

Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership

Annual Report 2024/2025



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Section 1

Outlining the requirements set out in statutory guidance

The Safeguarding Children Partnership has a statutory responsibility, as set out in the [Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance \(2023\)](#), for leadership and multi-agency co-ordination of “arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.” In other words, the Partnership is a strategic arrangement between the statutory safeguarding partners (Dorset Council Children’s Services, Dorset Police, NHS Dorset, and Education has been more recently recognised as a statutory partner in the local –but not yet national - safeguarding children partnership arrangement) to ensure that there are effective child safeguarding arrangements in place in the local area.

As referenced, in the [final Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership \(PDSCP\) Annual Report 2023-2024](#), the previous PDSCP (including BCP Council) formally separated on the 1 August 2024 into two distinct Safeguarding Children Partnerships for each Local Authority area; the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP) and the BCP Safeguarding Children Partnership (BCP SCP). The structure of the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership is set out in its [multi-agency safeguarding arrangements document](#).

The rationale for the separation was underpinned by strategic changes, brought forward by the [Stables Homes Built on Love review](#) led by the Department for Education, which Dorset Council has been a wave one Pathfinder Local Authority for. This has brought with it a different operating model for Dorset Council Children’s Services, in comparison to BCP Council Children’s Services. In addition, the changes outlined in the Working Together Guidance 2023 posed an additional challenge for the Pan-Dorset arrangement. With the removal of the Independent Chair role, implementing the necessary changes becomes considerably more complex under a Pan-Dorset arrangement. By transitioning to a Dorset Safeguarding Partnership and a separate BCP Safeguarding Partnership, both areas have successfully adapted their structures and procedures seamlessly to align with the revised guidelines. There is a dedicated business team for each Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Whilst the Partnerships are now separate, there are some functions that have been agreed to be delivered jointly and these include:

- The safeguarding children training & development offer
- The child death overview panel arrangements (which is also joint with Somerset)

The [Safeguarding Children Partnership website](#) is also currently a joint website between the DSCP and the BCP SCP, which has been clearly structured into sections for each Safeguarding Children Partnership, as well as including a Pan-Dorset section which includes the above functions. There is a plan for the BCP SCP to establish their own website in due course.

Over the preceding 12 months, the DSCP recognised that to achieve the best possible outcomes:

- Children and families should receive targeted services that meet their needs in a coordinated way.
- There is a shared and equal responsibility between organisations and agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in the Dorset area.
- The responsibility to join up services locally rests with the safeguarding partners who have a shared and equal duty to make arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children across the Dorset area.

The Statutory Safeguarding Partners

Working Together 2023 defined the head of each statutory safeguarding partner agency (Dorset Council, NHS Dorset and Dorset Police) as the Lead Safeguarding Partner (LSP) who are as follows for the Dorset area:

- Catherine Howe, Chief Executive Officer, Dorset Council (for reporting period 24-25 this was Matt Prosser)
- Amanda Pearson, Chief Constable, Dorset Police
- Patricia Miller, Chief Executive Officer, NHS Dorset

As set out in Working Together 2023, the delivery of the multi-agency safeguarding functions and processes should be delegated to the Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs) to allow the LSPs to focus on their joint functions and maintain strategic oversight.

In the Dorset area, the LSPs have identified the following senior officers in their respective agencies who have responsibility and authority for ensuring full participation with these arrangements:

- Paul Dempsey, Executive Director for People – Children, Dorset Council
- Mark Callaghan, Assistant Chief Constable, Dorset Police
- Pam O'Shea, Chief Nursing Officer, NHS Dorset

These representatives or delegates:

- Speak with authority for the safeguarding partner they represent.
- Take decisions on behalf of their organisation or agency and commit them on policy, resourcing, and practice matters.
- Hold their own organisation or agency to account on how effectively they participate and implement the local arrangements.



Pan-Dorset Lead Safeguarding Partner Meeting

In the new structures for each Safeguarding Children Partnership, there is a Pan-Dorset Lead Safeguarding Partner meeting which sits across both. This group meets, up to three times a year, to ensure the Lead Safeguarding Partners have strategic oversight of the multi-agency safeguarding functions. This meeting is structured into three sections: a Pan-Dorset section, a Dorset SCP section and a BCP SCP section. Some of the key Safeguarding Children Partnership items are presented to these meetings, including reviewing progress against the strategic priorities and agreeing the budget for each financial year. The Pan-Dorset section of the meeting allows for discussion and highlighting of any joint strategic issues across both Local Authority areas.

Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership Board

The Dorset Safeguarding Children Board (previously called the Strengthening Services Board up to the 1 April 2025) is where the Delegated Safeguarding Partners deliver their joint functions, as set out in Working Together (2023). This is chaired by the Chief Executive of Dorset Council with representatives at executive level across the Partnership. The Board has been meeting 6-weekly; however, it was agreed at the last board on the 8th of May 2025, that the board would now meet quarterly. The first quarterly meeting has been scheduled for September 2025. Highlights from the Board are shared with the Lead Safeguarding Partner meeting.

Sitting underneath the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership Board are several partnership groups and sub-groups (see Appendix 1 for structure). Each of these groups and sub-groups have a focus on delivering on a certain area of the multi-agency child safeguarding arrangements. For example, the Education Safeguarding Board has been established following the work Dorset Council have been completing as a Pathfinder for the Stable Homes Built on Love Review. This board specifically considers how education is driving forward the partnership priorities and has its own delivery plan against the priority areas.



Partnership Training and Development

The Safeguarding Children training offer continues to be offered as a Pan-Dorset function. This includes a core safeguarding training provision with this being open to attendance from a wide range of agencies, to ensure that there is a multi-agency attendance at the courses.

The administration and co-ordination of the training is paid by income generation.

The Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Training is a trusted and dependable provider, ensuring that organisations meet their safeguarding training requirements. Courses are commissioned through the Learning and Development Framework and meet the specific quality control and contract compliance measures.

The offer is regularly updated with both local and national changes in policy and procedure, as well as in relation to any specific learning that emerges from the completion of local rapid reviews, Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPRs) and any other quality assurance or scrutiny activity delivered by both the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership and the BCP Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Child Death Overview Panel

Statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 defines child death review partners as “local authorities and any Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) for the local area as set out in the Children Act 2004 (the Act), and as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017”.

When a child dies, in any circumstances, it is important for parents and families to understand what has happened and whether there are any lessons to be learned. The responsibility for ensuring child death reviews are carried out is held by ‘child death review partners,’ as defined within Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023, and set out in current legislation. Child death review partners must make arrangements to review all deaths of children normally resident in the local area and, if they consider it appropriate, for any non-resident child who has died in their area.

Child death review partners, for two or more local authority areas, may combine and agree that their areas be treated as a single area for the purpose of undertaking child death reviews. Child death review partners in Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole, Dorset, and Somerset have agreed to treat Pan Dorset and Somerset as a single area, resulting in a joint Pan Dorset and Somerset Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) undertaking child death reviews for Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole, Dorset, and Somerset children.

The CDOP panel met 7 times in 2024/25 and reviewed 59 deaths that have occurred prior to this annual reporting period of April 2024-March 2025: 31 Pan-Dorset deaths (16 Dorset and 15 BCP) and 28 Somerset deaths. There is a delay in child deaths being reviewed at a full CDOP, due to the information gathering process that needs to take place with involved agencies, including the deaths first being reviewed at local child death review meetings, before a review takes place at CDOP.

In addition, CDOP has been notified of a total of 25 deaths of Pan Dorset residents and 27 deaths of Somerset residents which have occurred during this annual reporting period of April 2024-March 2025. These deaths will be reviewed by CDOP within the next annual reporting period. In addition, there were 5 notifications of Out of County children, resident elsewhere who died within our areas (3 Dorset Out of County / 2 Somerset Out of County) – these deaths will be reviewed and recorded by their home Local Authority. The annual CDOP report April 2024-March 2025 is due to be published in November 2025.



Section 2

Dorset Area Profile

The population of the Dorset Council area is 384,809, a rise of 1.3% since the 2021 census. There are 73,056 children and young people aged 0-19 representing 19% of the total population, an increase of 0.5% since the 2021 census. 30% of the population are aged 65 and older (nationally 19%) and the working age population aged 16 to 64 represents 54% of the population.

English is the main language in Dorset with 98.2% of the population in 2021. There are though over 80 languages spoken across Dorset, however residents for whom non-English is a main language make up a very small proportion of the population. The top 5 languages spoken in Dorset are English with Polish, Romanian, Nepalese and Bulgarian spoken by 0.7% of the population. According to the 2021 Census 93.9% of the population are white British, a decrease of 1.7% from the 2011 Census with the remaining 6.1% of residents from Black and Minority Ethnic groups (national 25.6%), this rises to 7.8% for children and young people (aged 24 years and under). Just over half of our residents, who are from an ethnic minority, report as being 'White Other.' This is mainly made up of White European residents.

The beautiful landscapes and towns and villages of Dorset can conceal hidden challenges: there are significant areas of deprivation, mostly in urban areas (mainly Weymouth and Portland). Eleven areas in Dorset are within the top 20% nationally for high levels of multiple deprivation, ten of these within Weymouth and Portland (data from 2019). In 2018, South Dorset was ranked at 533 among 533 parliamentary constituencies in England for social mobility with some 70% of the population of the constituency living in Weymouth & Portland. There is rural deprivation linked to isolation and difficulty accessing housing, transport, and essential services. The Children's Society estimates that approximately 23% of Dorset Children are living in poverty, with up to 45% in some wards (2021).

There are 46,415 children from Reception to Year 14 in Dorset (January 2025 school census). Dorset has 158 Schools Academies, Maintained and Free. Overall, for the quality of education rated good or better by Ofsted, Dorset has 77% of all its education establishments rated as good or better and this is in comparison to the national picture of 84%. Overall, for the effectiveness of leadership and management rated good or better by Ofsted, Dorset has 86% of all its education establishments rated as good or better and this is in comparison to the national picture of 93%.

Attainment at the expected standard at Key Stage 2 for the combined Reading/Writing and Mathematics was at 55%, 5% below national and in the bottom 20% of all local authorities. At Key Stage 4, 42% of pupils achieved Basics (GCSE English & Maths) at grade 4 or higher, compared to 46% nationally. 63% achieved grade 5 or higher, compared to 65% nationally. Both indicators remain a challenge for Dorset. The gap between disadvantaged young people and their peers is still not where we need it to be and faced further challenge due to the pandemic and the impact on school attendance.

Crime is generally low with Dorset being within the top ten safest places to live in the UK. First Time Entrants of young people to the Criminal Justice System are relatively low in a national context.



Section 3

Progress against statutory guidance

A) Activities Achieved and B) Impact

We have been implementing Education as a key safeguarding partner within our new safeguarding activity, in relation to Education being included as a statutory partner in the safeguarding children's partnership. This has involved the establishment of a dedicated Education Safeguarding Board, co-chaired by the Corporate Director for Education & Learning, Dorset Council, and a local head teacher, the board is made up of senior leaders from early years to post 16 education providers across Dorset. In addition, representatives from this Board attend the other Partnerships' sub-groups which allows for education's input in all areas of work across the child safeguarding partnership. The impact of this, is we now have education embedded in our safeguarding children's partnership as an equal statutory partner, which means that the voice of education is now evident across the partnership.

The neglect action plan that was formulated following the independent scrutiny work of neglect in 2023/2024. We have updated our neglect strategy. The impact of this is having a clear strategy on how we address neglect across our multi-agency partners in Dorset.

A multi-agency quality assurance activity has taken place in relation to intra-familial child sexual abuse, which is one of the Partnership's current priority areas. This has resulted in a report outlining the findings and recommendations. The partnership will now take this forward to develop actions to take forward to improve the confidence of front line practitioners in the partnership to work with children who have been sexually abused.



The first conference of the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership took place in collaboration with [Dorset Council's Pineapple Project](#) on the 25 November 2024. The Conference was titled: 'Finding our Girls'. The Conference was linked to our priority area number 1 - Violence experienced by children and young people - by specifically looking at violence against girls.

The conference had two keynote speakers, one of these being Laura Bates who is the founder of the Everyday Sexism Project. Laura talked about issues around global gender inequality and some of her campaign work around tackling this inequality. The conference also heard from Kendra Houseman, who is the founder of Out of the Shadows, which is a training and consultancy service which delivers safeguarding training informed by the experiences of survivors of abuse. In addition, we also heard from local agencies such as Paragon Dorset, which provides services to victims of domestic abuse, as well as an overview of the Chesil Hidden Girls initiative, which promotes safety of girls and women in the Weymouth & Portland area.

The conference was attended by 264 practitioners across the Dorset and BCP areas. We received a great response rate from attendees of 72% to polls and Q&A sections during the event.

We also received great feedback from attendees following the event including:

- 85% rated their experience at the conference as excellent
- 100% agreed that the conference had achieved its aims as set out at the beginning of the day
- 100% agreed that the conference has helped them think about what their organisation can do to support the violence against women and girl's agenda

The Partnership's conference followed a conference held by the Office for Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) earlier in the year, on the 16 July 2024, in relation to violence against women and girls. Partnership work in relation to violence against women and girls continues across the partnership.

In 2024-2025, a diverse range of training courses, including mandatory and priority sessions, such as:

- Safeguarding L2 Foundation
- Working Together (WT) Initial and Update
- Neglect
- Safer Recruitment and its Update
- Managing Allegations
- Online Safety
- Missing Exploited Trafficked Children (MET)
- Child Exploitation Basic Awareness
- Trauma Informed Practice (TIP) Introduction
- Domestic Abuse (DA)
- 7-point briefing aimed at practitioners, in relation to the local protocol on bruises or injuries to non-mobile babies and children, was shared following the review of the local protocol.
- Annual review of Pan-Dorset policies and procedures

Engagement and Impact of Training Attendance

The training co-ordinator is responsible for issuing a survey, to all attendees of the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children training offer, three months post their attendance at the course, to be able to assess the impact of the training in relation to their professional practice. The survey also includes a question around the practitioners' use of multi-agency toolkits, developed by each of the Safeguarding Children Partnerships, to support their practice in certain areas (e.g. working with parents/carers who are or have experienced domestic abuse.)

Our training programs have seen significant engagement with the completion of this survey, with a total of 126 responses received from staff across the Dorset Council area. Key highlights from these surveys include:

- **High Confidence Levels:** 84% of delegates reported feeling confident or very confident in applying their learning.
- **Knowledge Application:** 95% of delegates rated their knowledge as good or extensive.
- **Practical Changes:** 64 delegates reported implementing changes in their practice, positively impacting children, young people, and families.



(c) Evidence of the impact – including contributions of each safeguarding partner

Dorset Council Children's Services

In the last 12 months, Dorset Children's Services have been embedding and adapting the Families First for Children Pathfinder model. The aim of the programme was to test-and-learn approaches to increasing effective, preventative multi-agency support and protection services, in response to the Government's strategy 'Stable Homes, Built on Love', published in February 2023.

Pathfinder areas have designed, and are now delivering, services across four key policy pillars:

- 1) Family Help,
- 2) Child Protection,
- 3) Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- 4) Family Networks.

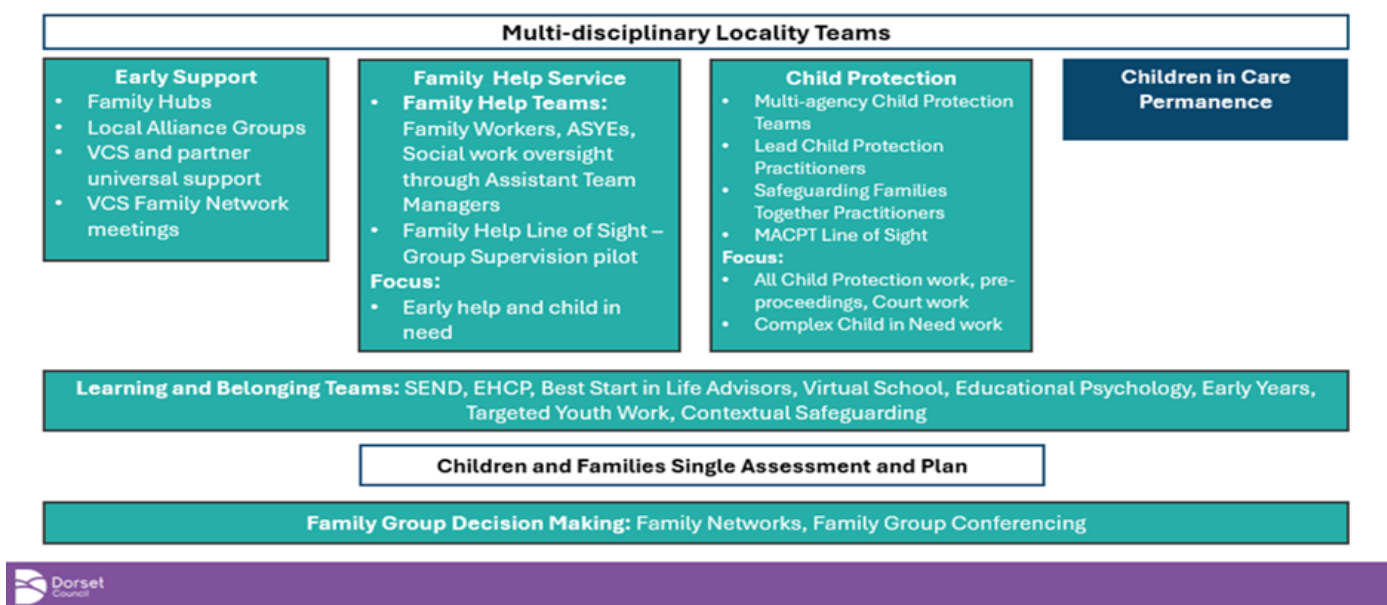
The Families First for Children (FFC) Pathfinder programme concluded on 31 March 2025, having successfully demonstrated the feasibility of its delivery model and significantly influenced national policy. As the programme transitions into a business-as-usual phase, service delivery and transformation will continue in accordance with the locally agreed and costed plans. This marks a pivotal step in embedding the Pathfinder model into routine practice.

On 20 March 2025, the national guidance for the Families First Partnership Programme was published, introducing several key changes from the earlier Wave 1 and Wave 2 Design Specifications. Notably, the new guidance provides greater clarity on the roles and responsibilities of Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams and the Lead Child Protection Practitioner. It also omits specific requirements for Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements, as these are now addressed in the updated *Working Together to Safeguard Children* framework. Furthermore, Family Network Support Packages will not be implemented, and Family Group Decision Making will be mandated only at the pre-proceedings stage, although its use is encouraged earlier in the process.

In response to the updated national guidance, work is actively underway to adapt the local model (as outlined in the diagram below) to ensure full alignment with the new design specifications by March 2026. This adaptation process is critical to maintaining consistency with national expectations, whilst preserving the strengths of the local implementation.

In March 2025, Dorset welcomed Ofsted inspectors for the ILACS inspection, which resulted in an 'outstanding' rating for Children's Services. The final report highlighted the positive impact of the Families First Pathfinder model on both practice and outcomes. Inspectors noted that effective social care practice was evident across all pillars, with statutory duties being met. The 'Family First' approach was praised for empowering families and fostering ownership of their improvement plans. Additionally, secure multi-agency decision-making, through effective line of sight meetings, was recognized as a key strength. The introduction of single-family help assessments, by skilled practitioners, was also commended. The report acknowledged the significant governance and oversight provided by the Pathfinder partnership, as well as the local authority's strong learning culture and openness to external scrutiny. Multi-agency collaboration was further emphasized, with partners from health, education, and police sectors contributing to a deep, shared understanding of children's experiences at both strategic and operational levels.

Implementation: overview of our model



Birth to Settled Adulthood/Transitions

The Birth to Settled Adulthood program, in Dorset, is designed to provide dedicated support services for children and young people with complex special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) as they prepare for adulthood. This service launched in April 2024 and aims to support individuals from birth to 25 years of age.

The Birth to Settled Adulthood (B2SA) programme has made significant progress in the last year, with key developments across service delivery, integration, and strategic planning. Phase 1 implementation focused on expanding Mosaic system access, piloting Care Act assessments, and launching a new outcomes framework. The Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) pathway was further developed, alongside the establishment of a Keyworker Service and a commissioning strategy. Data and performance monitoring remain a priority, with a Power BI dashboard in development. A partnership with Oxford Brookes University is supporting evaluation through a survey rollout planned for late 2025.

Phase 2 has refocused priorities on integration, communication, and targeted support, including the Best Start in Life and All Age Continuing Care initiatives. The Dorset Keyworker Service, a critical NHS priority, is progressing toward full implementation, aiming to reduce inpatient admissions for young people with complex needs. In parallel, the housing strategy has advanced with innovative models to increase supply, improve standards, and meet complex accommodation needs. This includes leasing temporary and settled accommodation, piloting bespoke housing solutions, and reviewing allocation policies. Despite challenges such as limited resources and high demand, the programme continues to drive forward with a strong cross-directorate approach, ensuring young people are supported to live safe, independent, and fulfilling lives.

Dorset Children Services Ofsted Outcome

During March 2025 we went through an Ofsted ILACS inspection of our Children's Services. The report was published on the 9th May 2025. The grading achieved is in the table below.

Judgement	Grade
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
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding

Ofsted quoted in the report that:

"Thinking 'Family First' has empowered families and enabled them to have ownership of their plans to support improvement in their lives. Effective line of sight meetings brings about secure multi-agency decision-making and have become an integral part of practice. Of particular note is the careful introduction of single-family help assessments implemented by skilled practitioners"

Dorset Council Education & Learning

The 2023 update to Working Together to Safeguard Children acknowledges the key role of education in safeguarding and sets out the requirements for local areas to create an environment which enables education settings to be fully engaged, involved and included in local safeguarding arrangements. The Families First for Children Pathfinder required Pathfinder areas to implement a range of activities to test and learn 1) how these arrangements might be put into practice and 2) the impact of such arrangements.

In Dorset, we have worked together to create a system that builds on the work already undertaken by settings to safeguard children, optimising the input of the education sector leaders. Ultimately putting the voice, wisdom and expertise of education at the heart of safeguarding leadership. The Dorset Education Safeguarding Board has been established as part of the Families First for Children reforms and aims to strengthen the voice of education within safeguarding.

The work of the Education Safeguarding Board and Members is to:

- To identify and discuss topics of interest, issues and risks raised by educational providers and, where required, to highlight these to the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP) and make recommendations.
- To evaluate the nature and quality of safeguarding within educational settings through a range of quality assurance activity, including audits, analysis of data, feedback from practitioners, children and carers and section 175/157 audits.
- To support educational providers with awareness of and compliance with national legislation, policies, guidance, best practice and findings from national case reviews related to safeguarding including highlighting changes.
- To liaise with educational providers to provide awareness and understanding of any key local developments in relation to safeguarding including guidance, findings from inspection, audits and case reviews.
- To feedback to the DSCP on the implication of decisions and policy changes relating to safeguarding in education settings.
- To support/develop training and learning opportunities with the safeguarding partnership training team in respect of safeguarding and education.
- To provide an opportunity for educational providers to identify and share best safeguarding practice and consider themes from Ofsted / Independent Schools Inspectorate reports / inspections.
- To support education settings to be inclusive and respond effectively to issues of diversity including supporting the sector to respond to the changing and complex needs of children with SEND both within mainstream, specialist and alternative provisions.
- To enable representatives from educational settings to link with the work of the DSCP, attend sub-groups as appropriate and provide feedback to the Education Safeguarding Board.

- To develop a work plan to carry out such work as agreed with the DSCP in line with the partnership and the group's priorities.
- To have oversight and ensure completion of actions that arise from Rapid Review and Child Safeguarding Practice Review.
- To report annually on the work plan and contribute to the production of the DSCP's annual report.
- Education Safeguarding Board members will seek the views of their respective setting/organisation/sector groups and bring forward key areas for discussion at in turn Board members will cascade key messages to their settings and sector groups.

The Board consists of representatives from key educational bodies and others, including Early Years, Primary Schools, Secondary Schools, Special Schools, Post 16 provision, Alternative Providers, Learning Centres, Independent Schools, Virtual School and Dorset Council Children's Services.

The safeguarding Board meets four times within an academic year. The first year has run between September 2024 – September 2025. During this first year the board has identified a number of key workstreams that are currently in train and led on by different members of the board.

Dorset Police

Over the last 12 months, the Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT) resources have been aligned along local authority boundaries to allow for more effective partnership working. The structure that has been aligned to the Families First for Children Pathfinder has now been introduced, with regular monitoring in place. Dorset Police attend national Pathfinder meetings, which illustrate the progress Dorset has been able to make in comparison to some other areas. The CAIT team has continued to see high levels of demand and is therefore investing in additional staff (4 officers/staff).

Dorset Police have identified a need to increase the omni-competence in the MASH staff to be able to respond to high demand within the different demand areas, such as Public Protection Notifications (PPN's), attending and contributing to strategy discussions and child protection case conferences. On average, the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) process 1200 Child Public Protection Notices a month. On average, the MASH is collating 110 strategy discussions a month. In 2024, 142 requests were made under Sarah's Law legislation. The Police have provided reports for all initial child protection conferences in the last 12 months.

A new PPN form contains a mandatory voice of the child section, which ensures officers/staff completing the form obtain this. Our Investigative Standards Team have been commissioned to complete audited reviews of crimes, stop search forms, PPN's and other material generated in working with young people. The reviews include whether the voice of the child has been captured. The Paedophile Online Investigation Team (POLIT) review all referrals regarding online abuse to ensure safeguarding advice is required and the appropriate action taken.

The Right Care Right Person (RCRP) principles ensure that individuals, requiring a public service, are dealt with by the right public service. Dorset Police, together with partner agencies, have now successfully implemented RCRP.

For example, partners from health and social care will conduct their own welfare checks before contact with the police, this means the correct professional is engaged who is best placed to deal with the individuals needs, rather than historically the police being asked to take responsibility.

Dorset Police recognise that care is required when assessing risks to children who are often needing extra support with the challenges they face. Care must be exercised to ensure that the child's voice is heard, whilst ensuring their best interests are protected and responded to. Control Room staff and officers have received training in this area and are supported through ICT decision making tools. Where an immediate threat to life

or risk of serious harm exists, Police Officers will always respond.

Dorset Police are currently involved in exploring and implementing a pathway of sexual harm behaviour work to divert juveniles to an education pathway, where the offending does not warrant a criminal justice approach.

Dorset Police are anticipating a National Child Protection Inspection (NCPI) over the next 12 months. This will be carried out by HMICFRS. To prepare, the Force has established an internal board that will be driving quality assurance work and taking note of the findings of other Forces' NCPI reviews.

NHS Dorset (Integrated Care Board)

The Integrated Care Board (ICB) is a statutory partner for both BCP and Dorset safeguarding children partnership's. NHS Dorset continues to collaborate closely and actively participates with statutory duties. NHS Dorset has continued to follow local multi agency partnership procedures for safeguarding children in the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership. NHS Dorset internal safeguarding assurance group (SAG) has monitored safeguarding governance quarterly, throughout the year. Highlights from this group are shared with the Chief Nursing Officer. NHS Dorset oversees the governance arrangements for the NHS providers in the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership.

NHS Dorset chairs the Dorset CSPR sub-group and, as part of that, has chaired several Rapid Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice reviews, (LCSPRs), ensuring any identified learning, recommendations and actions are shared within the NHS.

NHS Dorset has led on implementing [ICON](#) across the NHS and this has been introduced to Children's Social Care, and other agencies, to ensure that parents and carers receive consistent messages regarding responding to crying babies.

NHS Dorset had led on revising the bruising and other injuries to non-mobile babies and children protocol and is currently leading the review of the local unborn baby protocol.

Aggregated Scrutiny

Whilst the Partnership, under the PDSCP arrangement, had recruited independent scrutineers with subject matter expertise for each specific area of scrutiny required. Going forward, the DSCP have agreed to recruit to an independent scrutineer role who will provide scrutiny on our strategic priorities and the functioning of the partnership.

During 2024-2025, the partnership completed two multi-agency assurance activities; a multi-agency learning circle and the intra-familial child sexual abuse quality assurance work.

The learning circle enabled the partnership to bring together frontline practitioners from across agencies to reflect on the child's journey through services and understand any learnings to improve multi-agency working to improve outcomes for this child. To prepare for the learning circle each agencies completed a chronology, this was then combined into one complete chronology that was shared with partners prior to the learning circle. This exercise alone demonstrated the missed opportunities that happens because of not having a multi-agency chronology for children where multiple partners are working to address the needs of the child and family. The partnership is hoping to test the development of a multi-agency chronology in 2025-2026 through the multi-agency child protection team and the changes that will be made to Dorset's model to align with the national families first guidance.

The Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership undertook a multi-agency quality assurance activity, in respect of assessing the effectiveness of the multi-agency response to intra-familial child sexual abuse (IFCSA) of children under 18 years of age in the local area. As per previous Partnership quality assurance activities, this

involved the triangulation of findings from a few quality assurance activities including audits on a selection of children, young people and families' case records, obtaining the views of parents and the voice of multi-agency practitioners and managers.

The quality assurance process identified several strengths in this area of practice including:

- Strong multi-agency collaboration was evident for the majority of the families audited, where effective information sharing between key agencies such as the school, children's social care and health services supported a co-ordinated response
- Child-centred practice was consistently demonstrated, with children's voices being actively included in planning processes.
- Timely interventions were noted across the majority of families audited with recognition particularly for the Police in implementing preventative strategies, such as the use of Sarah's Law.

The quality assurance activity also identified a number of areas for development including:

- Risk assessments completed were sometimes outdated or insufficient
- There was a lack of professional curiosity in relation to the protective capacity of non-offending parents
- Supervision and management oversight were inconsistent, with limited evidence of contingency planning or reflective supervision
- Delays in police investigations negatively impacted children's emotional wellbeing and planning
- Professionals working with the families demonstrated over-optimism, underestimating risks and prematurely closing or stepping down families without fully resolving the concerns

Broadly, the quality assurance activity identified the following themes for development by the Partnership going forwards:

- The need for increased professional confidence and training in working with children and young people experiencing sexual abuse
- There is further work to be done to highlight the importance of understanding the emotional complexity of family dynamics, particularly when children do not disclose their abuse due to loyalty or affection for the abuser, or even fear or what would happen if they told.
- The quality assurance work highlighted a lack of specialist tools and professionals with the right level of expertise to interpret the voices of non-verbal or neurodiverse children.

These areas of development have formed the basis of an action plan that is being overseen by the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership to ensure that the learning is embedded in practice. The action plan will be drive forward by the task and action subgroup which meets 6 weekly. The progress of this action plan will be overseen by the multi-agency quality practice action group and is due to be reviewed at the September 2025 meeting.

Voice of children and families

The voice of our children and families has continued to be a priority for the partnership in 2024-2025. This has been demonstrated in the following activities:

- Feedback, engagement, and co-production are all part of the work we do. A Family Engagement officer has been supporting with work aligned to both Pathfinder and Safeguarding Partnership priorities. Undertaking some co-production of the Section 47 advice and support, now offered by Quality Assurance Reviewing Officers, was developed first with parents who had already been subject to Child Protection processes, to understand how we could strengthen our practice. We are also seeking feedback in relation to our Family Group Conferences and Family Network Meetings to support, enhance, and strengthen our offer.

- The families also volunteered to help shape leaflets and guidance to inform families of our new offer.
- We are further developing our family engagement and involvement and have been working with the Family Rights Group to develop the Dorset Participation Forum (Family Advisory Boards). This is building on the Safeguarding Families Together evaluation and feedback from families to help provide scrutiny, challenge and guidance on our safeguarding partnership arrangements.
- We have worked directly with children and young people in the co-design of the Gender Identity Toolkit for Practitioners. This has now been quality assured by the legal team and will progress through Children's services and then Dorset Council Senior Leadership sign off, followed by partnership governance to be signed off at the Dorset Safeguarding Children board.
- We ensure that our practice across the multiagency partners is trauma informed and all direct work with children is age appropriate, empathetic and relational.
- When we undertake multiagency audit work, we aim to gather feedback from both parents and children regarding the services they have received.
- At key decision-making points we ensure that we speak to children, whether that be for their Child in Care review and Child protection conferences.
- To further support our work with children we have committed to using Mind of My Own with children and young people. We are rolling this out gradually to support and embed this practice across services,

Young People's Voice: Insights from the Pineapple Project Survey

The 2025 Pineapple Project survey, building on its 2022 origins in Chesil Locality, has significantly expanded its reach to include all locality areas and genders across the county. With 1,548 responses, the survey offers a powerful and diverse representation of young people's experiences, perceptions, and needs regarding safety in their communities. The findings reveal both commonalities and disparities across age groups, genders, and localities, providing a rich foundation for targeted action and systemic change.

Young people articulated a clear understanding of what contributes to their sense of safety. The presence of friends and family, good lighting, visible police presence, and access to safe community spaces such as youth clubs and gyms were among the most frequently cited factors. Notably, over 800 respondents highlighted the importance of having designated safe places with trusted adults, reinforcing the value of community-based guardianship. However, a concerning number—over 480—also reported feeling safer when carrying items for self-protection, including personal alarms and, alarmingly, weapons. This underscores a pressing need to address both perceived and real threats in their environments.

Experiences of harm were widespread and deeply troubling. A significant number of young people reported being followed (421), sexually assaulted (262), approached by people in cars (232), and subjected to street harassment (352). These experiences were disproportionately reported by young women, highlighting the gendered nature of safety concerns. The data also revealed that harm is not limited to physical violence but includes a spectrum of violations such as being filmed without consent and exposure to gang-related crime. These findings demand a holistic safeguarding response that recognizes the full continuum of harm.

When it comes to disclosure, young people primarily turn to parents (1175), friends (937), and other family members (504). However, a substantial number also reported not telling anyone (142), citing barriers such as fear of not being believed (958), fear of punishment (805), and not wanting parents to find out (922). These contradictions—where 75% say they would tell a parent, yet 64% don't want parents to know—highlight the complexity of trust, fear, and autonomy in young people's lives. The data calls for a nuanced approach to safeguarding that includes empowering peer support, building trust in professionals, and engaging parents as informed partners.

The survey also revealed that 43% of respondents felt there was “no point” in disclosing harm, and 61% feared they wouldn’t be believed. These figures are a stark reminder of the systemic barriers that silence young people and the urgent need to create environments where their voices are heard, validated, and acted upon. The Pineapple Project’s emphasis on community guardianship, peer support, and contextual safeguarding is a direct response to these needs, aiming to build a culture where safety is not only prioritized but co-created with young people.

Funding

The Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership is committed to the principles of equitable and proportionate funding with shared and equal responsibilities as set out in Working Together (2023). There is a dedicated Business Team to support the work of the partnership across the Dorset area. The budget will also fund the Partnership’s statutory functions, such as completion of Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Independent Scrutiny activity.

The PDSCP separated on 1 August 2024 and the balance of partnership funding of £76,390 was transferred to the new partnership arrangements. Each partnership received £38,195, a 50% share of the available balance.

From 1 August 2024 a dedicated team supported the DSCP work, funded by contributions from Dorset Council, NHS Dorset ICB and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Dorset. As at the 31 March 2025 the DSCP funding balance was £60,716.

The DSCP contributions for 2025/26 are expected to total £151,570. This funding plus the carry forward balance will be used to fund the work of the DSCP.

(c) Future Plans

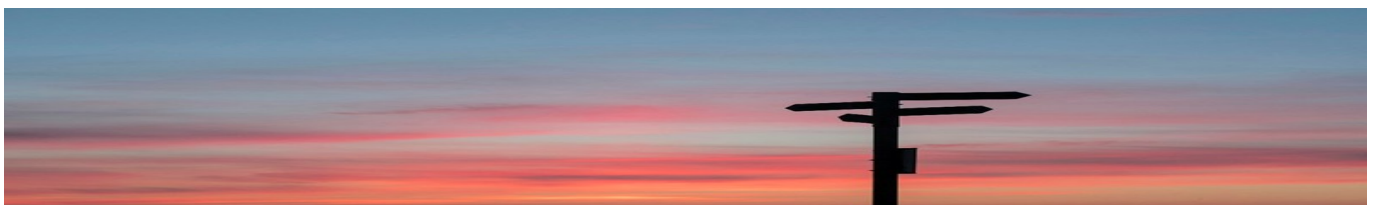
Going forward in 2025/2026 the partnership will be completing multiagency audits bi-monthly against the priority areas, auditing the journey of 5 children and families across the partnership. This will begin in quarter 3.

In quarter 3 of 2025/2026 we also have planned a multi-agency assurance activity which will be scrutinised by an independent scrutineer is planned to take place in quarter 3 this year in relation to pre-birth to 2-year-olds. This is following 4 rapid reviews that took place across quarter 4 2024/2025 and quarter 1 2025/2026 in relation to non-accidental injuries to non-mobile babies and neglect.

The training team plan to relaunch the Neglect offer for free, aligning with the launch of a new strategy and toolkit. A proposal approved by the Dorset SCP MAQPAG recommends a 5% uplift on course fees, linked to the cost-of-living rise. Cancellation fees for free courses have increased from £25 to £30.

£10,000 from the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Training Team budget will be used by DSCP (MAQPAG) for free training offers linked to LCSPRs or annual conference costs, as each partnership will have its own conference.

The DSCP’s next annual conference, due to be held in December 2025, will have a focus on Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing.



Section 4

Additional Information

Priority areas

The previous Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership agreed three priority areas for their work from 2023/2024, and these continued for 2024/2025 (as set out below). These priority areas are currently being reviewed, now that the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership has been formed as a separate partnership, and the updated priorities will be published on the DSCP website shortly.

Priority One: Violence experienced by children and young people including.

- Sexual violence and abuse
- Domestic violence and abuse
- Physical violence and knife crime

A) Sexual violence and abuse

Data, included in the Partnership's Performance Report for Quarter 3 (2024/2025), shows that the overall number of children at risk of sexual exploitation has been increasing over the last three quarters.

Dorset Multi-Agency Child Sexual Abuse toolkit

As previously reported, in the Partnership's annual report 2023/2024, a [Dorset multi-agency child sexual abuse toolkit](#) had been devised and published, on the DSCP website, aimed at multi-agency practitioners to provide them with additional guidance and support in this area of practice. The impact of this toolkit on practitioners' practice is continually being assessed by the Partnership, through multiagency audits and independent scrutiny activity. In addition, the partnership completes a 3-month impact survey, which is distributed to those who have attended the Safeguarding Children Partnership training offer, in relation to practitioners' use of the toolkit. What we have currently found is that there is limited evidence that practitioners or managers are using the toolkits to support the work they are doing with children and families. Individual agencies and partners are developing strategies to socialise the toolkits with practitioners and set reminders for them to be used in our work with children and families. The bi-monthly audit exercise will enable us to regularly review the use of toolkits and track improvement overtime.

Dorset Extra-Familial Risk and Harm

During 2023/2024, the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership renewed [their strategic approach to working with Extra-Familial Harm](#). Extra-familial harm is defined as safeguarding risks to children and young people that present outside of the home environment, for example through drugs, gangs, youth violence or sexual and criminal exploitation. During 2024/2025, the Partnership continued to develop their strategic response to extra-familial harm and have published an [extra-familial harm toolkit](#), on the DSCP website, for use by multi-agency practitioners. This includes key documents, such as the terms of reference for the governance structure in the Partnership in relation to extra-familial harm, including for the tactical and strategic groups.

An Extra Familial Risk and Harm Panel has been in place since September 2023. This is a multi-agency panel, held on a weekly basis. There continues to be good partnership engagement with these Panels.

The work of the Pineapple Project, part of the wider Chesil Hidden Girls concept, continues to develop in its mission to safeguard the young women of Dorset, when they are outside of their family homes and in the local community. The work of Chesil Hidden Girls was highlighted at the Violence Against Women and Girls conference, led jointly by the Pineapple Project & the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership in November 2024. The Pineapple Project are continuing to develop their number of community guardians across the Weymouth, Portland Dorchester and Swanage areas.

In 2025/2026, the Partnership have scheduled multi-agency audits to take place to test that the Extra-Familial Harm strategy has been embedded and to take forward any identified learning and recommendations as required.

B) Domestic violence and abuse

CSPs (Community Safety Partnership) in Dorset lead on the multi-agency response to Domestic abuse across the partnership and the updated strategy for 2025-2029 is currently being agreed and will be published shortly on this page [Dorset community safety partnership - Dorset Council](#)

Domestic Abuse training to all frontline police staff has included the importance of capturing the voice of the child and their wider safeguarding needs. Domestic Abuse Scrutiny Panels review Dorset Police's response to Domestic Abuse and the Force is also a member of the Wessex Domestic Abuse Joint Interoperability Group with the Crown Prosecution Service to identify good practice and areas for improvement.

Domestic abuse quality assurance work – implementation of the action plan

The Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership undertook a multi-agency quality assurance exercise, in respect of partnership work with families where there was domestic abuse and a specific focus in audit activity on under 5s during 2023/2024, as reported in last year's annual report.

During 2024/2025, the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership implemented the learning identified in the action plan.

Action taken by the Partnership: The existing multi-agency policies, procedures and toolkits in relation to domestic abuse were reviewed to ensure that they had specific guidance in relation to undertaking assessments where there is domestic abuse including child to parent abuse and coercive controlling relationships between young people. This included reviewing the [High-Risk Domestic Abuse \(HRDA\) procedure](#) that also sits within the [multi-agency domestic abuse toolkit](#).

In addition, the Partnership sought assurance from Dorset Police, Dorset Healthcare, NHS Dorset on behalf of primary care and Children's Social Care in relation to the assessment tools they use for working with domestic abuse and that they have appropriately considered this learning point. All of these partner agencies provided assurance in relation to the assessment tools that they utilise and the further development work that is happening within each agency in relation to ensuring the voice of the child, young person and parents/carers are effectively captured and responded to.

Action taken by the Partnership: The timely issuing of reports for child protection conferences has been taken forward by the Families First for Children Pathfinder, as part of the test and learn phase of this programme. This is being tracked through the multi-agency child protection action group.

Action taken by the Partnership: The multi-agency safeguarding children training offer in domestic abuse was reviewed to ensure that the learning identified through the quality assurance activity was included, and this is now part of the training programme for multi-agency practitioners for 2025/2026.

In addition, 7 pilot sessions have taken place across a selection of Dorset schools in relation to training on coercive control which has been delivered by You Trust. These have been received well by the schools, strengthening the schools understanding of spotting the signs of coercive control in relationships. These sessions are currently being fully evaluated, led by the Safeguarding Schools team in Dorset Council, to see if these could be rolled out wider across all Dorset schools.

Action taken by the Partnership: Dorset Council colleagues in the Community Safety Partnership have established a business case for a digital actions management system that would allow for better tracking of actions from HRDA. This was endorsed by the (HRDA) Quality Assurance Group and is currently being progressed, with completion of this scheduled for 2025/2026.



C) Physical Violence and Knife crime

Work in relation to knife awareness and knife crime sits within the Community Safety partnership (CSP), recognising the collective need to support and address this within the community.

Dorset Police continue to support Operation Sceptre (a national initiative in relation to knife crime) across Dorset and this includes diversions, targeted intervention for those most at risk of being involved in knife crime, and educational work for schools across the County with the firearms and knife education work (FAKE). F.A.K.E. is also supported by the safer school's network and our education colleagues, reaching between 2500 and 3000 young people twice a year. Work continues, throughout the Dorset local authority area, around the serious violence duty with working groups targeting knife crime intervention and education for young people, along with funding opportunities to support this work. The Dorset Police Safeguarding Hubs incorporate knife crime and physical violence when considering exploited children. Those identified as being high-risk will be 'managed' in conjunction with both Dorset Council and BCP Council.

The Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership recognises that limited multi-agency quality assurance activity has yet been completed in relation to physical violence and knife crime. The Partnership are proposing for the strategic priority areas 2025-2027, that this priority area is renamed to extra-familial harm which will include physical violence, knife crime, sexual violence and abuse, including online abuse. Although the data shows that public place violent crimes and knife crimes shows stability in this area, with numbers broadly similar to the same quarter last year, this does remain an area of concern and thus has been proposed to be retained as a priority area going forwards.

Priority Two: Children's mental health and emotional well-being

Children's mental health and emotional well-being continues to be a priority area for the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership. However, in recognition that there are several elements to this area which are not all overseen by the DSCP, the Partnership have proposed to narrow the focus of this priority area, going forwards for 2025-2027, to the impact of children's and parental mental health and well-being on children.

Dorset Police will seek to minimise the occasions young people are arrested and taken to a custody environment and will use voluntary attendance where possible. If they are arrested, there is an increased focus to ensure they are dealt with quickly and effectively and will be screened for achieving a 'reachable moment' to connect with the young person. The Force has become more effective at using and enforcing bail conditions, civil orders and Domestic Violence Protection Notice's to lessen the emotional impact of domestic abuse on children within the household.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Transformation

CAMHS is undergoing a transformation currently, and this will include having a presence at the Family Support and Advice Line (the 'front door' to Dorset Children's Services), as well as offering support in schools. This is due to be implemented in 2025/2026.

Priority Three: Neglect

During the past year, Dorset Police took part in the Neglect Scrutiny Panel and is now implementing the learning identified which included greater professional curiosity. Training has been provided to officers and staff to inform them of what they should be looking for when in a house or engaging with young people. Allocation of children and young people where neglect is a feature will be discussed at the Force Tasking meeting to ensure appropriate ownership.

Independent Scrutiny Project – Implementation of the action plan

During 2023/2024, an independent scrutiny project was commissioned by the Partnership focusing on neglect.

During 2024/2025, an action plan has been implemented and progressed to address the learning and recommendations from the scrutiny activity. This is still being finalised and due to be completed in 2025/2026.

Some of the actions completed to date are the following:

- The Partnership's neglect strategy has been revised and updated, and is due to be published alongside the updated neglect toolkit – once finalised – in 2025/2026
- Dorset Police have completed an audit on their neglect figures as the number of cruelty and neglect crimes declined between Quarter 2 2022/2023 and Quarter 2 2023/2024, which is in contrast to the national picture of a 106% increase in child cruelty and neglect offences in England in the past 5 years (NSPCC 2023, [106% increase in child cruelty and neglect offences in England in the past 5 years | NSPCC](#)). Furthermore, the Partnership's dataset had identified a corresponding reduction in the number of children starting child protection plans under the category of neglect. The findings from the audit showed that there does not appear to be a significant change or discrepancies in the category of the reasons why the offence of cruelty or neglect has been recorded. The findings do not suggest that there have been any errors in recording cruelty or neglect offences based on category. Based on the information known at this time, there does not appear to be an obvious causation for the reduction in cruelty or neglect offences recorded by Dorset Police other than a genuine reduction in the number of offences being reported to Dorset Police or to Dorset Children's Social Care.
- A review of the neglect multi-agency child safeguarding training offer is underway and will be completed once the neglect toolkit has been revised so that the training offer can promote the use of these tools amongst the multi-agency practitioner attendees.



Section 5

Future Planning - Next steps

There are several key areas currently under development in the partnership including:

- Completion of independent scrutiny of our multi-agency audit in relation to pre-birth to 2-year-olds and implementation of the actions agreed following the learnings and recommendations identified.
- Appointment of a scrutineer
- Implementation of the actions from the intra-familial child sexual abuse quality assurance work through an action plan
- Development of further guidance for practitioners in relation to learning reviews, including Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPRs), where they are involved in these which can be linked to our local guidance document on the serious incident notification, rapid review & LCSPR process.
- Review of the Partnership dataset to align with the revised and updated strategic priorities
- Review of Partnership arrangements around harmful sexual behaviour in children and young people, including development of a framework/local pathway for agency response to this.
- To continue to ensure the voice of practitioners and children, young people and families is central to the work of the Partnership
- To increase the oversight of the Multi-agency Quality Practice and Action Group, all subgroups including the Multi-Agency Child Protection Board will be required to complete quarterly reports. Non-statutory agencies, such as the Youth Justice Service, strategic alliance etc will also be invited to report key highlights quarterly.
- In the development of the Partnership's strategic priorities in the future, the independent scrutineer will develop and run a workshop to support LSP to identify and confirm the priorities, using both data and feedback from partners. This will include having already had discussions with partners in MAQPAG and the Partnership board prior to the workshop. This will continue to ensure priorities are selected using both data and senior operational partner's feedback.



Section 6

Conclusion

As we conclude the DSCP's first Annual Report for the year 2024-2025, we take a moment to appreciate the continued drive for innovation and development in child safeguarding in the local area. This has been particularly notable in the work of partner agencies, as part of the Families First for Children Pathfinder. Dorset continue to act as a blueprint for strengthened safeguarding arrangements, particularly in relation to the involvement of Education within the Safeguarding Children Partnership.

The establishment of separate Safeguarding Children Partnerships has been delivered successfully and without any impact to the business-as-usual arrangements of the Partnership.

Our continued efforts in quality assurance, data analysis, scrutiny activity and service improvement has enhanced the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

The voice of the child and young person continues to be a cornerstone of our work, and significant developments have been made in this area because of the Families First for Children Pathfinder programme, as well as other innovative safeguarding work.

As we look to the future, we are emboldened by our current and previous successes and strides taken in further developing our multi-agency child safeguarding arrangements. We continue to strive for better and take forward any learning identified, both from a local and national perspective.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to every individual and organisation that has contributed to our mission. Your support has been invaluable, and it is through our continued partnership that we will forge a path towards a safer, more nurturing environment for all children and young people in the Dorset area.



Appendix one

Dorset Safeguarding Children's Partnership: Education as an equal Safeguarding Partner

There are senior operational staff from the four partners; health, local authority, police and education that make up the core membership of the subgroups.

