focus on the whole child and family and what support is needed to help overcome underlying barriers to attendance.
- Children with low attendance in the early years are more likely to be at a disadvantage to their peers. In early years settings, children who attend regularly benefit from exposure to language, cognitive stimulation, and social interactions. We know poor attendance habits established early may persist into school so we have ensured that this will be routinely monitored through discussions between the settings and their Best Start in Life Advisor, through our revised practice model.
- We have 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.
- Persistent absence has now reduced (May 2024) but had grown between January and March.
- Unauthorised absence is higher in years 9, 10 and 11 – focused project with QE School has seen attendance improve.
- Friday absence not as distinctive in Dorset as national, but one the DEB wishes to look into this further. The trend for unauthorised absence during mid-week is reducing.
- Severe absence remains an area of focus and challenge and we are working closely with families to understand the reasons for prolonged absence, from their point of view. Our Let's Talk event on school attendance (May 2024) had a major focus on enabling families to access mental health support as anxiety is most often the reason cited for longer term absence
- Where schools have adopted and embedded Therapeutic Thinking, attendance has improved.
- Stephen Tierney has worked with regional leads and we have agreed to create an Attendance Alliance in the South- West.



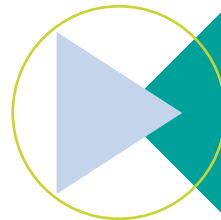
# Year 6 Summer School Places – collaboration bid for all Chesil primary schools



15 Primary schools in Chesil were asked to identify children who would benefit from enhanced transition but were not in receipt of free school meals (FSM children were funded by HAF).



40 children were identified as lacking in confidence, poor attendance, anxiety, SEND or other vulnerabilities that the school were aware of.

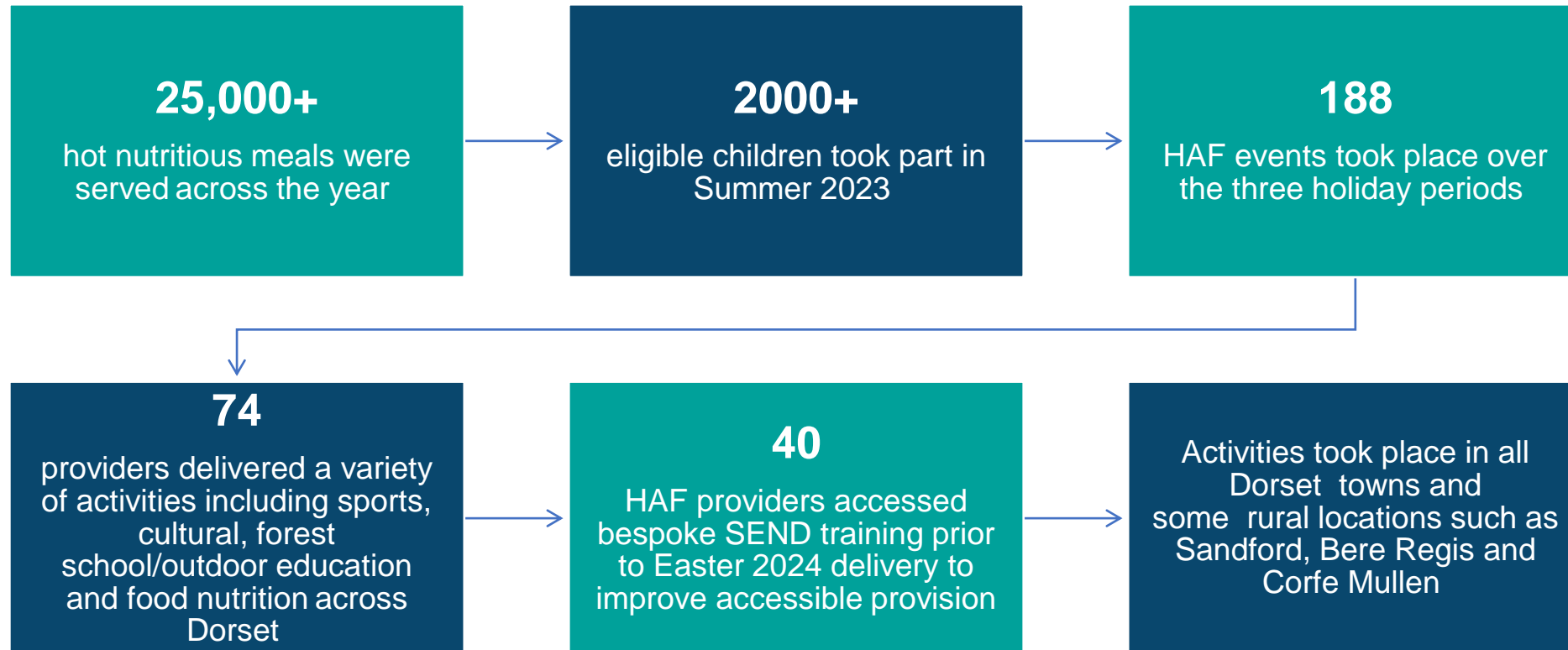


Local Alliance Group (LAG) funding paid for these children to attend a 5-day summer school in their new secondary school. The summer schools were organised and run by our teams, Family Skills and Learning, using school staff to build relationships with the new cohort. Children had a full programme of events to help with getting to know their new school, key staff, routines and lots of team building games to build confidence.



All children enjoyed a hot lunch each day, offering the opportunity for socialising and routine activity that we know from our children can cause anxiety if they have never experienced it before.

# Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme 2023-24



## Next steps:

**The programme aims to offer children and young people stability, structure and support alongside fun, food and physical activities during longer school holiday periods. We will:**

- Continue to work with partners to improve provision for children with complex needs
- Encourage more secondary age children to attend the programme
- Work with providers to encourage them to voluntarily register with Ofsted

*“For the child I have been working with, in particular, this could well make all the difference. She has not attended school since February. If she does make it in September it will be largely thanks to this summer school. I do not believe she would have had a hope without it, especially as last week was the first time she has even set foot in the building.” Teacher*

*“Getting to know our newcomers ahead of their start in September. Absolutely helpful in aspects of SEN knowledge regarding a few pupils which I will be teaching. Delivery and the team involved were fantastic and the independence encouraged for the pupils to take responsibility for tidying was great.”*

*“I thoroughly enjoyed it, it gave the schools/teachers/T.A’s a brilliant insight on who will need extra help starting at their bigger school in September 2023 and how to approach certain pupils. A very valuable learning curve for the Teaching staff. Overall it was a VERY REWARDING week and definitely something that I think should happen every year, especially for vulnerable children and children experiencing anxieties.”*

*.. a wonderfully safe and nurturing space for children to explore worries and concerns, and to put many of those worries to rest - or have them gobbled up noisily by the Worry Monsters! Staff were fabulous, and had an opportunity to begin to form positive and supportive relationships with all the children who attended. Staff were able to flag up the particular needs of each child as they observed them within the group, both to the Head of Year and to the Nurture Team. Of course, to top it all, the children will have many friendly and familiar faces in the crowd to greet them in September; they have made friendships with each other that will, in many cases, last their whole school careers. What's not to like?!! It is an inspired idea that has been carried out with supreme care and professionalism. It works brilliantly and I hope it will be replicated nationwide.”*

# 'School Connect - Building Bridges Programme' Supporting reintegration at Wey Valley

## Key areas of focus

- In 22/23 Wey Valley Academy's attendance was the lowest in Chesil. They were also the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest in Dorset of all mainstream secondary schools
- In 22/23 Wey Valley had 31 children between 0-15% attendance
- In 23/24 this equates to **23** children in Years 10 and 11 with less than 10% attendance
- The majority of these low attenders have a diagnosis of ASC and high anxiety
- Due to their mental health needs, the LA have a duty under the Education Act Section 19 to provide education for these children, the cost for using an external AP provider for 15 hours per week for each of these 23 children would be £3525 per week (£123,375 for the remaining 35 school weeks of the 23/24 academic year)

## Proposal

**A portion of this money given to Wey Valley would enable them to support their lowest attending students in their own building.**

Forest school sessions

1. In-school tutoring either during the day or after hours - we are having some success in engaging Y11 after the school day is over with 1:1 tuition
2. Workshop activities: bike repair, mechanics. This could be done with WOEC or Sustains potentially
3. More focussed work with Early Help/Family Workers coming on site with families to help students take first steps back into school
4. Sports / gym activities
5. ELSA and counselling: we could commission more ELSA training with funds, and/or pay for an expansion of our existing counselling services.
6. Post-16 transition



## LAG's part-funded

Forest school sessions: tuition hours, extra equipment
In-school tutoring either during the day or after hours - we are having some success in engaging Y11 after the school day is over with 1:1 tuition.
Workshop activities: bike repair, mechanics.
Early Help / Family Workers coming on site with families to help students take first steps back into school.
Sports / gym activities
ELSA and counselling: More ELSA training with funds, and/or pay for an expansion of our existing counselling services.

# Elective Home Education

- We have a strong focus on our children who are electively home educated, recognised by Ofsted in November 2021: *“Dorset saw an increase in children being electively home educated in the context of the pandemic... A strong and joined-up approach between schools and children’s social care in this instance keeps children safer.”* and *“Children who are missing from education and those who are home educated are tracked well”*.
- 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 works with the family, school and other agencies as needed to find solutions and return the child to school.
- Following consultation with home educators, 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 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.
- In line with national trends, EHE registrations have risen in Dorset. 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. In March 2024, 80% of suitability checks were carried out, despite growing numbers of children, particularly in the east of the county and our performance has continued to improve.
- The CEOs of MATS have agreed to include EHE numbers as a key performance indicator for our priority for inclusion.
- We see an opportunity in “Education as the Fourth Safeguarding Partner”, to both provide more systems leadership and formally involve EHE parents and carers in our education strategy and Best Education for All plan.

# SEND - The Dorset Local Area Partnership Context

We have co-produced and agreed a framework across the Dorset Council area for all key strategic partners to collaboratively work to achieve the best outcomes for Children and Young People.

Our partnership ensures that children, young people and their families have ongoing opportunity to meaningfully participate in the decisions that affect them.

Our partnership works together to understand the needs of local children, young people and their families, so that we can commission and provide services that are inclusive and supportive, always keeping children and young people at the heart of all we do.

Our strategic partners are Dorset Council, NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board and the Dorset Parent Carer Council. Collectively, we are ambitious for our children and young people with SEND and increased vulnerabilities and are committed to providing a great education and supporting strong life outcomes.





# Our Belonging Strategy

- Our children told us they didn't like the term inclusion, they don't want to be included – they want to belong.
- The Dorset Education Board has co-produced our new Belonging Strategy with children, young people, families, schools and partners.
- Our strategy aims to promote belonging of all of our children and young people, accepting difference and supporting our children in all settings, and close to where they live.
- The Dorset Education Board commissioned a film which shows young people describing what helps them to feel they belong. A feeling of safety, caring teachers, family and friends are at the heart of what enables children and young people to experience a deep sense of belonging.
- Belonging was the theme of our Annual Conferences in 2023, we continue to promote the strategy which underpins so much of our work.
- Our Local Alliance Groups have delegated budgets to promote inclusion and belonging of children and young people in school and in communities, through the Covid Outbreak Management Fund. We are starting to see a positive difference for children and families.
- Examples of funding include walking buses in Weymouth, a refurbished classroom at Dorset Hospital for children on Kingfisher Ward that is now an inviting learning environment that enables children to forget they are unwell and learn in a non-clinical but safe environment, family cooking classes, early years and ready for school community projects and many more.



# An Example of Creative funding

## Developmental Movement Play

- Funding was granted to St George's Primary School on Portland for resources and training to support Development Movement Play.
- This allows children who may need more time to develop key motor and sensory foundations to utilise a space with trained adults. This can support children to move through milestones that they may have missed so that they can improve their skills for learning.
- Staff have set up the room and children are already using the space. Staff will be accessing full training next term.



# An Example of Creative funding

## Alternative Provision: innovative pilot project

### Alternative Provision pilot:

We have just secured funding to run a pilot programme of alternative provision utilising woodland on-site at one of our first schools.

We are working in partnership with the Dorset Council Outdoor education team. This allows the school to keep children on-site who have been suspended, or are at risk of suspension, accessing an adjusted and bespoke timetable.

It also saves significantly on AP costs, and we hope will be an example of an alternative way of working feeding into the high needs block work.

## Forest School



# Mountjoy Belonging Breakfast Club – To support attendance of those who are persistently absent

## Quantitative Assessment

- 17 students regularly attend Belonging Breakfast Club. These are pupils with longstanding attendance concerns, whose families took up the offer.
- From data comparing this terms attendance (Autumn 23) with summer term attendance, and the overall annual attendance percentage for these pupils (September 22 to July 23) it is possible to make the following judgement – 82% of pupils involved show improved attendance for the Autumn Term 23. Those for whom impact is not yet clear are pupils with very specific needs – mental health issues, medical complexity, behaviour needs.

## Qualitative Assessment – observations by staff, students and parents

To promote emotional and behavioural regulation, and resilience

To aid verbal and non-verbal communication

To establish social routines

To foster a sense of belonging in order to increase attendance

To support families financial wellbeing and resilience

Parent says, “I am so glad that M is eating a little more; she sees the others eating and thinks it is fun now, whereas it used to be a chore for her.”

Pupil comments:

“It’s beautiful, eating is ok but I look forward to playing...it makes me happy

Breakfast club is amazing, we get food and get to play with friends from other classes...it’s a dream!

It’s really good, I like seeing everybody in the mornings

when asked what he thought about Breakfast club he put his thumbs up, pointed to another student, and signed ‘friends’.

I love to play and eat Weetabix

# What did our last local area SEND & AP Inspection find?

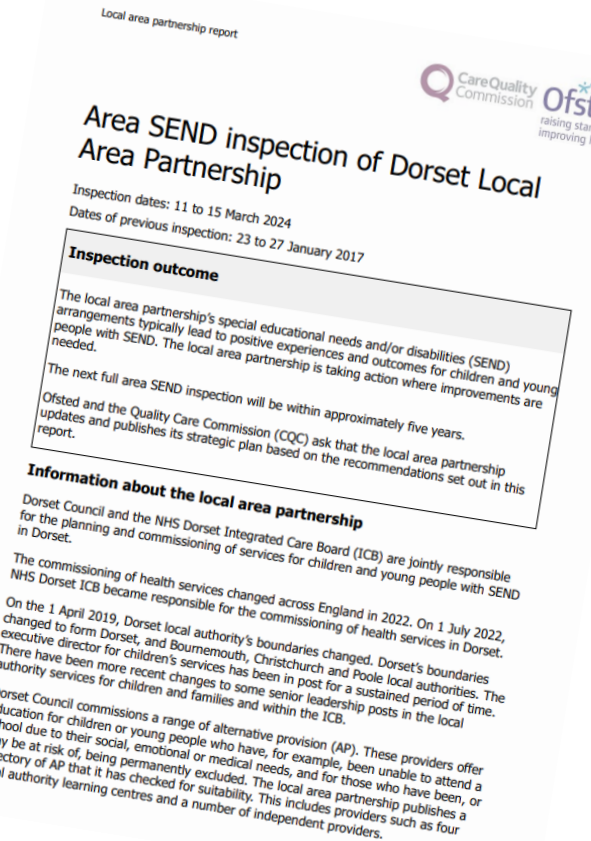
## Our Local Area SEND Inspection took place between 26<sup>th</sup> February and 15<sup>th</sup> March 2024

Over the course of the three-week inspection, inspectors explored 16 children in detail, selected by them from a much larger cohort of children, to understand their lived experiences and that of their families. Surveys were issued to children and young people, practitioners across agencies, parents, and carers. We had an impressive response to these. 325 documents were shared with inspectors. The information from the surveys and the documents, as well as our Self Evaluation enabled the inspection team to develop key lines of enquiry and to test these through on-site activity.

Inspectors commended the partnership for placing children, young people, and their families at the centre of decision-making, leading to **“typically positive experiences and outcomes.”**

The Inspection highlighted the collaborative efforts of strategic partners, including Dorset Council, NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board, and the Dorset Parent Carer Council, to support children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).

Our most recent Inspection report can be accessed [here](#).



# Post 16

We have committed to the best education for all children, at all stages. As stated in our CYP and Family's plan: "education is crucial for economic growth and a strong driver of social mobility."

Our commitments to increasing vocational courses, including T Levels is making good progress and we are going further.

A bespoke building to provide T Levels was completed for Ferndown Upper School and handed over on 15th May 2023. It was funded by a grant the school obtained from the DfE for the provision of T Level accom and we topped the project up. The approx value of the build was £1.15m with DfE providing £624k and DC funding the remainder.

"If I see it, I can be it" - We are giving conspicuous care to helping our children both imagine and experience a future where they can enjoy making a valuable contribution through work. We believe this starts with a deep sense of belonging throughout their childhood, and requires specific focus for children aged 16+

Our young people and parent carers tell us they want to understand more about opportunities available to them post 16 and in the world of work.

Projects to enhance young people's understanding of and engagement with prospective employers have been underway, alongside curriculum and careers and skills work with our schools and FE colleges.

Our Dorset Education Board held a post 16 focused meeting in May, to kick start our Post 16 forum. This enabled us to share best practice, cultivate and describe our shared vision and ensure we maximise impact for young people.

As one of our priorities is to champion our disadvantaged children, we showcased the Dorset Marvels Project (see below)

We also welcomed the opportunity to ensure the plan and priorities of the Dorset Skills Board are aligned with the priorities of the wider education community. This has enabled focused activity for the Post 16 forum, launching in September.

We have secured investment through our bid to the DfE for SEND provision at Weymouth College, where learners have been enabled by effective outreach to engage in post 16 education. This is based on feedback from young people stating a bespoke environment will enhance their learning experiences within a large FE environment.

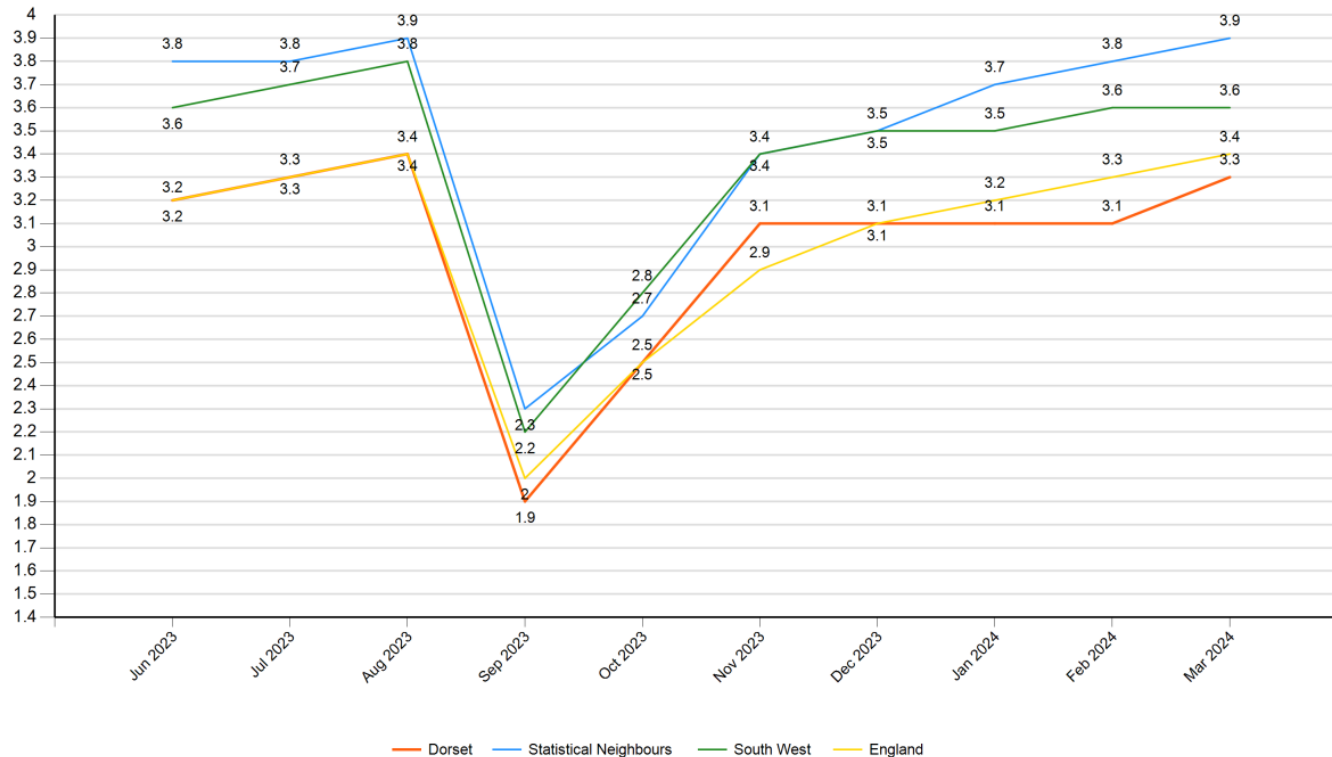
We focused a Let's Talk event for Parents and Carers on post 16 provision and opportunities to education, employment and training and have met parent groups face to face to ensure our Post 16 strategy is based on lived experiences.

Local employers are engaged in developing more supported internships and apprenticeship opportunities for young people, to expand the range of opportunities available to our young people.

# % of 16- and 17-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET)

National data available up to March '24 shows the familiar trend of NEET rise and fall.

NEET % - Academic Age 16-17  
Dorset against South West, Statistical Neighbours & England



- Dorset consistently performing lower than Statistical Neighbours, South West & England average (Nov '23 exception likely due to earlier tracking of NEET)
- Current position as of May '24 NEET % is 3.6%, with NEET joiners since Jan '24 coming mainly from leavers from education (college).
- Increase in NEET is affected also by robust tracking of not knowns with May '24 not knowns at a record 0.4%.
- Detailed analysis of caseloads has identified some temporary NEETs with a plan to re-engage in September, allowing us to prioritise support to those with no clear plans or offer of EET.
- We have a cohort of NEETs who are not yet ready to engage with an adviser for a variety of reasons and we are currently developing a 'stepping stone' model of support 'Starting Point' over 4 sessions 1-1 to build confidence, motivation & readiness to engage with EET adviser support.
- Following end of Traineeships, additional funding has been used locally on a new provider (JGA) who has worked closely with EET team to deliver small targeted employability provision in rural areas – Gillingham and Bridport and Blandford due to start w/c 3<sup>rd</sup> June.
- Skills & Learning planning to pilot Functional Skills online provision for under 18s Autumn 2024 for young people struggling to engage in mainstream & face to face. Planned for Oct/Nov & New Year delivery.

# Continuously strengthening Post-16 provision

- We are seizing the opportunities presented by the merger of the 2 FE colleges in Dorset, to achieve our aspirations
- Maximising the learning and curriculum opportunities of post 16 provision to build on existing vocational and land-based learning and expand further, linking to local employment opportunities

'A good education, with the qualifications to show for it, can transform lives for the better. Conversely, young people who finish their studies without attaining the expected standards will struggle both in further study and the world of work'



# Effective Transition Project - Dorset Marvels

## What we did in partnership...

- Delivered intensive support to over 120 disadvantaged students in receipt of FSM and at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training)
- Delivered evidence-base/holistic interventions (Theory of Change model) to achieve high quality **sustainable destinations**.
- Dorset Marvels provides young people to access expert 'Careers Counselling' consistently and focuses on **outcomes**
- Robust monitoring and evaluation - Institute for Employment Studies (IES)
- Third Party – Education Development Trust
- 18 Month Programme: June 22 – Feb 2024
- Students have 6-month intensive destination support

## Outcomes

- ✓ **84%** of students on Marvels programme sustained their post 16 destination compared to **58%** national average over 1 year [Longer term destinations, 2021/22](#)
- ✓ Changed CEIAG delivery in schools, particularly disadvantaged cohort
- ✓ Gap in CEIAG provision (20 school contracts)
- ✓ Estimated Return of Investment (ROI) NEET = £11,474 ([Research: Cost Benefit Analysis](#), 2024)



"...helped a lot – stuff I wouldn't be able to do on my own and helped me to get my future sorted out and also helped develop my confidence. I loved the work experience. I tried my best and all the staff were great!"

Dorset  
CAREERS HUB

THE CAREERS &  
ENTERPRISE  
COMPANY



# Dorset Children's Services Self-Evaluation

## Section Three: How do we know it?



# Quality Assurance Framework

Within our QA framework we utilise a range of tools and mechanisms that supports us to understanding the quality of practice and the workforce needs

Our Quality Assurance Framework is fully embedded and has received positive external validation through peer reviews, Full ILACS, Joint Youth Justice, Care Leavers Focused Visit, Children's Homes inspections and Local Area SEND inspections.



# Quality Assurance Functions

We continue to adapt and adjust our resource in line with the evolving needs of the service and have invested in additional assurance activity supporting quality of practice in line with pathfinder changes across both child protection and Family Help through two new practice leads. We also created additional assurance of SEND practice and the impact of this role was evidenced in our SEND inspection having seen an improvement in the quality of EHCP's. We are also now expanding QA oversight of the quality of our court and adoption work to support Social Workers as part of continued development post ASYE.

Workforce Development  
& Recruitment and  
Retention

Quality Assurance  
activity ( Audit,  
observations, Reg 44's,  
FRO's & quality of court  
and adoption work

Principal Social  
Worker (practice  
development - practice  
leads)

Quality Assurance  
Reviewing Officers (CP  
and CIC Meetings, S47  
advice and support)

Managing Allegations

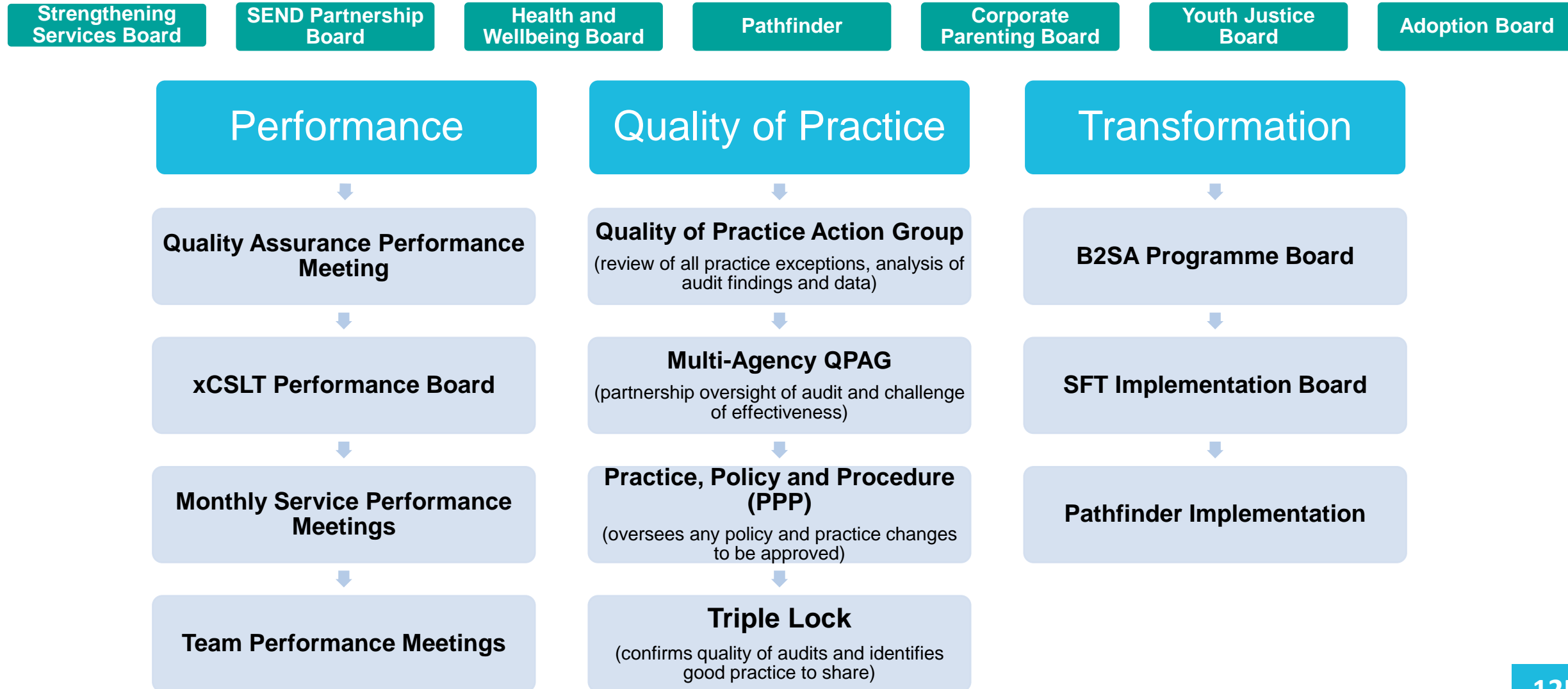
Safeguarding in  
Education

Family Engagement  
and Feedback

Family Group  
Conference (access to  
support packages)

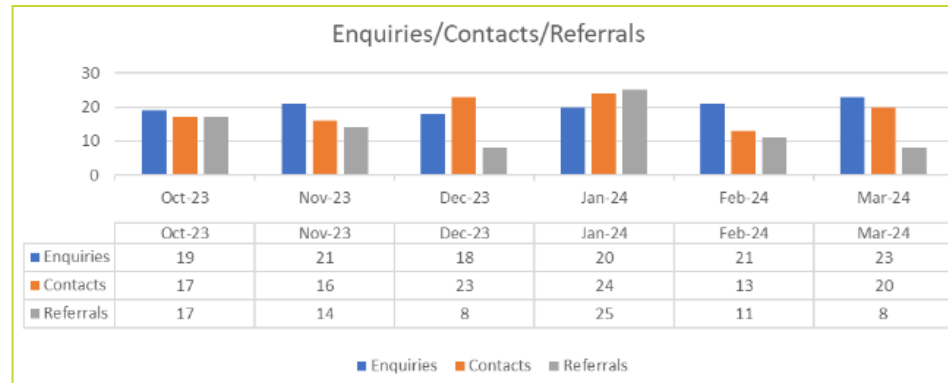
# Quality Assurance Governance Arrangements

Strong governance arrangements that feeds into the partnership governance:



# Safeguarding - 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 and have been further strengthened by the implementation of standard operating manual that sets out how the DO role is undertaken in Dorset.



A data dashboard supports management oversight, tracking and monitoring and this is used in conjunction with the existing tracker. The strengthening practice plan is improving the quality of employer investigations and seeks feedback from professionals on their experience of the service as a mechanism to further enhance the service provided.

Work continues to strengthen our communication with partners to raise the profile of the DO in Dorset. The DO is now providing training to new recruits in the Police and meets regularly with the police leaders to support consultation taking place with the DO about management of allegations involving police staff. The DO has delivered training to a range of local provisions/services including locality social work teams and the military. We have also been working closely with corporate colleagues within the council raising awareness of the types of considerations required in their directorates as to when a referral is required and understanding transference of risk.

The DO continues to work closely with fostering colleagues to ensure oversight of allegations about foster carers are managed proportionately to ensure risks to children are managed. Also recognising the differentiation about standards of care and what should be managed through fostering as opposed to a managing allegations process. Both the DO and fostering are acutely aware of the stress the management of allegations process can place upon our carers and the need for support and timely resolution is firmly embedded.

# Performance Management

- **Our Performance Management Framework is embedded including using 'Daily Dashboards', identifying operational and strategic strengths and areas to improve.** 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..** Dashboards are in place for MASH, SEND, the Virtual School and Missing and Child Exploitation, Children In Care, Care Leavers, Fostering, 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 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 monthly 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.
- **In January 2024 we expanded our Business Intelligence Dashboards to include locality level information.** The dashboards enable Dorset Council and partner colleagues to access information including Social Care, School and population data, Household, disability and demographic data Ethnicity, health, religion, Exclusions and attainment.



# Workforce Development – The Learning Hub

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 and The Academy (our virtual learning and development platform) to support employees.

This includes practitioner toolkits; we are continuing to develop these practice resources and have introduced two new toolkits the Parents and Carers Mental Health toolkit and the Parent and Carers Substance Misuse toolkit recently. Practice Launch events are held and to introduce new and updated practice resources and we continue with our programme of reflective sessions within teams which have a set resource on a particular theme identified through our quality assurance processes.

We have introduced service specific inductions and career pathways to support our Social Workers and practitioners in Family Help, SEND and Youth Worker roles.

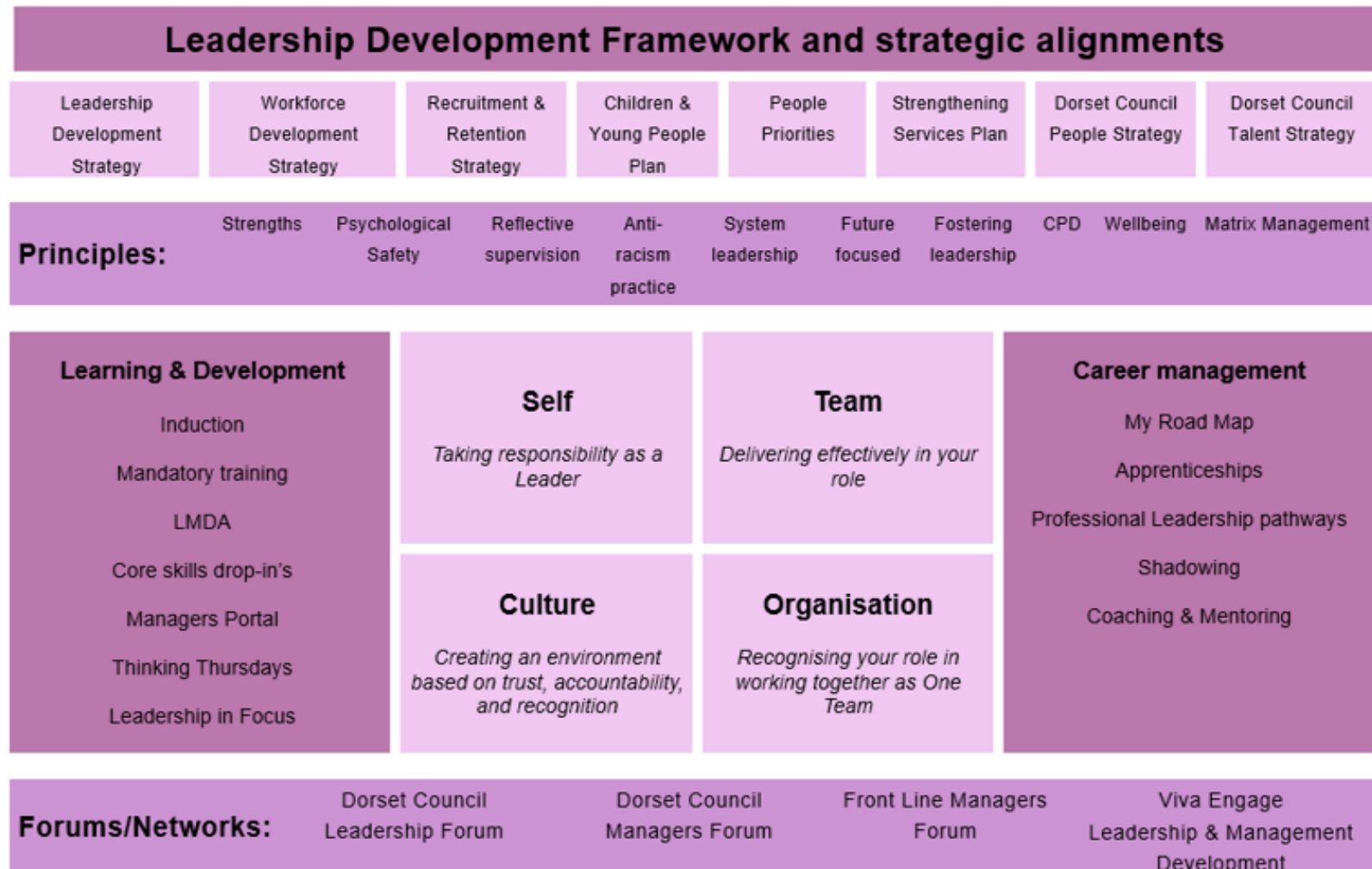




# Workforce Development

We have a Workforce Development, Recruitment and Retention Strategy that is overseen by our workforce development steering group and is Chaired by the Corporate Director for Quality Assurance. As part of this work, we now have a new Leadership Development Strategy which sets out our 10 principles of Leadership and our commitment to provide all leaders and managers regardless of level or experience a consistent, uniform approach to develop the necessary leadership behaviours and skills to embed our leadership culture.

The Group also reviews learning needs identified from the wider QA system and responds to the evolving needs of the service, such as the changes in Pathfinder. One significant area of progress to support the changes in Family Help is the new level 4 FH apprenticeship (Higher Certificate) and are working with Bournemouth university to add additional modules to a level 6 which would be the equivalent of a degree



# Children's Safeguarding Partnership Priorities 2022-2025

## Violence experienced by children and young people

### Sexual violence and abuse

Individuals aged under 18 at the time of reporting the offence to police remain the largest cohort of victims, accounting for over a third (34.0%) of all sexual offence in the last 12 months.

### Domestic Violence and abuse

In 2021-2022 9,477 domestic abuse-related crimes were recorded by Dorset Police up from 9,159 the year before.

### Physical violence and knife crime

Under 18s continue to account for the largest proportion of Public Place Violent crime victims, Pan-Dorset.



## Children's mental health and wellbeing

Child mental health remains a disproportionately high factor within referrals from the police and is the predominant concern in around 10% of submissions. This is also reflected within referrals from social care and health, as well as child attendances to local A+E Departments

## Neglect

Neglect continues to be a feature in both national and local reviews e.g., neglect featured in nearly 75% of the 166 SCRs examined for the period 2017-19 and the partnership also recognised the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on families.

# Children's Safeguarding Partnership: achievements and what's next

## Achievements

- Annual Pan-Dorset Conference on Violence experienced by children and young people and Children's mental health, we had excellent feedback - 98% of those who responded rated the event as good or excellent ,75% of those who responded said that conference was very useful to their work with a further 24% saying that it was fairly useful
- Completed 1 LCSPRs for Dorset Council and implemented actions.
- Quality assurance activity in place including
  - ❑ multi-agency Dorset Domestic abuse QA programme including audits, voice of families, voice of practitioners and led to an action plan to improve lives of children and families
  - ❑ Commissioned independent scrutiny activity in respect of priority area of neglect and offered both assurance and learning with clear actions being implemented
- Revised multi-agency dataset against priorities to focus work.
- Trauma informed - The Partnership have developed an agreed definition of and outlined the key principles of a trauma informed approach. Partners have agreed evaluation trauma-informed tools, agreed introduction to trauma-informed practice training module delivered by the partnership and an agreed process to review policies and procedures to ensure that they are trauma informed.
- Revised and renewed escalation process with clear tracking and oversight which informs learning
- Extra-Familial Harm strategies agreed
- Development of existing toolkits into multi-agency toolkits e.g. Intra-Familial Sexual Abuse
- Linked training and development with partnership needs and priorities

## What's next

- Further implement the changes from Working Together 2023, some of which have already been actioned
- Further develop the role of independent scrutiny through our family advisory boards
- Further involve education as a statutory partner within all the subgroups
- Multi-agency quality assurance programme continues with a focus on intra-familial sexual abuse
- Deliver practitioner guidance re: working with gender identity (pending NHS Dorset response)



# Children's Recruitment and Retention Strategy

## Experience



Develop a robust, efficient, transparent, and easily accessible recruitment process where managers and candidates are supported and receive a positive experience

## Attraction



Attract a diverse workforce of high quality and experienced professionals with suitable qualifications, creating a recruitment pipeline of talent

## Retention



Support workforce to be able to carry out their roles effectively; effective onboarding and a robust induction programme, high quality management and supervision, and manageable and sustainable workloads

## Pathfinder

74 positions recruited Overall

53% internal

42% external

3% agency conversion

13 positions recruited April to May  
with a further 8 family worker roles to be offered

(subject to references)

2 Interviews to be scheduled for consultant social workers

### Current Adverts

Team Manager Family Help

QARO Court Officer role

Team Manager Child Protection

Advanced Practitioner

Social Workers (Child Protection)

Social Workers (Permanence)

May 2024



# Quality of Practice

## Collaborative Audit

The collaborative audit approach undertaken by the operational managers within the service alongside the locality 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 ( Triple Lock).

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. Overall quality of practice is strong and have now included EH audits into our reporting. Practice is consistently good, with some areas requiring strengthening within Early Help. We have been bringing Early Help supervision requirements in line with our practice in social care and have set clear expectations, for example around the use of chronology. The collaborative approach across the locality workers involved with the child enables a reflective conversation with the practitioners to support holding the child at the forefront of our practice and review what is working well or what we are concerned about. This particularly supports how we work together for example when a child may be open to YJS ensuring we have a good understanding of how best to support the child and family.

## Feedback from children and families

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 quarterly 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 produced monthly which contains learning and findings from both audit and family feedback to be shared with wider workforce and identifies practice, policy or procedure changes as well as training needs.

# Quality of Practice

## Audit Dashboard

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.

## Principal Social Worker

Our Principal Social Worker is driving quality of practice and keeping front line practice at the forefront of strategic improvements. They continue 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. The principal social worker has focussed on strengthening group supervision which includes the development of practice standards, policies and procedures that are being aligned to the new Pathfinder and legislation changes. We are currently supporting 20 ASYE"s and 7 completed their QSYE in 2023. To further support the service with the increased number of NQSW's we have dedicated practice educator resource supporting with quality assurance and guidance reducing demand on the locality managers

## Quality Practice and Action Group

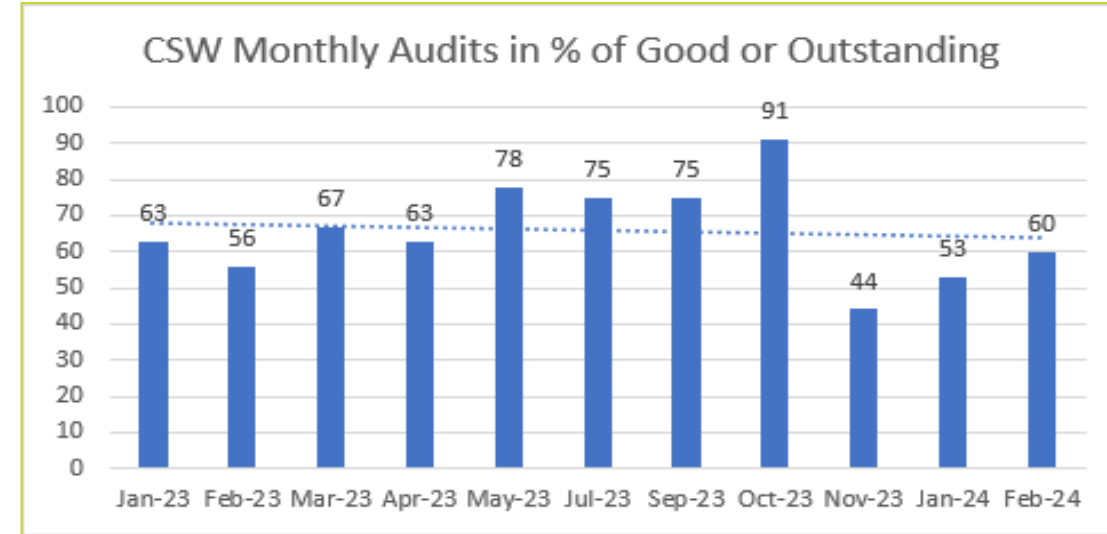
Quality practice and action group monitor compliance with policies and procedures: evidence strengths and good practice; identifies gaps and areas of development; drives learning and service improvement with a key focus of how this contributes to the quality of practice. Good practice is highlighted so it can be used as a model to implement across our work with families. Where practice needs to develop, we work with the teams to develop and monitor this improvement. As our practice leads become established in quality assurance team, they will also support the development of our practice.

# Quality Assurance Framework

## Audit outcomes

Our audits identify good practice, areas to improve and learning to be shared. Over the past 6-months, audits have demonstrated:

- Consistency in the quality of supervision, ensuring our management oversight is driving forward our planning for children.
- Through reflective supervision, 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. The child's voice is reflected in our recording and informing our planning.
- There is clear management oversight.
- Partner engagement has continued to be a strength and in a specific dip sample of strategy discussions demonstrated all statutory partners were included alongside specialist agencies where appropriate.
- Where children are entering our care, they are entering in a planned way.



## The principal areas identified to further strengthen our practice:

Continuing to strengthen our use of chronologies, summaries and genograms.


Further strengthening of family group conferences.

Practice Observation Week was last held in November 2023. The focus was domestic abuse as also aligned to our partnership priorities. Although it was not a feature in every meeting observations and feedback identified that our work, where domestic abuse is a feature, remains strength based. We are aware of the impact of domestic abuse and the resulting trauma as our language and behaviours are sensitive. An area to strengthen was getting feedback from children, young people and families where they have experienced domestic abuse and so our engagement officer is building this into our work priorities and family feedback strategy.




# Management Oversight

**Oversight**



<p><b>Leadership Oversight Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dorset wide</li> <li>• Receives exceptions from Line of Sight meetings</li> </ul>	<p><b>Line of Sight Meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In each locality</li> <li>• Child level meeting to discuss/decision make, wrap around support</li> <li>• Multi-disciplinary</li> </ul>	<p><b>Multi-agency Resource Panel</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision making and resource panel</li> </ul>
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**Working Together**




<p><b>Locality Step-up Step-down Meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In each locality</li> <li>• To discuss warm handovers between early help and social care</li> </ul>	<p><b>Children Missing out on Education Meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To discuss all children from all localities</li> <li>• There is also a children in care specific meeting</li> </ul>	<p><b>SEND and Alternative Provision Panel</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Line of sight for SEND provision and access to support and resource</li> </ul>	<p><b>Specialist thematic work with partners</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E.g. Court work, Children in Care, Child Exploitation and Youth at Risk etc.</li> </ul>
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**Meeting Together**



<p><b>Locality Management Meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attended by HOLS, Service Managers, Senior Educational Psychologists and Education Challenge Leads from the locality</li> </ul>	<p><b>Whole Locality Team Meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attended by all staff from across the locality</li> </ul>	<p><b>Team Meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service Managers meet with their Team Managers</li> <li>• Team Managers meet with their Teams</li> </ul>	<p><b>Operational day to day working</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colleagues work together with each other and partners on a day to day basis supporting children and families</li> <li>• Through support, advice, guidance and joint working with children and families</li> </ul>
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**Continuous Improvement**



<p><b>Specialist Network Performance and Practice Development Meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For Social Care; Early Help; Schools, Inclusion, SEND and Educational Psychology</li> <li>• Monthly meetings providing an opportunity for managers to come together to focus on their specialist/ portfolio areas</li> </ul>	<p><b>Dorset Children Thrive Quality Assurance and Performance Management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following discussion at Performance and Practice meetings, Senior Managers come together to discuss overall performance at Monthly Performance Board and Quality and Practice Action Group</li> <li>• All Managers to Team Manager level attend our quarterly Quality Assurance and Performance Management Conference</li> </ul>
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## Robust management oversight arrangements

Our front-line practitioners have regular and high-quality **reflective supervision** and there is robust scaffolding in place to ensure leadership and management oversight that helps share risk and respond to need. Group supervision also takes place as part of our Safeguarding Families Together.

There is a wide range of informal support and a well understood and defined approach to **quality assurance** which is well understood and practitioners engage well with it.

We are developing our management oversight through Pathfinder, introducing Family Help Line of Sight Meetings and ensuring social work oversight across all work in Family Help.

# Family Engagement and Feedback

- Feedback, engagement and co-production are all part of the work we do. We have recruited a Family Engagement officer who has been supporting with work aligned to both pathfinder and Safeguarding Partnership priorities. Undertaking some co-production of the Section 47 advice and support now offered by QARO's was developed first with parents who had already been subject to CP processes, to understand how we could strengthen our practice.
- Those families then volunteered to help shape the leaflets and guidance to inform families what the new offer is. Valuation of the work is also scheduled as some of this work is part of our test and learn approach to child protection conferences. We will be developing family advisory boards building on the SFT evaluation and feedback from families to help provide scrutiny, challenge and guidance on our safeguarding partnership arrangements.
- Regular feedback requests will be sent out to families while receiving services as well as upon closure and have now added a QR code to our letters to help increase the volume of feedback.

## On average over the last 12 months:

- 88% of families report their worker did what they said they would do.
- 85% of families report that they felt included in decisions about them.
- 88% of families report they were given the opportunity to share their views wishes and feelings.
- 76% of families report that contact with their worker was about right.

# Family Engagement and Feedback

*He has done a lot and taken the pressure off me" and if I am not sure about something I can always text or phone him, which is "really good".*

Family Help Parent March 24

*The worker has been totally amazing and so supportive, he has really helped my son and provided a safe space for him to learn and thrive*

Family Help Parent August 23

*I am now more confident in dealing with different situations at home with behaviours. My daughter is also managing her emotions much better which is positive.*

Children's Social Work Parent March 24

*The worker has been a great advocate for me & my son.*

Family Help Parent July 23

# Youth Voice

Dorset continues to be firmly committed to ensuring our children and young people have a strong voice in all of our work.



## Youth Voice Team

The Youth Voice Team has a Youth Voice Manager, 3 FTE Youth Voice Officers, 1 x 30hr Youth Officer, an apprentice Youth Voice Officer and a support officer on a 0hr contract. We are due to recruit a p/t fixed term officer to hear the voices of children and young people arriving in the UK through resettlement pathways or seeking asylum.

- The team host these spaces for young people to influence change:
  - The Network – for care experienced children and young people
  - Dorset Youth Council
  - Dorset Youth Parliament
  - Young Commissioners
  - Young Ambassadors
  - In development with young people – a specific voice group for those who have a special educational need or disability.
- The Youth Voice Team were key in helping Dorset Council adopt care experience as a locally adopted protected characteristic.



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.

## Examples of how we're listening to our children and young people

### Dorset Youth Council

Young people continue to request a space on the website that represents them. They say 'where are we', when they look at the Dorset Council landing page. Our website is too corporate for them and although it contains the information they need, it is not engaging.

We have created a Youth Voice Hub on the new procured engagement platform from Delib, called Citizen Space. We will be building the content over the coming months with young people, helping them to showcase their impact.

LGBTQ+ young people have shared with us what they need at school and in their communities, during Dorset youth pride events.

We are working with young people to create a 'Safe Space Charter' for local businesses and organisations to work towards, so that they can display a sticker which is being designed by young people.

Young People have co-designed the 'Pledge to Students' as part of the work with the Dorset Education Board.

The Board heard feedback from young people about what was important to be included and the language used. They also challenged the initial language of 'Student Pledge' and asked for it to be called the 'Pledge to Students'.

The Youth Council have made a video for decision makers about their call to action around the delivery of PSHE in schools, for their Life Skills Campaign.

'I wish that schools used more sustainable energy. I hope that the school environment can become better especially with mental health issues. I wish that there were more choices when it came to attendance. Why should my mum be penalised for my mistakes. It's not her fault I hate school.'

'Teach more life skills EG buying first home'

'make finance and first aid and general life skills just as important as English, science and maths, they will need it more in life'.



## Dorset Youth Parliament

One of the members of Youth Parliament for Dorset hosted a debate evening for young people in a local museum, which was attended by students across the country and brought some healthy debate around school uniform and identity.

## Young Ambassadors

Young people who are care experienced, have delivered 4 ½ day training sessions called In My Shoes. This training is continually developed as we hear from young people in our work. A young person has developed this to also be delivered in modules to enable more people to hear these important messages. One module was recently delivered to Designated Teachers with our Virtual School colleagues on 'language that cares'. Many young people have been trained to interview senior leaders in Childrens Services. Most recently interviewing for the Corporate Director of Commissioning and Partnerships.

## Young Commissioners

Children in care, care leavers and children who have been on child protection plans, helped to shape the specification and evaluate the bids for the retendering of the advocacy and Independent Visiting contract. They will also get involved in reviewing the contract.

*We are working with the organisation to help them develop the areas that young people identified needed strengthening.*

## Takeover Challenge

The Youth Voice Team host a Takeover Challenge in Dorset Council every year and specifically recruit young people who are care experienced, young carers and young people with special educational need or disability. Decision makers sign up to enable young people to get involved with decision making and to influence their work.

# Leaders actively engage and work with children, young people and families

## Voice of children and families

Co-production and the voice of children, young people, their families and partners is at the heart of all our work.

We have created a Youth Voice Officer, employed in November 2023, to lead on hearing the voices of children and young people with SEND and those with more complex needs.

Our team get to know and build relationships with our children and young people, their parents/carers and practitioners – we go to the places where our children are.

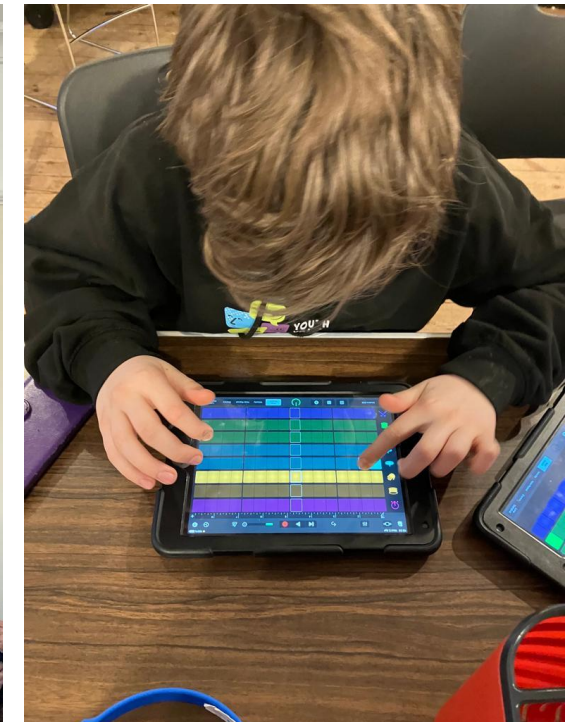
Our team are trained in using Easy Read with Photo Symbols licenses and use Widgets to produce accessible resources for our children.

Our Dorset Youth Representatives Group is facilitated by NHS Dorset for people who work and engage with children and young people across Dorset.

NHS Dorset Chatterbox and Your Mind Your Say



- Shaping B2SA
- Takeover Challenge
- Belonging Strategy
- Pledge for Students
- Autism in Schools project





## Let's talk: SEND in Dorset

Welcome, we are glad you could join us.

We have muted your mic and disabled cameras for the presentation.

This session is about listening to you. Please drop your questions and comments in the Q&A.

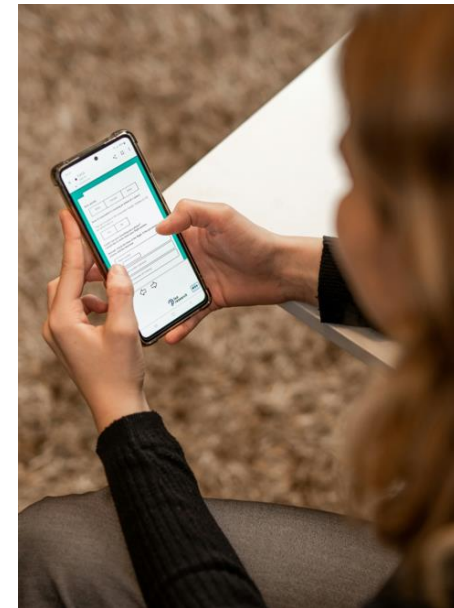


Each half term we hold virtual 'Let's Talk' events to discuss topics raised by parents and carers. These are well attended and have covered subjects such as the parent carer survey in 2023, transport and post 16 options, and attendance.

[Let's Talk SEND - Dorset Council](#)

We carried out a survey in the summer of 2023 to gather views from parents, carers and practitioners about the SEND system.

## [Special educational needs and disability impact survey 2023 - Dorset Council](#)



## The survey

**Dorset Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Impact Survey 2023.**

**399** parents and carers of a child with SEND completed the survey.

**How did participants hear about the survey?**

- 21%** their school or education setting;
- 20%** social media;
- 15%** Dorset Council's SEND newsletter;
- 10%** a practitioner working with the family;
- 9%** Dorset Parent Carer Council.



# Impact and Learning

## Best Practice

We regularly record and share the impact of our practice with children, young people and families, sharing examples of impact, best practice and learning with colleagues, partners and members at our Quality Assurance and Practice Management (QAPM) – Good and Better events.

The QAPM Conference is held at the end of each quarter and provides an opportunity for managers to take stock and review our performance, impact and feedback from families, over the previous quarter. Most importantly, at the centre of the conferences, is the impact that we are having on improving the lives of our children and families.

By having these regular reflective sessions, all 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. Our aim is that the learning from the conferences, and how the whole team can play their part in helping our services to be the best, is shared by managers with their teams.

# Impact and Learning

## 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.

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.

# Independent Evaluations

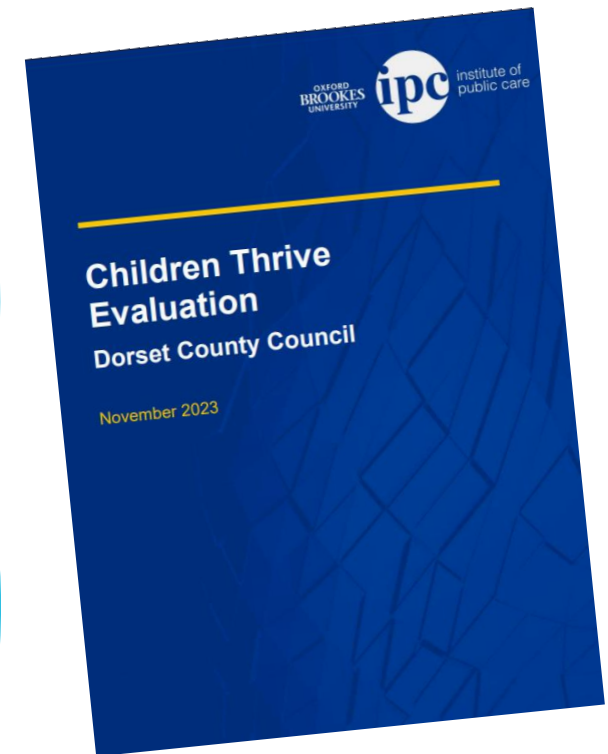
We have and are engaged with the following independent evaluations:

- IPC Oxford Brookes published the evaluation of the Dorset Children Thrive model in November 2023.
- University of Bedfordshire have reviewed and published its finding on the impact of our implementation of our Safeguarding Families Together programme.
- We are working with the DfE and other LAs to develop and implement the FFCP.

## Case Study – Dorset Children Thrive – Independent Report

Dorset Council Children's Services received a judgment of 'Good' when last inspected in October 2021. We introduced a new locality practice model, Children Thrive, in September 2020, integrating Education and Early Help services and linking them much more closely with social care practice in localities. We commissioned the Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University to help us understand the effectiveness of our approach and the Children Thrive model and where there might be opportunities to develop practice as we pilot a new Families First for Children model as one of three pathfinders. The Children Thrive model, whilst being introduced in a time of unprecedented challenge, has not been static and has developed over the last three years, to pilot initiatives such as Safeguarding Families Together.

A key principle of the Children Thrive model is getting the right help at the right time. From data and cases analysed, triangulated with staff feedback, this external audit of our approach found was frequently found to be the case.



# 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's Strengthening Services Board.

We have had no Serious Incidents Notifications in the last 12 months. We have during this time finalised the CSPR report for Edie.

On 14<sup>th</sup> May 2024 Dorset published a CSPR for Edie. The CSPR group and Strengthening Services Board will monitor progress against the recommendations and actions in the CSPR. Actions that remain open from previous CSPRs are being held on the Strengthening Services Action Plan, with partnership challenge to progress and close them. Progress impact and exception reporting are escalated to the Executive to provide line of sight.

Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership



# Dorset Children's Services Self-Evaluation

## Section Four: What are our plans for the next 12 months to maintain and improve practice?



# Our priorities over the next 12 months

We have an ongoing, unwavering commitment to champion the rights of children and young people across our partnership by putting children, young people and families at the heart of practice. We continue to deliver our ten-year Children, Young People and Families' Plan, reporting to our partnership and communities on the impact its delivery is making. We will continue to uphold and improve services but in 2024/25 we will have a particular focus on:



## Post Local Area SEND Inspection Plan, published on our Local Offer in May 2024

- This delivery plan addresses the recommendations and areas to further improve our partnership support and services for children, young people and families with SEND.
- The progress and impact of this will be reported through our established and embedded governance, linking into our Strategic Alliance's Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2023-33.

# In addition, we will be focussing on...

## Fully implementing our refreshed Safeguarding Partnership arrangements

### Lead safeguarding Partners MTG

Chief exec of LA, Chief Exec ICB,  
Chief of police with DSLs for each  
agency

### Dorset Strengthening Services Board

#### Dorset Designated safeguarding Partners

Chief Exec/ DCS (Chair), Chief Nursing  
Officer (NHS Dorset), Assistant Chief

### BCP Partnership Delivery Board

#### BCP Designated safeguarding partners

DCS (Chair), Chief Nursing Officer (NHS  
Dorset), Assistant Chief Constable

## Proposed plan to Cabinet 11<sup>th</sup> June 2024...

- Proposal to Cabinet to create separate Dorset Children's Services Safeguarding partnership.
- Allowing the two LA's to respond to their own local and priority needs
- A change of structure in line with Working Together is proposed and option to allow the Lead Safeguarding Partner's to have a Pan-Dorset join up
- Dorset's SSB enables the strategic delivery of the partnership and progress of improvements tracked and monitored and to fulfil the statutory obligations.
- Sub-group membership review being undertaken and already delivering place-based arrangements

# In addition, we will be focussing on...

Providing conspicuous care to our children and young people who are Electively Home Educated to understand and address the reasons behind the increase of EHE

Completing our roll out of Family Hubs, enabling partnership services to support families in their communities.

Fully embed our Birth to Settled Adulthood Service, pursuing timely integration with health partners into the model

Rolling out Safeguarding Families Together across the County enhancing our approach to also focus on care leavers and as part of our multi-agency child protection enhancements through Pathfinder

Responding to the findings of the Family Rights Group diagnostic and feedback from our Kinship Carers Reference Group to improve the experiences of families in pre-proceedings.

Improving multi-agency delivery of services to care leavers to address poor mental health and deliver improved education, employment and training engagement and outcomes

Commissioning new supported housing to welcome the increased number of children and young people who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum

Delivering improved local care placement sufficiency, stability and permanence for children in care to support improved mental health and education outcomes

Continuing to progress our plans to build on Integrated Commissioning to improve outcomes for all children in Dorset including those with complex needs.



# In addition, we will be focussing on...

Building on our initial work, fully implement Mind of My Own as a tool to further strengthen young people's voices.

Following our application to Coram Voice, if we are successful, engaging in a project to embed emotional wellbeing indicators into our business as usual performance management/quality assurance

Following commitment from CEO group to be responsive to changing patterns in education outcomes, embed our Dorset Education Board Task and Finish approach.

Reviewing our Early Help Strategy in line with CYP Plan and Pathfinder reforms

Embedding our extended role of the Virtual School

Implement the Youth Sufficiency Strategy with our partners, in line with requirements of the revised statutory guidance to Local Authorities on services and activities to improve young people's well-being

Re-shaping our Commissioning function to further enhance our Directorate 'engine room'

Continue to build, develop and maintain a skilled and stable workforce

# Continually ambitious for our children!

Our children and young people provide us with wonderful leadership, and they inspire us every day to continue with our relentless ambition to make Dorset the best place to grow up. Our fantastic workforce make us continually proud as they work to support our families warmly and alongside each other and our partners.

We have strong foundations in place and we will maintain our focus over the next 12 months, we will strive to go even further for our children, young people and families.

We are taking great care with how we implement Pathfinder reforms and will be monitoring and evaluating closely as we test and learn together with our partners.

We know this year will be a challenging year but are resolute in our determination and with strong leadership across the whole of our system to deliver our plans. We are building something special to last, We are determined that in Dorset, all our Children Thrive.

