

Dorset Council - People and Health Scrutiny Committee

30 July 2025

Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services 2025

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

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

Local Councillor(s):

Cllrs - All

Executive Director:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

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

Brief Summary:

This report sets out the findings of a recent Ofsted inspection of the Council's Children's Services. Ofsted, the inspection body for Children's Services, undertook an Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in Dorset between 10th March and 21st March 2025.

This report was presented at Cabinet on 24th June 2025 and is provided to People and Health Scrutiny Committee for oversight and assurance.

Ofsted awarded outcome judgements as follows:

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families

Outstanding

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

Outstanding

The experiences and progress of children in care.

Outstanding

The experiences and progress of care leavers.

Good

Ofsted identified one area for improvement, as follows:

'The clarity and detail of the care leaver offer, including for care leavers who are parents.'

We have drafted a post inspection action plan to address the area for improvement - included here as an appendix - and will submit this to Ofsted.

Recommendation:

That the committee:

- Reviews the report, notes and celebrates the very positive judgements awarded to the Council by Ofsted
- Supports the post inspection action plan

Reasons for Recommendation:

Dorset has legal, statutory duties to deliver effective safeguarding services and improve outcomes for children in care and care experienced young people. The impact of an effective Children's Services contributes to delivering improving communities for all, a priority in the Council Plan.

1. Report

- 1.1 The ILACS framework sets out how Ofsted must inspect and make judgements on how effective a local authority is in discharging its statutory duties in safeguarding children and young people, including how well it supports the improvement of outcomes for children in care and care experienced young people (care leavers).

- 1.2 Under the ILACS framework, a local authority is inspected every 3-years, plus or minus 6-months. This is followed with either a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) or a Focused Visit between ILACS inspections.
- 1.3 Prior to the inspection in March 2025, Dorset's last full ILACS inspection was September to October 2021. A link to the previous report is included in the appendix.
- 1.4 In the March 2025 ILACS inspection, Ofsted judged Dorset Children's Services as 'outstanding' for overall effectiveness, 'outstanding' in three out of the four sub categories, and 'good' in the fourth sub category.

- 1.5 The report summary headline is that:

'Children in Dorset receive exceptional services that help meet their needs and reduce risks, supporting them to have better experiences and reach their potential. Since the previous inspection, when Dorset was judged to be good, senior leaders have continually and relentlessly developed services for children. Ambitious, family focused, and child centred senior leaders, including political and corporate leaders alongside multi-agency partners, have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to children.'

- 1.6 Other highlights of the report include:

'Children in care receive an outstanding service that results in their life experiences significantly improving.'

and

'Care leavers in Dorset receive a strong service from ambitious personal advisers and managers who know them well.'

- 1.7 The report recognised the contribution of children and young people:

'The meaningful involvement of children and young people, who co-chair and participate in the corporate parenting board, ensures that things that matter most to children are fundamental to the agenda.'

And the fantastic commitment of our hard working and skilled frontline staff:

'Practitioners' relentless dedication to ensure that children, families and care leavers receive the support they need shone through in this inspection.'

- 1.8 Ofsted identified just one improvement area - 'The clarity and detail of the care leaver offer, including for care leavers who are parents. (Outcome four, National Framework)'

2. Post Inspection Action Plan and next steps

- 2.1 The ILACS framework requires local authorities to publish its Post Inspection Action Plan within 70 working days of receiving the final inspection report.
- 2.2 Dorset's ILACS final inspection report was published on 9th May 2025, meaning we must submit our action plan by 15th August 2025.
- 2.3 Dorset has developed a robust action plan to address the findings and recommendations from the Ofsted Report.
- 2.4 The Post Inspection Action Plan is included as an appendix (Section 9).
- 2.5 Next steps - Our plans and progress against these actions, will be shared with Ofsted at the Annual Engagement event. The Annual Engagement event is a formal meeting between Ofsted and the Local Authority's Executive Director of Children's Services and the Corporate Directors of Children's Services as part of the ILACS Framework, sections 39-47.
- 2.6 Dorset's next Annual Engagement event is scheduled for 14th July 2025.
- 2.7 For the Annual Engagement event, we will provide Ofsted with our Test of Assurance and our ILACS Self-Evaluation. Our Annual Test of Assurance' and ILACS 'Self-Evaluation' are included as appendices (Section 9).
- 2.8 The progress and impact of the Post Inspection Action Plan will be presented at, and overseen by the statutory safeguarding partnership board, Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP) and the Corporate Parenting Board.
- 2.9 A follow-up report to committees will be scheduled after the Annual Engagement event in July 2025.

3. Financial Implications

In the event of an inadequate Ofsted rating or judgement, where children are at risk of ineffective safeguarding, the financial impact would be significant, to undertake rapid, system wide improvements to deliver safe, effective children's services.

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

Considered by the relevant services as part of the delivery of children's services.

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

Delivery of outstanding services to children, young people and families promotes and contributes to their health and wellbeing.

6. **Other Implications**

Reputational damage can arise from failed Ofsted inspections.

7. **Risk Assessment**

The level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

8. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

Considered by the relevant services as part of the delivery of children's services.

9. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Inspection of Dorset local authority children's services

Appendix 2 - Dorset's Post Inspection Action Plan 2025

10. **Background Papers**

- [Cabinet Report June 2025](#)
- [Cabinet Report December 2021 – ILACS Report](#)
- [Childrens Services Annual Engagement Self-Evaluation 2024 final.pdf](#) – Dorset's Children's Services Self-Evaluation 2024
- [ILACS Framework](#)
- [Dorset Local Area SEND Inspection 2024](#)
- [Dorset Focused Visit 2023](#)
- [Dorset ILACS 2021](#)
- [Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2023 to 2033 - Dorset Council](#)

11. 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).