

People and Health Scrutiny Committee

22 September 2025

Dorset Safeguarding Children's Partnership (DSCP) Annual Report April 2024 – March 2025

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

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

Local Councillor(s):

Executive Director:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public Choose an item.

1. Executive summary

The 2024–2025 reporting year marks a significant milestone for the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP), following its formal separation from the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership in August 2024. This transition has enabled Dorset to tailor its safeguarding arrangements to better reflect local needs and align with national reforms, particularly those outlined in *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)* and the *Stable Homes Built on Love* review.

1.1 Strategic Leadership and Governance

DSCP has established robust governance structures, including the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership Board and a Pan-Dorset Lead Safeguarding Partner meeting. These forums ensure strategic oversight, accountability, and alignment across agencies. Education has been successfully embedded as a statutory partner, enhancing multi-agency collaboration and ensuring the voice of education is central to safeguarding leadership.

Since becoming a sovereign partnership, the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP) has undertaken a comprehensive review of the Terms of Reference (ToR) for each board and subgroup. This work has significantly strengthened the partnership's governance framework and clarified the distinct roles and responsibilities across its structures. The DSCP Board now meets quarterly to scrutinise the work of partner agencies, with a particular emphasis on the partnership's agreed priority areas. Oversight of subgroup functions is led by the Multi-Agency Quality Practice and Action Group, which drives continuous learning and improvement through rapid reviews, multi-agency audits, and learning reviews.

The DSCP is widely recognised as an effective and collaborative partnership, where agencies are confident in providing both robust support and constructive challenge to ensure the safeguarding of children in Dorset. Recent multi-agency scrutiny has focused on intra-familial child sexual abuse, with two further scrutiny activities scheduled for September and October 2025. These will examine safeguarding practices for children under two and the implementation of the extra-familial risk and harm strategy. In addition, bi-monthly multi-agency audits are being embedded to support ongoing quality assurance. To further enhance its effectiveness, the partnership is currently in the process of appointing an Independent Scrutineer. This role will provide objective oversight and assurance regarding the impact and effectiveness of the DSCP's work.

1.2 Key Achievements

Key achievements were the integration of education as a statutory partner through the formation of the Education Safeguarding Board. The Families First Partnership Board played a key role in integrating education into Dorset's safeguarding arrangements. This board includes representation from Ofsted and the Department for Education (DfE), ensuring national oversight and alignment with statutory expectations. The Education Safeguarding Board is now a well-established component of the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP), with average attendance of 30-40 members. Meeting quarterly, it reports directly to the DSCP Board and contributes to strategic safeguarding discussions. To ensure education's perspective is embedded throughout the partnership, representatives from the Education Safeguarding Board actively participate in each of the DSCP subgroups. Education continues to be a core part of children services MA line-of-sight meetings, where professionals collaboratively review the progress of children and families and contribute to informed decision-making.

The Partnership completed targeted multi-agency audits on intra-familial child sexual abuse and neglect, resulting in informed action plans to improve practice. Training and development efforts were robust, with 126 practitioners responding to post-training surveys—84% reported high confidence and 95% demonstrated strong knowledge application. The voice of children and families was amplified through co-production initiatives, feedback mechanisms, and tools such as Mind of My Own, enhancing engagement and service responsiveness. Additionally, the inaugural DSCP conference, “Finding Our Girls,” focused on violence against girls and received overwhelmingly positive feedback, further reinforcing the Partnership’s commitment to addressing priority safeguarding issues.

Youth Voice recently engaged 254 young people across Dorset over a two-month period to explore the question: “Should mobile phones be allowed in schools?” This consultation was conducted through workshops and assemblies, capturing a broad range of perspectives.

Key themes emerging from the discussions included the impact of mobile phone use on:

- Safety
- Wellbeing
- Social interaction
- Education and learning

When asked to vote, 72% of participating students supported allowing mobile phones in schools, while 28% opposed the idea. Schools in Dorset currently make their own decisions regarding mobile phones, with some schools for example, having implemented a smart phone ban and other schools having a policy of onsite out of sight. The findings from this engagement are now being considered by the Dorset Education Board, which will determine the appropriate next steps.

1.3 Future Planning

In July 2025, the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP) agreed our priorities for 2025-2027:

Priority 1: Violence experienced by children and young people

Priority 2: Domestic Abuse

Priority 3: The impact of children’s and parental mental health and wellbeing on children

We will move forward with several key initiatives to strengthen safeguarding practices across the county. These include conducting bi-monthly multi-

agency audits to assess and improve service delivery, launching a revised neglect strategy and toolkit to support practitioners, and hosting a conference centred on the impact of mental health on children. The Partnership will also continue to embed learning from previous quality assurance activities and enhance independent scrutiny and practitioner guidance to ensure accountability and continuous improvement.

1.4 Conclusion

The DSCP has demonstrated resilience, innovation, and commitment in its first year as a standalone partnership. Through strategic leadership, collaborative practice, and a relentless focus on the voice of children and families, the Partnership has laid a strong foundation for continued improvement and impact. The dedication of all partners has been instrumental in driving forward safeguarding excellence across Dorset.

2. The report

2.1 Please see appendix 1

3. Alternative options considered

3.1 Not applicable.

4. Legal considerations

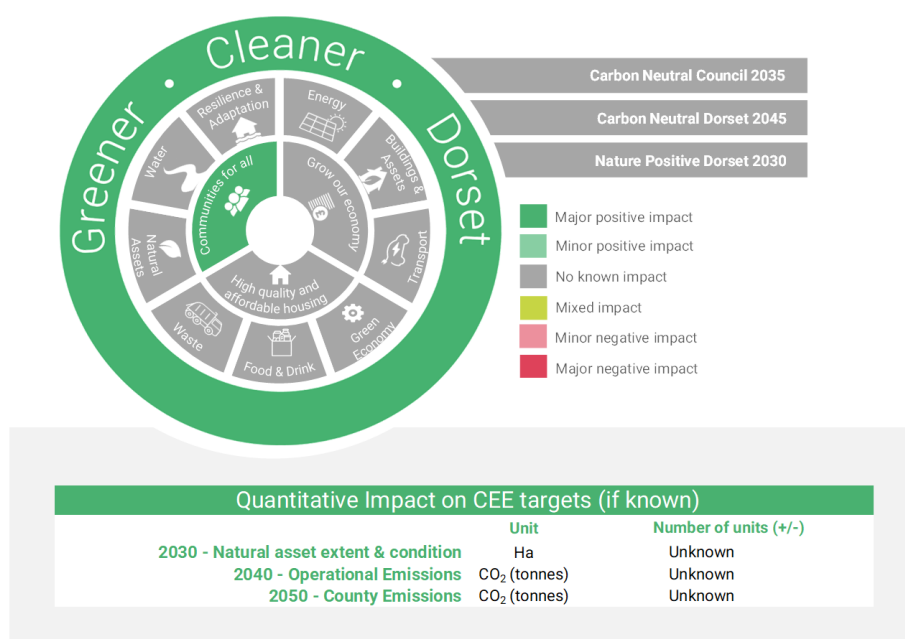
4.1 Not applicable. Statutory Report.

5. Financial implications

5.1 A strong safeguarding children's partnership has important financial implications. By promoting early intervention and coordinated multi-agency responses, it helps prevent escalation of harm, reducing the long-term costs associated with crisis services, health care, social care, and the criminal justice system. Effective safeguarding also improves service efficiency by streamlining processes, reducing duplication, and ensuring resources are targeted where they are most needed. Additionally, robust governance and accountability mechanisms support transparent budget planning and equitable funding contributions from statutory partners, as demonstrated by DSCP's shared funding model and investment in training, independent scrutiny, and statutory functions.

6. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

6.1



7. Well-being and health implications

- 7.1 A strong safeguarding children's partnership has profound well-being and health implications for children, families, and communities. It ensures that children are protected from harm, abuse, and neglect through coordinated multi-agency responses, which in turn promotes their emotional security, mental health, and overall development. By embedding trauma-informed practices and amplifying the voice of children and families, such partnerships foster trust, resilience, and early intervention—reducing long-term health inequalities and improving life outcomes.

8. Other implications

- 8.1 None

9. Risk implications

- 9.1 There is no decision needing to be made, this report is for information only. No risk.

10. Equalities

- 10.1 A strong safeguarding children's partnership actively promotes equality by ensuring that all children and families, regardless of background, identity, or circumstance, are protected and supported equitably. It helps to identify and address disparities in access to services, outcomes, and experiences—

particularly for children and families from minority ethnic groups, those with disabilities, or those facing socio-economic disadvantage. Through inclusive practices, diverse representation, and culturally competent approaches, the partnership fosters a system where the rights of every child and family are upheld, and their unique needs are recognised and met.

11. Appendices

- 11.1 Appendix 1: Dorset Safeguarding Childrens Partnership Annual Report 2024-2025.

12. Background papers

- 12.1 None.

13. Report sign-off

- 13.1 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)