

People and Health Scrutiny Committee

6 February 2025

Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership

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: Richard Belcher

Job Title: Service Manager, Strategic Partnerships

Tel: 01305 221765

Email: richard.belcher@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

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

Brief Summary:

This report provides an assurance update on how the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership delivers its statutory functions which oversees multi-agency safeguarding arrangements covering the Dorset council area. This report contains:

- An overview of the Annual Report of the Pan-Dorset Children's Safeguarding Partnership (2023 – 2024)
- An update on the activity of the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership over 2023-24 and progress against the implementation of the Working Together 2023 guidance.
- A specific focus on the arrangements of bringing Education as a Safeguarding Partner.

Part of the statutory functions of the partnership and council's responsibilities include the requirements to publish an Annual Report. The current Annual Report of the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership produced when Dorset & Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council shared a safeguarding partnership, is therefore provided as an attachment for consideration by the committee. The Annual Report details partnership work in 2023/24 including:

- Outlining the findings from a review of the safeguarding arrangements.

- Summarising local and national learning including in relation to Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews.
- Providing an overview of multi-agency training.
- Outlining the funding arrangements for the partnership.
- Providing information from the Child Death Overview Panel.
- Detailing work across the partnership linked to the priority areas for 2023/24.
- Outlining other key developments by the statutory safeguarding partners.

In July 2024, the decision was made to separate the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children's Partnership into two local partnerships: one covering the Dorset Council area and the other covering the Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole area.

The Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership is chaired by Dorset Council's Chief Executive with independent Scrutineers providing support and challenge to the partnership. The transition from the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership to the local Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership has been smooth. Dorset has implemented the updates to the national guidance, set out in Working Together 2023, approved by the Strengthening Services Board in December 2024. The Executive has met in compliance with all statutory requirements. Dorset's local arrangements remain well supported across the partnership.

Recommendation:

For scrutiny to be assured that the multiagency safeguarding arrangements adhere to the statutory requirements and provide robust oversight and planning to support good outcomes for children and young people.

Reason for Recommendation:

The multiagency safeguarding arrangements are a statutory duty as outlined in Working Together 2023.

1. Annual Report 2023-24

1.1 To bring transparency for children, families, and all practitioners about the activity undertaken, the safeguarding partners are required to publish a report at least once every 12-months. The report must set out the work that have been undertaken and as assessment of the effectiveness of the partnership arrangements, outlined in the Children's Act 2004.

1.2 This is the fifth annual report under the 2018 multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. The report reflects the safeguarding commitments and hard work of all executive partners, professionals and volunteers alike, as we work together to address shared priorities. The priorities are shaped by the issues facing children and their families across the areas of Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

- 1.3 The Annual Report is provided as an appendix to this report. The Annual report identifies some of the local challenges and opportunities across the two council areas as well as the governance that enabled the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership to develop and deliver activities to promote safeguarding and protect children. This report highlights several key areas of activity and progress.
- 1.4 The Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership agreed the following priorities for 2023-2025:
- Priority 1: Violence experienced by children and young people including sexual violence and abuse, domestic abuse, physical violence and knife crime.
 - Priority 2: Children's mental health and emotional well-being.
 - Priority 3. Neglect.
- 1.5 When Dorset & Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole councils decoupled from the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership arrangements, in July 2024, both area partnerships agreed to continue with the priorities from the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership to 2025.
- 1.6 The next Annual Report, 2024-25 will be for the Dorset Council Area.
- 1.7 The annual safeguarding conference took place in October 2023. The conferences included a focus on 'Hopefulness' and working with adolescent young people. The Conference was linked to our priority areas 1 - Violence experienced by children and young people and 2- Children's mental health and emotional well-being. Future conferences for 2024-25 have been scheduled, one of which was the Pineapple Project facilitated violence against women and girls.
- 1.8 The Multi-Agency Training offer is constantly updated with both local and national changes in policy and procedure. The core offer in 2023-24 covered:
- Safeguarding Level 2 training
 - Working Together both initial and updates
 - Neglect
 - Safer Recruitment and updates
 - Online Safety
 - Missing Exploited Trafficked Children

- Child Exploitation Basic Awareness

1.9 During 2023/24 the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership has undertaken a range of quality assurance activity linked to its priority areas and these are explored under the priority areas. Activity has been completed in relation to domestic abuse, neglect, injuries to non-mobile babies. The findings from local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and other learning events can be found on the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership website Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Learning Reviews. These led to key areas of activity for the partnership to improve the lives of children and families.

1.10 The partnership undertakes several key roles including:

- Learning from practice: the partnership facilitates learning from practice through multi-agency case audits and when required the commissioning of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and the implementation of any learning.
- Child Death Overview Panel: arrangements for reviewing child deaths are through a panel that covers the Pan-Dorset and Somerset local authority areas. The aim is to identify any patterns or trends that can be used to systematic or local changes to prevent future deaths. Links to the Child Death Overview Panel reports are included in the background papers.
- Delivering and evaluating multi-agency safeguarding training.

1.11 An agreed Pan-Dorset dataset has been developed over 2023/24 and this contains a core dataset and data linked to each of the priority areas and reviewed the data on a quarterly basis to identify any key trends and to inform partnership activity. This data has been used as part of quality assurance activity.

1.12 The Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership also revised and updated the escalation policy and process and launched this in April 2024 to have effective oversight of escalations and ensure resolution and any key themes identified and addressed. The partnership has also been focusing work on the experience of older children/young people including in relation to their experience of neglect and domestic abuse, extra-familial harm including knife crime and working with gender identity.

1.13 Undertaking and implementing recommendations from the findings of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. These and other reviews can be found on the [Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership website](#) (Both Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership and Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole

Partnership share the existing Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership website, with links to the local partnerships) Key areas of learning from reviews for the partnership in 2023/24 included:

- Developing the multi-agency response to extra-familial harm including the link with intra-familial harm
- Ensuring an effective multi-agency response to working with young people and knife crime.
- Developing practice re: responding to bruising and injuries to non-mobile babies
- Ensuring that there is an effective safeguarding response to children who have disabilities or are neurodiverse.
- Work with children and families in a trauma informed way.
- Ensuring that there was effective work with families re: home safety.

1.14 The partnership developed key-principles for organisations in relation to developing trauma-informed practice, provided tools for organisations and has now developed further training.

2. **Working Together 2023**

2.1 [Working Together 2023](#) is statutory guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE) to set out the functions and expectations of organisations and agencies to protect and promote the welfare of children and young people. The 2023 edition updates and replaces the 2018 version. The new edition is based upon *Stable homes, built of love* (2023) and sets out the importance of strong multi-agency and whole family working to improve outcomes of children and young people.

2.2 Every Local Authority, and partner agency, must have implemented this by December 2024, to ensure that their working practices are compliant with the revised edition to improve the services and practices of all practitioners working with children and families.

2.3 To review and implement the reforms, the Dorset Safeguarding Children's Partnership devised a task and finish group to review and consider the reforms and any updates required to policies and procedures in place and new reforms that needed to be developed and implemented.

2.4 The Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements have been implemented and approved at Dorset's Strengthening Services Board in December 2024. These will be published

online in January 2025. As part of the implementation two documents were reviewed and updated these are Dorset's '[How we do things in Dorset](#)' & the 'Continuum of need' which is attached as an appendix.

3. **Education as a statutory partner**

3.1 Within the [Working Together 2023](#) guidance, partnerships are required to strengthen safeguarding arrangement through the inclusion of education as a statutory partner. 'Amendments made by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to the Children Act 2004 strengthened this already important relationship by placing new duties on the police, integrated care boards and the local authority, as statutory safeguarding partners. Safeguarding partners are under a duty to make arrangements to work together, and with other partners locally including education providers and childcare settings, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area.'

3.2 The organisations accountable for the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership are:

- Dorset Council
- NHS Dorset
- Dorset Police
- Dorset Educational Settings

3.3 To strengthen the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, an education specific strategic sub-group has been created (the Education Board) with nominated leads and deputy representatives from primary and secondary schools. Education co-ordinator roles have been strengthened to support the infrastructure required to involve education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, linking into the Safeguarding in Education service in the local authority.

3.4 The Education Safeguarding Board has 38 active Board Members across Early Year, Primary, Secondary and Post-16 settings. Providers include, Maintained, Independent and Multi-Academy Trusts. The Board meets 4 times per year and is chaired by the Corporate Director of Education and Learning.

3.5 Education representatives from the Education Safeguarding Board attend all the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership safeguarding groups, including:

- Dorset Safeguarding Partnership Strengthening Services Board

- Multi-Agency Child Protection Operational Board
- Learning Hub
- Quality of Practice Action Group
- Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group

3.6 Representatives report back into the Dorset Education Board, which in turn links into the Dorset Strategic Alliance, delivering the 'Best Education For All' and contributing to the 'Safe at Home and in the Community' priorities in the Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2023-33.

3.7 Wider safeguarding information is cascaded and shared through a new Education Safeguarding Board Newsletter.

4. **Financial Implications**

The Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership is committed to the principles of equitable and proportionate funding with shared and equal responsibilities. There is a dedicated Business Team to support the work of the partnership across the Dorset area.

For 2023-24, each partner put in an equal share into the PDSCP budget and for 2023/24 this was £75,785 per partner. This meant a total budget of £303,140.

There was a carry-over at the end of the fiscal year of £68,853 as this was to support the changes required from Working Together 2023.

For 2024/25 the same budget of £303,140 was agreed to support the 2 Local Safeguarding Partnerships (Dorset Council area & BCP Council area) equating to £151,570 for each area.

5. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

None identified through this report.

6. **Well-being and Health Implications**

The Partnership's work is designed to impact positively on the well-being and health of Dorset's children and young people, by keeping them safe, by reducing the risk of harm and through raising awareness of child safeguarding issues so that children are protected from harm and provided support when they need it.

7. **Other Implications**

None identified through this report.

8. **Risk Assessment.**

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

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

9. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

None completed for this report. Dorset Safeguarding Partnership to review & update Equalities Impact Assessment in 2025 alongside the review of the partnership's priorities & Annual Report. The Partnership's core business is to reduce the impact of inequalities, both on individual children and young people and on groups, cohorts of children and young people.

10. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report 2023-24

Appendix 2 – Continuum of need

11. **Background Papers**

[How we do things in Dorset](#)

[Working Together 2023](#)

[Cabinet Report September 2024 \(Item 9.0\)](#)

[Child Death Overview Panel Annual Reports](#)

[Dorset's Strategic Alliance Children, Young People & Families' Plan 2023-33.](#)

12. **Report Sign Off**

11.1 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)