

# People and Health Scrutiny Committee

## 24 October 2024

### Good Care Provision

#### For Review and Consultation

#### Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

Cllr. C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

#### Local Councillor(s):

All

#### Executive Director:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: Kelly Henry,  
Job Title: Head of Good Care Provision, Safeguarding and Business Support  
Tel: 01305 225538  
Email: [kelly.henry@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:kelly.henry@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

**Report Status:** Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

#### Brief Summary:

This report provides an update and progress regarding our delivery of Good Care Provision to the children, young people and families of Dorset.

#### Recommendation:

Members of the People and Health Scrutiny Committee are requested to consider the content of this report and support the work undertaken to date to achieve our objectives regarding Good Care Provision as set out in the Dorset Children, Young People and Families Plan 2023 – 2033.

#### Reason for Recommendation:

Members of the People and Health Scrutiny Committee are Corporate Parents for our children in care and care leavers and they need to be assured that we are delivering a range of Good Care Provision when our children and young people cannot remain cared for by their immediate or extended family.

## 1. Background

- 1.1 Dorset Children, Young People and Families' Plan '23 – 2033 identifies 7 priority areas the Strategic Partnership has committed to focusing on to ensure a bright and ambitious future for all of Dorset's children. This report is concerned with Priority 3, Good Care Provision.



- 1.2 Our aim is to keep our children close to home and to be the best corporate parents we can be. We will always strive for children to remain living with their families and where this is not possible, we will actively seek out and work with a child's extended family and friends to provide family-based care. Alongside this and when children cannot be placed with extended family, we have an obligation to ensure we have a range of high-quality care provisions for young people to live locally which meets their needs, inclusive of their culture, language and religious needs.
- 1.3 We will prioritise loving relationships for all children in care and care leavers and ensure we have a wide range of care options in place locally by ensuring we have the right number, type and quality of foster carers, residential homes,

and other types of regulated accommodation. Where children cannot return to birth family, we want to secure timely and successful permanence through adoption wherever this is the best plan for the child.

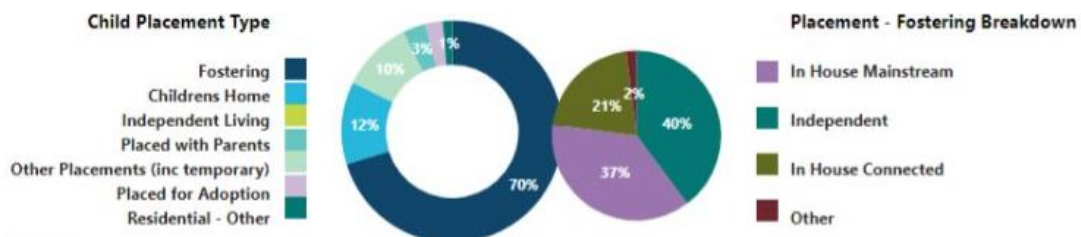
- 1.4 We want to reduce inequalities for children in care and care leavers ensuring we improve their health and wellbeing and are ambitious for them to achieve their potential, recognising the important foundation that stability and consistency of relationships with care providers gives. In addition, we want to make sure that there are a range of short breaks available to support families with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities to be able to continue to care for their children.
- 1.5 Our ambition is that more of our children and young people, who need care, are cared for in Dorset. When a child or young person needs care, if they are closer to their home and community, the people, and the services they already know will be able to continue to help them. This helps to ensure better outcomes for young people.

## 2. Dorset’s Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People

- 2.1 In Dorset we have seen a reducing local child in care population. In the last year the numbers of older children have increased as we have welcomed unaccompanied children through the National Transfer Scheme. Our children we currently care for:



- 2.2 Types of care arrangements our children live in.



- 2.3 The majority of our children and young people live in fostering arrangements with over half placed with Dorset Council approved foster carers, both

mainstream and in connected carers arrangements. This meets our objectives of striving for our children to be in family based care.

- 2.4 Children placed with parents means that the local authority still shares parental responsibility and the child has returned home as part of our rehabilitation work. Within this rehabilitation work will be a plan to discharge the Care Order so children can remain within their family without our legal oversight.
- 2.5 Residential Other, relates to children placed in Residential School placements as opposed to children homes for young people who attend mainstream education in the local area or Parent and Child Residential Assessment Homes. We use these and parent and child foster placements to inform our assessments of a parent's ability to care for their child safely.
- 2.6 Supported accommodation and supported lodgings are for young people aged 16 years and older which offer young people with a good level of independence skills an opportunity to further develop these skills in preparation for adulthood. Supported accommodation is now a regulated activity and will be inspected under its own Inspection Framework by Ofsted.
- 2.7 We have no children under the age of 18 years living in independent accommodation and we have no care leavers living in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- 2.8 Where our children live,



**45 % of our children in care live over 20 miles away from home (excluding our unaccompanied asylum seeking children). Last month it was 45 %.**

Living 20 miles from home can still mean children are living in Dorset given its geographical size. Most young people who live outside Dorset are living in neighbouring authorities and/or with family and friends foster carers. While this goes against our wish for children to remain in Dorset these young people are remaining within their extended family.

### **3. What our children and young people have told us about where and who they live with?**

- 3.1 As part of the development of the Corporate Parenting Strategy '24 – 2027 we worked with children and young people to ensure that the strategy

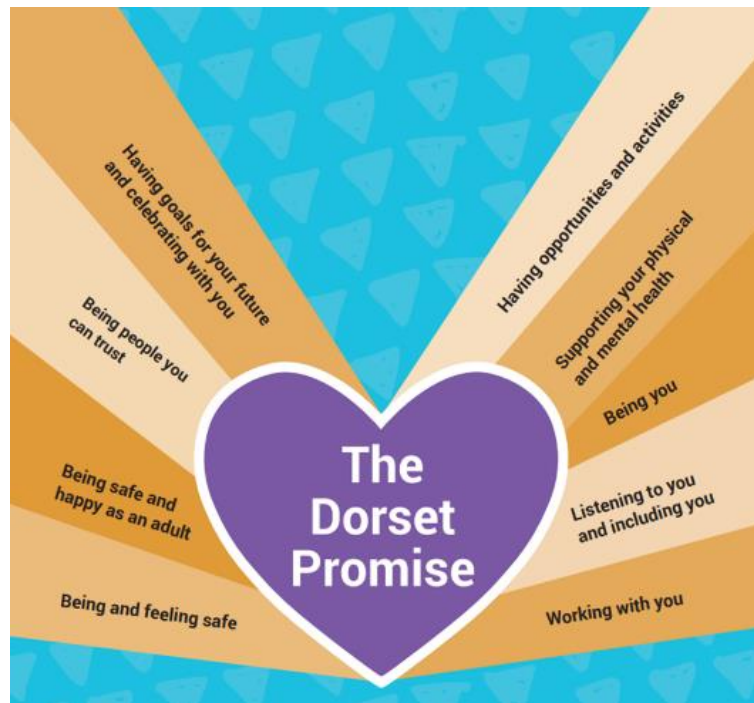
reflected what children and young people believed was important. We did this by listening to what our children and young people told us in through the 'Your Life, Your Care' and 'Your Life Beyond Care' surveys and through the work of our Youth Voice Service. This is what our children and young people told us.

- 89% children feel safe where they live compared to 61% young people and 82% general population.
- Nearly all children trust their carers and felt that their carers are interested in their education.
- Nearly all children and young people trusted their social worker and personal adviser and most had a say in decisions.
- Nearly all children had a trusted adult, spent time outdoors and were taught life skills.
- Fewer children said they liked school and more reported feeling bullied.
- Older children were more likely to say they did not have a really good friend.
- Over half said they did not spend enough time with their siblings or parents.
- Adolescents more likely to report being unhappy with how they looked and felt their lives were not worthwhile.
- Nearly all children said they were taught life skills, although 27% young people said that they find it difficult to cope financially and 14% said they were lonely always or often.
- Having a pet was important and were felt to give emotional support.
- More children and young people would like a really good friend.
- More care experienced young people in Dorset reported that they had a long-term health problem or disability.

3.2 The Dorset Promise to Children and Young People is our commitment to care experienced children and young people. As corporate parents, we want our children and young people to do their best and make a success of their lives. It takes a community to make a difference and in making this promise we share our responsibilities by working with people who can make this happen.

3.3 Corporate Parenting Board provides challenge and scrutiny to ensure the best outcomes are achieved and children in care and care experienced young people have opportunities to thrive and be the best they can be.

3.4 Being a good corporate parent means making sure children and young people have their own say in keeping themselves safe and making sure children and young people are not treated differently or unfairly because of being in, or from care.



#### **4. How do we know our children and cared for and safe?**

- 4.1 There are several national and local mechanisms to ensure our children are kept safe.
- 4.2 Ofsted is our main regulator body and are responsible for inspecting Local Authority Childrens Services either through 'Inspections of Local Authority Children Services' (ILACS) or Focused Visits. (If local authorities run their own fostering services, these are looked at within the remit of ILACS inspections) Ofsted will undertake targeted inspections of Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 4.3 Residential Children's Homes, Residential Special Schools and Supported Accommodation Provisions, regardless of if these are private providers or run 'in house'. these have their own dedicated inspections by Ofsted. We use these reports to understand how well a provision can meet the needs of children who we are considering placing. However, we have a number of means in which we monitor provision and its quality which leads to good outcomes for children.
- 4.4 Children in Care have allocated Social Workers who are required to visit children at least every 6 weeks and Quality Assurance Reviewing Officers (QAROs) who oversee the delivery of children's care plans, see the child every 6 months at their Children in Care Reviews as well as contacting the child and Social Workers between reviews. Children are offered an advocate in such circumstances if they do not already have one. The Local Authority

Designated Officer (LADO) is a statutory role within local authorities to review and investigate allegations against professional's working with children.

- 4.5 Internally we have systems in place to monitor external provisions between inspections, these range from annual Quality Assurance visits to provisions, reviewing monthly reports from providers regarding activity in the month (to pick up themes such as how providers are responding to children going missing). Our Contracts Team oversee contract delivery of services and support the Brokerage and Social Work teams with advice and guidance on managing any issues.
- 4.6 We always strive to place children in provision judged 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. If a provision is downgraded to either 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate' following an Ofsted inspection, we have a process to swiftly understand the safety of our children placed which includes an urgent review to understand if we need to take steps to find an alternative home. If a child remains within a provision we will increase visiting by the allocated social worker and will review and monitor progress of improvement against the providers Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Children who remain in the downgraded provision are monitored through Placement and Resource Panel. We have no children placed in 'Inadequate' provision.
- 4.7 In March '24 we welcomed Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) who undertook an inspection of our partnership arrangements for children with disabilities and special needs. They recognise the work we undertake in keeping our children safe;

*'There is strong oversight of children and young people in care living in homes away from Dorset. They are not considered 'out of sight, out of mind'. There is Area SEND inspection report: Dorset Local AREA Partnership, 11 to 15 March 2024 5 increased oversight of children's progress and experience by social workers and quality assurance reviewing officers, particularly when there are issues of concern, such as allegations made against staff or a less than good Ofsted judgement'*

## **5. Good care Provision Progress to date**

Good Care Provision had 23 actions when the Children, Young People and Families Plan was launched in late 2023. The following section highlights our progress in delivering on these actions:

- 5.1 We have developed and published our Sufficiency Strategy 2024 – '27. The strategy sets out the authority's intentions in respect to developing both internal and external care arrangements (fostering/supported

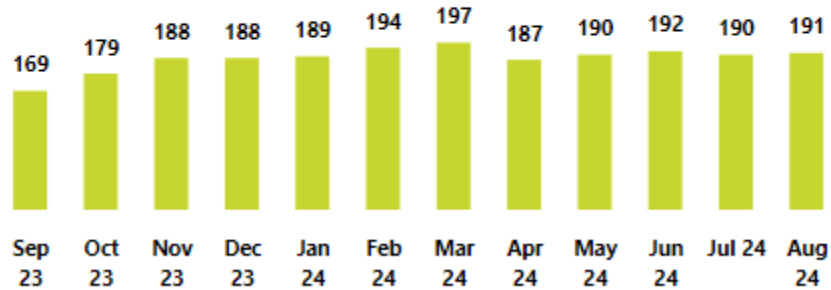
accommodation/residential and a range of short breaks) as well as the support services required to ensure children can remain at home when it is safe to do so.

- 5.2 Proposal for Phase 2 of Harbour Model delivery in the East of Dorset approved. Care accommodation at Rowans and outreach delivered from Carey Camp is in progress with Registered Manager appointed and staff team recruited to.
- 5.3 Development of dedicated Kinship Care Service embedded within delivery of Families First for Children Pathfinder to go live October 2024. Progress of delivery of Family Network and Kinship Care Strategy monitored through governance of Kinship Strategic Delivery Group.
- 5.4 Family led decision making embedded within delivery of Families First for Children Pathfinder model.
- 5.5 This year we have developed the Dorset Council Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2023 – '25 which aims to;
  - increase the number of Dorset Council foster carers through improved recruitment and carer retention outcomes.
  - increase the range of in-house foster carer provision to provide a wider range of homes and especially more for disabled children, teenagers, and children and young people from different ethnic backgrounds
  - increase the proportion of our children in care who are placed in Dorset with Dorset Council foster carers.
- 5.6 Foster carer recruitment and retention programmes effective at increasing capacity. We are delivering the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2023 – '26. We have audited capacity of foster families to foster children with additional needs. We continue to analyse predicted need for fostering families to home children with additional needs and are developing training and recruitment to ensure children with additional needs, who need foster families, have access to trained/qualified foster families. Rollout of Mockingbird Constellations across Dorset have increased Foster Carer relationships and communications. We launched our first Mockingbird Constellation in November 2022. We currently have 6 constellations, with a seventh in progress 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 invited us over to Seattle to share our learning and achievements.

Number of Foster carers at end of month



- 5.7 We have seen an increase in the number of foster carers over the last year. Some of the fluctuation is as a result of the number of Early Permanence placements where children are placed in foster to adopt households and carers cease to be foster carers once placement orders are sought.
- 5.8 Between Sept 23 – Aug 24, 3 mainstream households have resigned and 12 mainstream households have been recruited. This is an improvement from last year where we had a downward trend, and we seeing an upward trend since Feb 2024. In August 2023 there were 172 fostering households (mainstream and connected carers) compared to August 2024 where there were 191 fostering households. Our recruitment target is to recruit 24 mainstream fostering households over a 12 month period and so although we are seeing an improvement there is more to do.
- 5.9 We have developed an unaccompanied children and young people service within the Care and Protection portfolio. This service is fully integrated into children's services to ensure unaccompanied children and young people's placements are considered as part of the Placement Sufficiency Strategy. We are extending our current Supported Accommodation Framework provision for 16+ young people to create 20 additional places in Dorset for our unaccompanied young people.
- 5.10 The Birth to Settled Adulthood Service has been developed, implemented and recruited to. It is now fully operational and reports into existing, robust governance structures. We continue to work jointly with colleagues in Adult

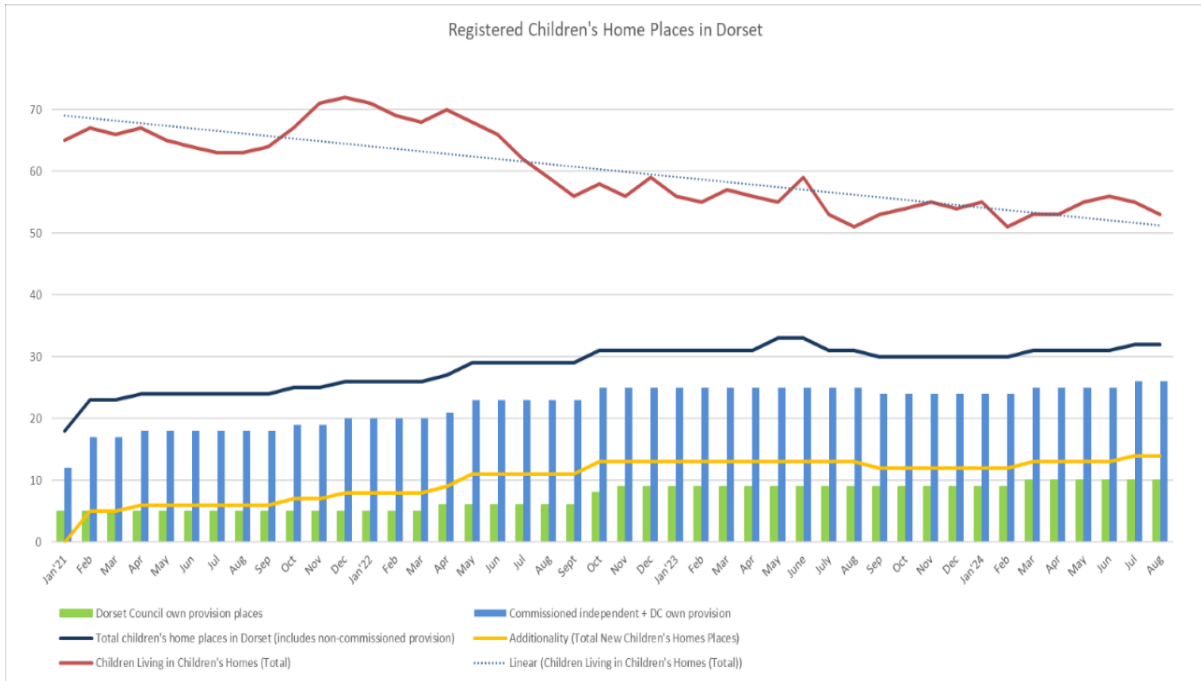
Services regarding developing accommodation options for young people cared for by this service that will take them into adulthood without having to experience a move at 18 years old as well as developing a joint brokerage model to support early planning of support, care and resource management for the service.

5.11 We have created and appointed a dedicated Permanence Service Manager who will provide significant oversight in terms of stability and children stepping down from residential care to fostering. This work is supported by the Brokerage Service (when we are unable to match children with our internal foster carers so we seek Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA)) and progress is monitored through the Placement and Resource Panel, this work will be further supplemented when the Fostering Service recruit a dedicated Family Finder position within the team. Placement stability is also being supported through Harbour Outreach with involvement of Harbour Therapist and Speech and Language Therapist with strengthening of approach through whole day assessments.

5.12 There are two performance measures in respect to placement stability, children who have had 3 or more placements in the previous 12 months (*Short Term Stability*) and children who have been looked after for over 2.5 years (Under the age of 16 years old) and have remained in the same placement for 2 or more years (*Long Term Stability*). The national average for short term placement stability is 10%, Dorset's position as of August '24 was 10%. The long-term placement stability national average is 69% and Dorset's position as of August '24 was a stronger 72.%.

Indicator	Unit	Good is	National Av.	Good + SN	Target	Mar 24	Apr 24	May 24	Jun 24	Jul 24	Aug 24
% of CIC for 2.5 years or more, aged under 16 who have been in their placement for 2 or more years	%	High	69.00	69.13	69.00	71.05	70.51	70.59	74.15	73.97	72.11
% CIC at end of month with 3+ placements in previous 12 months	%	Low	10.00	11.25	10.00	9.13	8.35	9.98	9.63	9.77	10.00

5.13 We have had an increase in the total number of available children's homes beds (internally and externally commissioned) within the county by 6% since launching our new Sufficiency Strategy.



5.14 We continue to develop our Dorset Supported Accommodation Framework to increase the volume of provision within the county, currently we have 87 places in Dorset on our Framework. We are adding extra capacity to ensure our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children can be placed in the county. The framework officially reopens in December '24 where new provider will be able to apply to join the Framework. Internal Supported Lodgings are actively recruiting more supported lodgings carers.

5.15 All of our external Supported Accommodation providers and Dorset Council Supported Accommodation submitted their applications to register with Ofsted by the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023 deadline. We have worked with our internal and external providers to ensure compliance, unfortunately due to the unprecedented volume of applications (Ofsted Data set shows a total of 9961 individual premise subject to registration, not providers) it has taken Ofsted a significant period of time to complete the registration process.

5.16 We have reviewed and updated the Joint Housing Protocol for young people aged 16 & 17 years and present to the council as being at risk of homelessness and this is monitored through our Sufficiency Board.

5.17 We have developed and delivered an innovative Level 4 Certificate in Therapeutic Childcare in the Harbour. We have developed 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.

- 5.18 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
- 5.19 We have undertaken a re-tender of our Short Breaks Framework earlier this year which comprises of two lots - Lot A - Residential and Individual Support, in home and community (Specialist Short Breaks) and Lot B - Group Activities (Targeted Short Breaks). The Framework includes an expectation for providers to prioritise Learning Disabilities and Physical Disabilities to ensure that children and young people with the most complex needs are best supported. It is also expected that providers offer short breaks that are fun and enable the child or young person to develop in areas such as independence, life skills and a sense of belonging. The specification introduces locality-based provision in line with the Children's Services delivery model which will reduce the environmental impact of travel across the council's area for families to access this specialist provision.
- 5.20 There are 7 young people accessing short breaks through our own residential provision at Hayeswood, with a further 3 young people being assessed. In September 2024 we welcomed Ofsted as they undertook their inspection of the home. Once the report has been finalised, we will share the outcome. Feedback from parents during SEND Inspection earlier this year has been overwhelmingly positive.
- 5.21 We have reviewed best practice and process, feeding into co-production workshops for the Families First for Children Pathfinder. We have developed our local model, linking into co-production of Family Group conferences and family networks within the Families First for Children Pathfinder.
- 5.22 We have developed and published our Joint Housing Protocol and review the impact of the Joint Housing Protocol through monthly meeting with Housing.

- 5.23 We are developing a refreshed reunification strategy which will set out what steps we will take when a parent's circumstances change that would enable them to have their child returned to their care, this will be completed by November '24.
- 5.24 We are in the process of working with Aspire (Regional Adoption Agency) to return the assessment and support of Special Guardianship carers back within the Fostering Service, this is due to be in place by April '25. The Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Financial Policy is being reviewed and updated in line with national guidance to ensure that financial circumstances are not a barrier to achieving permanence through an SGO.
- 5.25 An Adoption Marketing Strategy has been completed and presented to Aspire Operational Board and Strategic Board in May '24. Its impact will be monitored through these boards. We remain above national average and good+ stat neighbours regarding the % of children leaving care through adoption and our timeliness continues to be good.

Indicator	Unit	Good is	National Av.	Good + SN ▲	Target	Mar 24	Apr 24	May 24	Jun 24	Jul 24	Aug 24
% Children Achieved Permanence Adoption (Rolling 6 months)	%	High	9.00	13.88	12.00	13.00	11.00	12.00	18.00	16.00	14.00

- 5.26 Building on the success of the 12 flats for care leavers in the Weymouth area we have in the last year created accommodation for a further 9 care leavers in the Weymouth and Portland areas.
- 5.27 We are in the final year of delivering the Staying Close programme, this was a 3-year DfE grant to pilot the programme in Dorset to support up to 12 care leavers at any one time to retain links through formalised support arrangements. We await updates from DfE if this grant will be extended.

## 6. Governance arrangements.

- 6.1 Good Care Provision is delivered through our Sufficiency Strategy [Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers 2024 to 2027 - Dorset Council](#).
- 6.2 The Children Act 1989 requires each local authority is required to create a Sufficiency Strategy to set out their approach to ensuring a range of high-quality care arrangements. The Sufficiency Board meets monthly and is chaired by the Executive Director for Children's Services.

- 6.3 Dorset Sufficiency Strategy has 7 strategic priorities that not only report on developments within our internal fostering and residential provision but our approach to working with local, regional and national commissioned providers to ensure Good Care Provision.

## **7. Conclusions and next steps**

- 7.1 We have worked at pace to ensure our children in care and care leavers have suitable living and care arrangements that will support them as they grow up.
- 7.2 As we progress and embed the work set out in Section 5 of this report and our Sufficiency Strategy 2024 – '27, we also acknowledge the national picture regarding sufficiency of care placements and the cost of external provisions.
- 7.3 We will put significant focus on the means and mechanisms in which we commission and manage all provisions for children to ensure they meet our children's needs and provide value for money.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 Whilst there are no financial implications from this report it should be noted that Dorset is not immune to the budgetary pressures of placing children in externally commissioned provision creates. External Placements budget was overspent by £3.4m 23-24 (£2.9m in 22-23).
- 8.2 Nationally all Children's Services are facing significant budget pressure, a survey undertaken by the County Council Network last year states; England's largest councils are 'running out of road' to prevent financial insolvency, as in-year overspends by over £639m this year, as 'uncontrollable' spending pressures drive up the cost of delivering services to vulnerable children. These overspends are contributing to a projected total funding deficit of £4bn for these councils over three years up to 2026. While all council frontline services are experiencing higher than expected costs, the survey shows a combination of stubbornly high inflation, rising demand and 'broken' provider markets for children's care placements mean in-year spending on children's services is spiralling out of control, with almost half of the projected £639m overspend attributable to this service.
- 8.3 It is of significant importance that we continue to invest in developing our internal provision particularly in respect to foster care as this not only provides children in care with family-based care but also keeps our children local to their families and communities thus reducing the need for expensive external provision, outside of Dorset.

## **9. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

N/A

## **10. Well-being and Health Implications**

Having a range of high-quality care provisions for children and young people can contribute to better outcomes in respect to wellbeing and health.

## **11. Other Implications**

N/A

## **12. Risk Assessment**

HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: N/A

Residual Risk: N/A

## **13. Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 13.1 The Strategic Alliance co-produced its initial Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2020-23 with children, young people, families and stakeholders from across the partnership. The 2023-33 plan builds on the vision and values of that plan, taking a longer-term view of impacting and improving outcomes. The Strategic Alliance regularly reviews the activity in the delivery plans to ensure that actions progress the improvement of outcomes and consider equality, inclusion and accessibility.
- 13.2 A range of engagement and consultations were undertaken when developing the Plan such as, strategic alliance workshops and meetings (multi-agency partnership including senior people from police, health, schools and early years settings, voluntary and community sector), think tank sessions, social media campaigns for Children and Young People promoting the development of the Children, Young People and Families Plan through the Family Information Service and inviting feedback and contributions from staff and partners throughout the development of the plan.
- 13.3 Good Care Provision contributes to positive impacts for our children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, as described in section 5 of this report we have increased our internal residential short breaks provision and retendered our framework for targeted short breaks, creating

a range of opportunities families and children can avail of, locally. Furthermore, the plan seeks to positively impact on carers and the development of our Mockingbird contributes to this, growing our Mockingbird family with our foster carers provides them with better support to care for young people which in turn provides more stability for our children in care.

- 13.4 The Equalities Impact Assessment will continue to be reviewed by the Strategic Alliance at quarterly meetings.

**14. Appendices**

N/A

**15. Background Papers**

N/A

**16. Report Sign Off**

- 16.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)