

## **DORSET TEST OF ASSURANCE CHECKLIST June 2024**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.2 This document should be read alongside the Dorset Council Self-Evaluation of Services June 2024.
- 1.2 The document confirms the arrangements in place at Dorset Council to provide local assurance and as part of the Council and Children's Services commitment to continuous improvement.

### **2. Background**

- 2.1 The Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services (last updated April 2013) [DFE stat guidance template \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk) sets out how Local Authorities will, as a matter of course, want to ensure their structures and organisational arrangements enable them to:
- Fulfil their statutory duties effectively (including ensuring that children, young people, and families receive effective help and benefit from high educational standards locally).
  - Be transparent about responsibilities and accountabilities,
  - Support effective interagency partnership working.
- 2.2 The guidance further sets out that local authorities should carry out effective assurance checks, integrated as part of their usual decision-making and scrutiny work, of their structures and organisational arrangements. Once any new arrangements are in place, local authorities should review their arrangements regularly to satisfy themselves that they continue to be effective.
- 2.3 These assurances should be agreed within the Council. They should be subject to self-assessment within the local authority, and to peer challenge and review, as part of the process of securing continuous sector-led improvement in the quality of services.
- 2.4 Children's Services are subject to regular inspections of services, where, as part of Ofsted's assessment of the quality and effectiveness of local authority leadership and management, inspectors identify an issue arising from the local authority's arrangements for discharging the DCS and LMCS functions, they may decide to look at the quality and effectiveness of the authority's assurance process.
- 2.5 The local authority may determine the precise nature of its own assurance process and how to provide transparency for local communities about which individuals are fulfilling the statutory roles of DCS and LMCS, taking account of local circumstances.
- 2.6 There are six key elements in assuring that effective arrangements are in place; these are set out in the next section.

### 3. Test of Assurance

#### 3.1 Culture of Self-Evaluation:

- Dorset Council Children’s Services produces a Self-Evaluation of its services for vulnerable children as part of its annual strategic planning cycle and to inform its Annual Conversation with Ofsted, the Self-Evaluation was most recently updated in June 2024. Children’s Services Self-evaluation is shared with the Safeguarding Partnership, Internal Audit (Southwest Audit Partnership), and is presented to the Corporate Senior Leadership Team and Cabinet.
- During the year Children’s Services also refreshes its self-evaluation to support participation in regional peer challenge events and to prepare for the Ofsted Annual Conversation as part of the ILACS framework.
- During 2023/2024 the Dorset local area partnership produced a comprehensive Self-Evaluation relating to the evaluation criteria of the SEND Local Area Partnership Ofsted and CQC Inspection Framework.

	The six elements	In Dorset – current position	Evidence	Next steps
1	Clarity about how senior management arrangements ensure that the safety and the educational, social and emotional needs of children and young people are given due priority and how they enable staff to help the local authority discharge its statutory duties in an integrated and coherent way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Dorset Council has a Director of Children’s Services role who is responsible for the entirety of children’s services – (known locally as the Executive Director People: Children).</li> <li>➤ The DCS and Children Services Leadership Team, work closely with the wider council senior leadership team. Members of the Council’s senior leadership team participate in strategic partnership meetings (Strengthening Services Board and Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People).</li> <li>➤ Dorset Council operates its Children’s Services using a fully</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Self-Evaluation (ILACs and SEND)</li> <li>➤ Children Young People and Families Plan</li> <li>➤ Strengthening Services Plan</li> <li>➤ Dorset Children Thrive Structure and structure charts</li> <li>➤ Extended Children’s Services Leadership Team and Locality arrangements (Heads of Locality and Strategy)</li> <li>➤ Governance and Meetings Framework</li> <li>➤ Matrix management and portfolio arrangements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Updating our Governance and Meetings Framework document to reflect Pathfinder, providing transparency relating to responsibility and accountability.</li> <li>➤ We will embed the enhancement of our model and further deepen our integrated multi-agency partnerships.</li> </ul>

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		<p>integrated locality approach described as the Dorset Children Thrive model – with many services now in place-based integrated locality teams with matrix management. Locality teams are supported by central based specialist teams and fully embedded. The new Pathfinder programme will enhance and further develop the model.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Operational management oversight arrangements (Line of Sight, Leadership oversight, MARP)</li> <li>➤ External scrutiny - evaluation conducted by Oxford Brookes/Institute of public care (IPC) in partnership with Dorset Council Children’s Services concluded that ‘getting the right help at the right time’ is a fundamental tenet of Dorset’s Thrive Model (November 2023)</li> <li>➤ National recognition - Dorset has been selected as one of only three Local Authorities to take part in the national Families First for Children Pathfinder between July 2023 and March 2025. The programme will enable children to remain and live at home in safe stable homes.</li> </ul>	
2	Clarity about how the local authority intends to discharge its children’s services functions and be held	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Director of Children’s Services directly line managed by the Chief Executive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Council Constitution.</li> <li>➤ Self-evaluation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Continue to engage with SWAP Rolling Audit</li> </ul>

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	accountable for them from political, professional, legal and corporate perspectives (including where, for example, services are commissioned from external providers or mutualised in an arm’s length body);	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services – Lead Member for Children’s Services</li> <li>➤ Director and Portfolio holder held to account by the People and Health Scrutiny Committee.</li> <li>➤ Culture of engaging in Sector Led improvement and learning opportunities and Peer Reviews.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Inviting external scrutiny e.g. Oxford Brookes evaluation regarding Dorset Children Thrive model and University of Bedfordshire’s evaluation of Safeguarding Families Together.</li> <li>➤ Need to know and line of sight arrangements.</li> <li>➤ Multi-Agency Strengthening Services Board with Corporate, partnership and political leadership membership.</li> <li>➤ Strategic Alliance Board.</li> <li>➤ Safeguarding Children Partnership arrangements.</li> <li>➤ Commissioning governance arrangements.</li> <li>➤ SWAP Audit programme.</li> <li>➤ Joint funding arrangements with the NHS, SEND Transport, Hearing and Vision Shared Service.</li> <li>➤ SENDIASS.</li> </ul>	Programme reviewed by SWAP with SLT annually.
3	The seniority of and breadth of responsibilities allocated to individual post holders and how these impact on their ability to undertake those responsibilities (especially where a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ DCS statutory post - Executive Director Children’s Services is in post and responsible for the delivery of the statutory role and responsibilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Self-evaluation.</li> <li>➤ Governance and Meetings Framework setting out Portfolios.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Following the announcement of the DCSs plan to leave Dorset in September 2024, the</li> </ul>

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	<p>local authority is considering allocating any additional functions to the DCS and LMCS posts).</p>	<p><a href="#">DFE stat guidance template (publishing.service.gov.uk)</a></p> <p>The DCS is assisted by four Corporate Directors leading their respective portfolio areas: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Children’s Social Care</li> <li>➤ Education and Learning</li> <li>➤ Commissioning, Quality and Partnerships.</li> <li>➤ Quality Assurance and Safeguarding</li> </ul> <p>Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education and Skills is the Lead Member for Children’s Services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (2021) judged Children’s Services to be ‘Good’ overall with ‘Outstanding’ for leadership. <a href="#">50172438 (ofsted.gov.uk)</a></li> <li>➤ Ofsted and CQC Local Area SEND Inspection 2024 judged <i>‘The local area partnership’s special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership is taking action where improvements are needed. This is the highest possible outcome in a SEND Inspection and provides recent evidence of the quality and impact of leadership in Dorset. <a href="#">50246984 (ofsted.gov.uk)</a></i></li> <li>➤ Acknowledgement by Department for Education and sector leaders on the</li> </ul>	<p>Council is to embark on filling the role of DCS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ This is in the context of a proven stable, strong and high performing Children’s Services senior and extended leadership team.</li> </ul>

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			<p>conditions in Dorset that have enabled practice to thrive and for Dorset to ‘buck the trend’ on outcomes for children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ In inspections and through external scrutiny, the conditions in place to enable practice to thrive have been acknowledged. For example, leadership, impact of transformation, manageable spans of control, quality assurance, integration.</li> </ul>	
4	The involvement and experiences of children and young people in relation to local services;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Dorset Children’s Services is deeply committed to ensuring children and young people (and their families) are enabled to provide leadership to the service and partnership.</li> <li>➤ Co-production is intrinsic to the directorates and partnership’s shared values and principles.</li> <li>➤ Annual Survey of Children in Care.</li> <li>➤ The voice of children and young people is a core element of quality assurance (audits of practice).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Self-Evaluation.</li> <li>➤ Strengthening Services Plan.</li> <li>➤ Quality Assurance Reports include evidence of feedback from children, young people and families.</li> <li>➤ Children, Young People and Families’ Plan and I Live in Dorset Campaign.</li> <li>➤ Takeover Challenge embedded – held annually.</li> <li>➤ Children in Care and Care-Leavers are systematically involved in the Corporate Parenting Board.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Work to build upon existing activities being delivered by the Participation Team ‘Dorset Youth Voice’.</li> <li>➤ This will continue to be strengthened in the Self-evaluation process.</li> <li>➤ Work to strengthen Feedback from children, young people and their families within audits will continue.</li> <li>➤ Developing Family Advisory Groups with the</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ There are a wide range of forums and activities in place for example: Youth Parliament, Youth Council. The Network (children in care group) and Care Leavers Council.</li> <li>➤ Participation of children and young people is now operated as an in-house service within the Children’s Services Commissioning team.</li> <li>➤ The Family Hubs programme being delivered to enable participation of and hear the voices of children, young people and families in the work within delivery of the Locality Model.</li> <li>➤ Mind of My own – an interactive tool to enable children and young people to communicate their views is being embedded across the Service.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The Quality Assurance and Partnership team collates feedback from children’s services on a quarterly basis evidencing how we have responded to feedback – ‘You said we did’.</li> </ul>	Safeguarding Children Partnership.
5	Clarity about child protection systems, ensuring that professional leadership and practice is robust and can be challenged on a regular basis, including an appropriate focus on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Dorset Children Thrive transformation programme.</li> <li>➤ Permanent structure in place.</li> <li>➤ Robust strategic and operational governance arrangements in place ensuring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Self-Evaluation.</li> <li>➤ Dorset Children Thrive Structure and Transformation.</li> <li>➤ Strengthening Services Programme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ We are further enhancing our Dorst Children Thrive model through Pathfinder, deepening integration. For example Education as the 4<sup>th</sup> Safeguarding Partner</li> </ul>

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	offering early help and working with other agencies in doing so.	<p>that senior leaders have a line of sight to front line practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Learning culture and learning loop in place – continuous programme of learning from others.</li> <li>➤ Dorset Children Thrive Practice Framework/Model implemented – integrated locality model across Family Help, Child Protection, permanence - including learning and belonging).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Performance Management Framework.</li> <li>➤ Quality Assurance Framework.</li> <li>➤ Evidence of learning from others (Peer Reviews, sector led improvement).</li> <li>➤ Supervision Framework.</li> <li>➤ Routinely inviting external scrutiny, for example Oxford Brookes University (Dorset Children Thrive) and University of Bedfordshire (Safeguarding Families Together).</li> </ul>	and implementing the Dorset Education Safeguarding Board and Multi-agency Child Protection Operational Board.
6	The adequacy and effectiveness of local partnership arrangements (e.g., the local authority’s relationship with schools, the courts, children’s trust cooperation arrangements, Community Safety Partnerships, health and wellbeing boards, Youth Offending Team partnerships, police, probation, Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences and their respective accountabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ We have established clear partnership governance arrangements for shared strategic partnership plans setting the short-, medium- and long-term ambitions.</li> <li>➤ The Strengthening Services Board and Strategic Alliance are in place.</li> <li>➤ The Strengthening Services Board agreed as the place-based delivery arm of the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership. This Board has line of sight to place-based</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Self-Evaluation.</li> <li>➤ Strategic Partnership Governance arrangements.</li> <li>➤ Governance and Terms of Reference: Strengthening Services Board.</li> <li>➤ Governance and Terms of Reference: Strategic Alliance.</li> <li>➤ Strategic Alliance Memorandum of Understanding.</li> <li>➤ Children, Young People and Families Plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Further develop relationship with Courts building on the work of the Reimagining Pre-proceedings work and describing arrangements in strategic documents.</li> <li>➤ Embedding Safeguarding Partnership arrangements in the context of the Dorset place-based approach.</li> </ul>



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		<p>operational safeguarding groups (MASH and Child Exploitation Strategic Groups) and receive regular reports from Community Safety Partnership and Youth Offending Service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Dorset Education Board in place.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Strengthening Services Programme.</li> <li>➤ Strengthening Services and Strategic Alliance reporting to the Health and Wellbeing Board.</li> <li>➤ Annual Partnership conferences.</li> <li>➤ Section 11 Multi Agency Safeguarding Audit.</li> <li>➤ Appetite of partnership to further strengthen integrated working e.g. The Harbour, Safeguarding Families Together, Family Hubs.</li> <li>➤ Strength and impact of strategic partnerships tested at inspection, most recently within the Local Area SEND Inspection.</li> </ul>	