

Cabinet

9 October 2025

Children's Services, Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services – Post Inspection Update For Decision

Cabinet Member:

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

Local Councillor(s): All

Senior Leadership Team:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

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

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In June 2025, Dorset's Children's Services provided Cabinet with the outcome of the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Service (ILACS), which took place in Dorset in March 2025, and about which Ofsted published their report in May 2025. The outcome was a grading overall of 'outstanding', with three of the four sub-categories graded as 'outstanding' and the fourth, the experience and progress of care leavers, graded as 'good'.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on progress against the Post Inspection Action Plan and shares Children's Services priorities for the next 12-months
- 1.3 In July 2025, children's services' senior leadership team met with Ofsted at the 'Annual Engagement' event. The Annual Engagement is a formal meeting between Ofsted and the local authority under the national Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services framework.
- 1.4 Dorset provided Ofsted with an update on the Post Inspection Action Plan along with its updated 'Self-Evaluation'. Dorset's Self-Evaluation sets out our assessment of services and our priorities for the next 12-months.

- 1.5 Since June 2025, Dorset's Care Leaver Service has progressed the actions in the Post Inspection Action Plan.

2. **Recommendation**

- 2.1 Cabinet is assured of the progress against the Post Inspection Action Plan.

3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 Dorset Council has a statutory duty 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 the 'communities for all' priority in the Council Plan.
- 3.2 This report provides assurance that Children's Services are continuing to learn from inspections and improve services to the communities of Dorset.

4. **The report**

- 4.1 Ofsted ILACS inspections evaluate the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements in respect of:
- The experience and progress of children who need help and protection
 - the experiences and progress of children in care
 - the experiences and progress of care leavers
 - the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families
 - overall effectiveness
- 4.2 Ofsted rated Dorset's Children's Services overall as 'Outstanding'
- 4.3 Ofsted identified one recommendation in the final report:
- Area to improve: The clarity and detail of the care leaver offer, including for care leavers who are parents. (Outcome 4, National Framework)
- 4.4 In June 2025, Dorset's Children's Services reported to Cabinet its Post Inspection Action Plan to address the recommendation in the report.
- 4.5 Since the June Cabinet, Dorset's Care Leavers Service has progressed the Post Inspection Action Plan:

A comprehensive review and enhancement of the support offer for care experienced young people has been successfully progressed. This work was co-produced with care experienced young people through dedicated workshops within the Corporate Parenting Board, resulting in a clearer, more equitable, and robust offer. Key improvements include:

- **Equitable Financial Support:** We are reviewing our approach to Council tax support to ensure fairness for care experienced young people living both within and outside Dorset.

Equitable financial support for care leavers in England is structured through a combination of statutory entitlements, discretionary local offers, and charitable grants.

We support all care leavers with housing payments such as rent deposit, rent in advance and will act as a guarantor to support finding suitable housing in the private sector, in their chosen location. We have reviewed our birthday/festival gift and from December 2025 this will increase from £20 to £50, making it inline with other Local Authorities. Care leavers in Dorset will have financial support with driving lessons, irrespective of where they live, this is matched to the offer available when in care so our young people are not at a disadvantage should they want to learn to drive at a later age/stage. Our care leaver app enables us to share details of our local offer as well as updates, discounts and events for our care leavers to access.

- **Targeted Support for Young Parents:** The offer has been strengthened to better support care experienced young people who are parents, aiming to give their children the best possible start in life.

Care leavers who are parents face unique challenges and require tailored support to ensure both they and their children thrive. We have worked in collaboration with our localities to ensure there is an enhanced offer to support care leavers who are parents within Dorset. We will be able to offer dedicated one-to-one support for care leavers who are parents through our family workers who have enhanced training to understand the lived experiences and needs of care leavers who are parents.

Our care leavers will have priority access to the Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC) programme. This is a peer-led parenting initiative designed to support families in disadvantaged communities across the UK. EPEC trains local parents to deliver structured parenting courses to other parents in their community. The idea is to build trust, relatability, and empowerment by having parents support each other, rather than relying solely on professionals. The programme has a focus on positive parenting strategies, managing behaviour, building emotional connection, communication and developing boundaries.

The PAUSE project is being commissioned to deliver and support care leavers in Dorset at an early stage (pre-pregnancy, antenatal and postnatal) to offer specific parenting support, understanding the impact of their own childhood on parenting capacity with the aim to break the cycle and to enable them to be successful parents, reducing the need for their children to come into care.

Our health support and offer to care leavers is an area we have identified needs further strengthening. We are working closely with our partners to identify care leaver “friendly” GP surgeries across Dorset, where all practice staff are trauma informed trained and can support our young people when they are needing health and medical care. There is the potential for a health “flag” for care leavers (with their consent) and a summary of their lived experiences so they are not needing to repeat their history, and key professionals will have access to the sensitive information to help support and engage with our young people. Oasis Midwifery provides enhanced support through pregnancy and beyond for care experienced young people. This is a targeted and enhanced support offer with care and support being offered beyond the universal health offer.

The lead PA for education, employment and training (EET) within the care leaver service develops a relationship and mentoring support to all our care leavers who are parents. There is a specific focus on re-engagement into EET, access to our pathway to employment programmes to build confidence and offer practical help and support to overcome the barriers and challenges we know our young people face and feel when returning to the workplace after having children.

- **Improved Accessibility and Visibility:** The offer is now more visible and accessible through enhanced online information and workforce development initiatives, ensuring both young people and staff are well-informed. We have reached out to our communities and partners to share and promote the Dorset local offer available to care leavers. This has included information sharing and face to face sessions with local GPs, police, midwifery and health visitors, local colleges and secondary schools as well as updating our website, launch of the care leaver app and sharing through social media and the Council website and intranet. We are confident that all our staff within children’s services are aware of the Dorset local offer and have access to the tools

These actions reflect a strong commitment to listening to care experienced young people and tailoring support to meet their diverse needs.

- 4.6 Dorset’s Children’s Services leadership team met with Ofsted to present our updated ‘Self-Evaluation’ including our priorities for the next 12-months.

Priorities for the next 12-months are:

- Ensuring Safe Implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme
- Ensuring family decision making is at the heart of all we do
- Closing the gap in Educational Outcomes
- Delivering our Post Inspection Action Plan

5 Legal considerations

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

6. 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.

7. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

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

8. Well-being and Health Implications

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

9. Other Implications

Reputational damage can arise from failed Ofsted inspections.

10. Risk Assessment

The level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

11. Equalities Impact Assessment

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

12. Appendices

- [Dorset ILACS Report 2025](#)
- Dorset's Post Inspection Action Plan Updated September 2025

- Dorset's ILACS Self-Evaluation June 2025
- Dorset's Children's Services 'Test of Assurance' June 2025

13. **Background Papers**

- [June Cabinet Report \(Item 7\)](#)
- [ILACS Framework](#)
- [Strategic Alliance Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2023-33](#)
- [Dorset Local Area SEND Inspection 2024](#)
- [Dorset Focused Visit 2023](#)
- [Dorset ILACS 2021](#)

14. **Report Sign Off**

- 14.1 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).