



Dorset
Council



Dorset Children's Services Self-Evaluation June 2025

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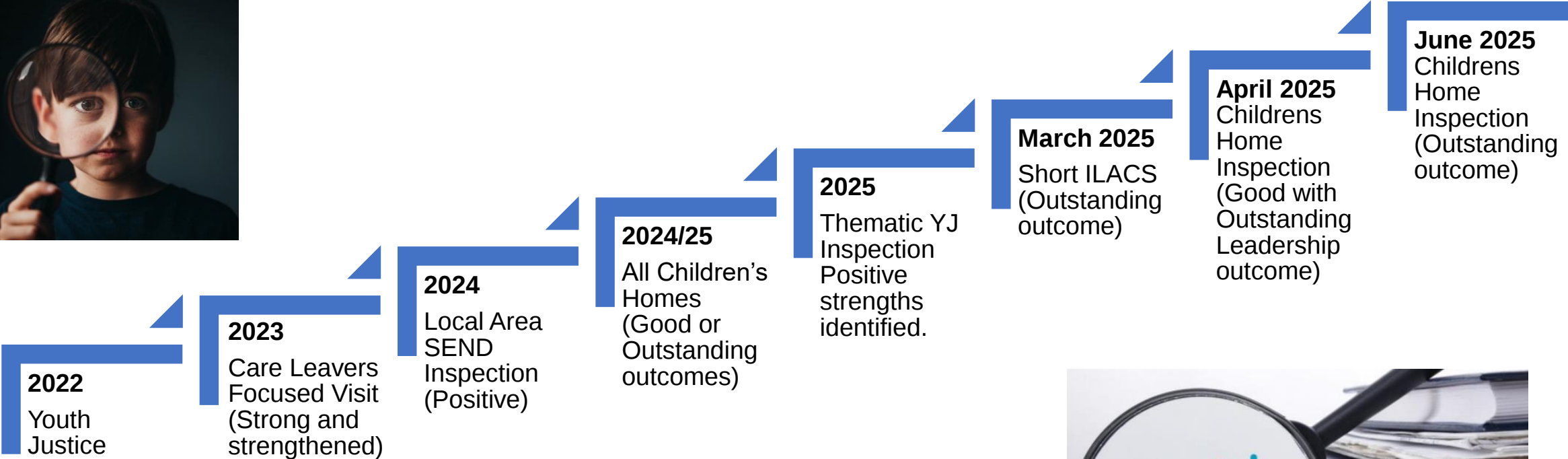
Dorset Children's Services Self-Evaluation

Section One: Introduction and Context



Dorset Children's Services External Findings

Continuous improvement is integral to our work in Dorset, striving to be ever better for our children and their families. Good progress has been made on all recommendations from inspections.



Introduction

Welcome to the Dorset Children's Services Self Evaluation of Practice, June 2025. This document sets out our self-evaluation against the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Framework and articulates:

- Our overall strategic plans and objectives for Dorset children, young people and their families
- Our governance structures, workforce, practice framework and model
- What we know about the quality and impact of practice in Dorset to improve the lives of Children, Young People and their families
- How we know this
- Our plans for the next 12-months to maintain and improve practice

Our self-evaluation focuses on our performance, data and evidence from 1st April 2024 through to 31st March 2025. Unless otherwise stated data provided is at 31st March 2025.

In May 2025, a motion was passed at full council to uphold the rights of the child by implementing a Childrens Rights Committee and a Childrens Rights Impact Assessment for use across the Council. We are ambitious to have a rights respecting county and support communities and our partner organisations to achieve this. You will see the articles woven through our Self Evaluation.

The document also provides our self-evaluation of education outcomes and should be read alongside our [self-evaluation of SEND practice](#) (March 2024) to provide a full view of Dorset Children's Services. Our Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People Partnership's Annual Report 2025 also identifies progress and impact against our 7-priority areas in our Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2023-33.

Dorset a great place to live, work and visit

The beautiful landscapes, towns and villages of Dorset can conceal hidden challenges (Data accurate to 31st March 2025)



Population: **384,809**

- 30% aged 65 and older (compared to 19% nationally)
- 6.1% population from global majority

Population (0-25): **90,535**

- 24% of the total population
- Low birth rates
- Historically working age young people leave the area



46,854 children from reception to Y14

- 12% of school-age children from global majority

158 schools

- Blend of academies, maintained and free schools
- 84% are rated good or outstanding
- 83% of academies are rated good or outstanding
- 86% of maintained schools are good or outstanding

Disadvantage gap

- Outcomes at Key stage 2
- Outcomes at Key stage 4
- Gap between disadvantaged young people and their peers is still not where we need it to be



11 areas within **top 20%** of deprivation

- Ten of these are within Weymouth and Portland

25% of children living in poverty

- Rural isolation leads to difficulty accessing housing, transport and essential services

Crime is **low** in Dorset

- First time entrants of young people are also low

Employment is **high**

- Earnings are below average

House prices are **high**

- Affordability issues for many young people and key workers

Number of Children (as of 31 March 2025)

- 2469 Family Help (inc. 1122 Child In Need)
- 280 Child Protection
- 435 Children In Care (Inc.41 UASC)
- 300 Active Care Leavers



New Dorset Council Plan

May 2024 the Liberal Democrats formed the new administration of Dorset council. New Council Plan was approved by cabinet in November 2024.

Our Vision

“Working together to create a fairer, more prosperous and more sustainable Dorset for current and future generations”

Our Strategic Priorities

Our four strategic priorities set out where we want to make a significant and positive difference. They are:



[Provide high quality and affordable housing](#)



[Grow our economy](#)



[Communities for all](#)



[Respond to the climate and nature crisis](#)



Prevention and Partnerships are the golden threads woven throughout our priorities.

Our Values and Strategic Priorities

We continue to believe it has never been more important to focus on ensuring equity of outcomes for all children and young people. The pandemic disproportionately affected children and young people, widening the gap in outcomes. Our collective determination can be found in our ambitious partnership plans.

We know we are stronger together. Strong relationships and partnership working is key to delivering the best outcomes we all aspire to achieve for our families in our communities. We have co-produced and delivered a framework across the Dorset Council area for all key strategic partners to collaboratively work to achieve the best outcomes for Children and Young People.

Our partnerships ensures that children, young people and their families have ongoing opportunity to codesign the services that affect them.

Our partnership works together to understand the needs of local children, young people and their families, so that we can commission and provide services that are inclusive and supportive, always keeping children and young people at the heart of all we do.

In June 2025, our Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People published its Annual Report 2025. This provides an update on our continued priorities, progress and impact of our delivery plan, supporting improving outcomes for children, young people and families across our 7 priority areas.



Our strategic **priorities** as set out in our 10-year plan

- Best Start in Life
- Young and Thriving
- Best Education for All
- Best Place to Live
- Local Family Help
- Good Care Provision
- Safe at Home and in the Community

Our Partnership Ambition for our Children and their Families

Our partnership vision for Dorset:

We passionately believe that strengthening families and communities - 'working with' not 'doing to' - is the key to unlocking potential and aspiration and this plan sets out how we will do that together.

Children and young people have generously given their feedback, shared their ideas and told us what is important to them. Their voices have shaped this plan, and we will work hard over the next 10 years to deliver their vision for Dorset."

We remain committed to achieving our vision, which is for Dorset to be the best place to be a child, where communities thrive, and where families are supported to be the best they can be.

It is a privilege to represent our children and young people as Dorset Council's Lead Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills and Chair of the Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People. I am proud of the positive impact our partnership is making and know that, collectively, we continue to strive to improve our work in supporting every child to have every chance." - Cllr Clare Sutton, (Annual Report June 2025)



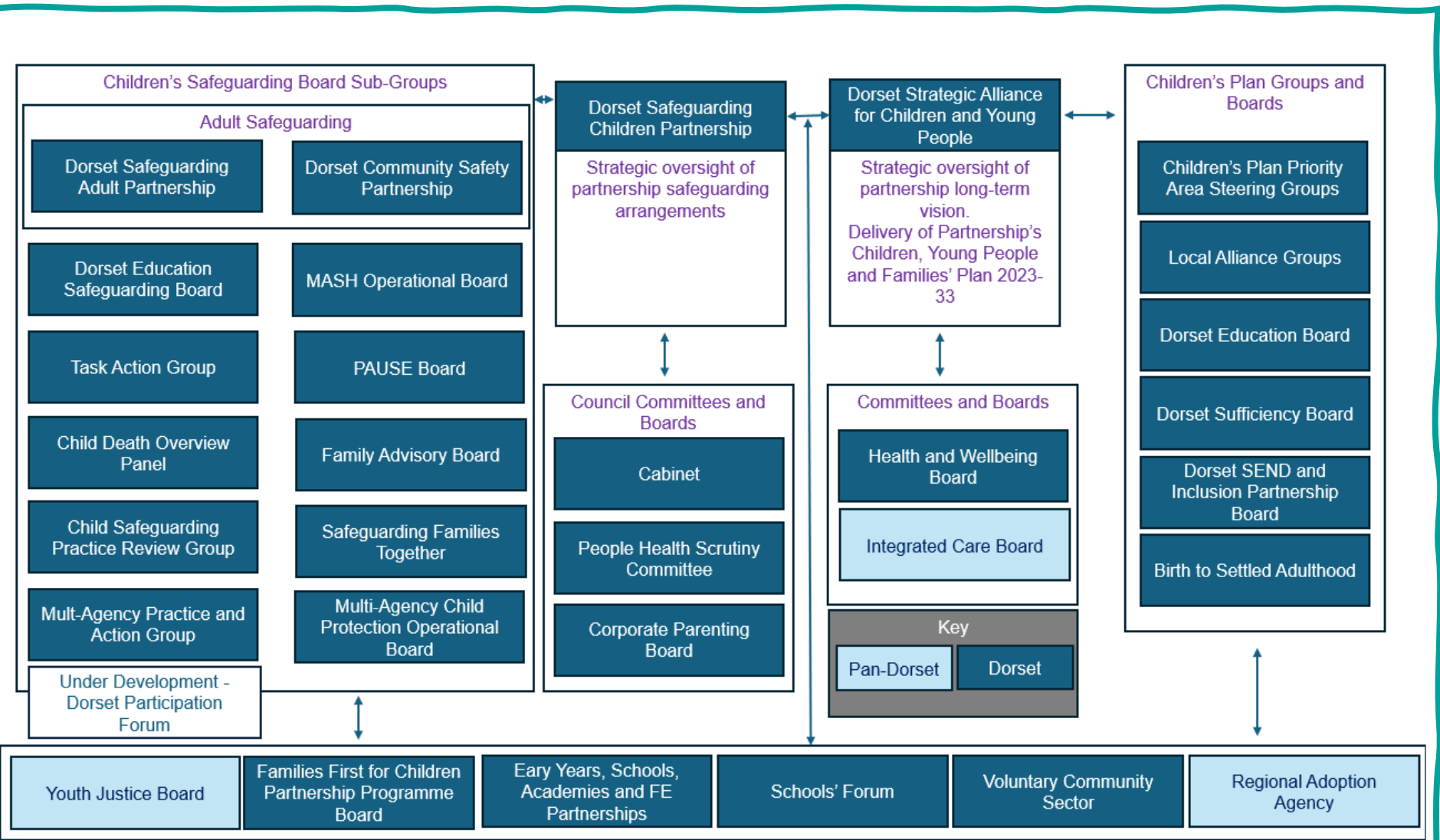
Our Annual Report 2025 was published in June 2025

Our Children, Young People and Families Plan can be accessed here: [Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2023 to 2033 - Dorset Council](#)

Our strategic partners are Dorset Council, NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board, Dorset Police, 0-25 Voluntary Community Services, Schools and educational providers and the Dorset Parent Carer Council.

Collectively, we are ambitious for our children and young people and are committed to providing and supporting strong life outcomes.

Strong Partnership Arrangements and Governance Structures



There is a **Golden thread** in our strategic plans

- Children, Young People and Families' Plan
- SEND Strategy
- Belonging Strategy and Plan
- Sufficiency Strategy
- Education Strategy
- Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Family Networks Strategy

Local, multi-agency services report into an established and embedded multi-agency governance structure

Governance provides member and executive assurance



Strong Leadership and Strategic Partnerships

We have solid foundations in place recognised in our March 2024 Local Area SEND Inspection and Short ILACS March 2025

Committed Political and Corporate Leadership. Liberal Democrat leadership with cross-party support

Robust Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership arrangements
– Appointment of Independent Scrutineer in Autumn 2025

Children, Young People and Families Plan 2023-33: partnership plan to improve longer term outcomes – shaped by our children and young people

Local Authority delivering Families First for Children Programme

Experienced Children's Services Leadership Team and 'One Team' Council and Partnership approach: shared values and principles

Dorset Children Thrive: our locality structure is making a difference to children, families and our teams

A **single ICB** progressing on a Dorset Council Place Based approach

Robust Governance, Management Oversight and Performance and Quality Assurance: frameworks embedded

Fabulous Staff
Committed and largely permanent workforce with managed caseloads

Stable and Effective Leadership / Stability in Transition

Council Political and Officer Leadership Team

The Chief Executive, Senior Leadership Team and Elected Members play an active role in providing support and challenge to the service and partnership and have a strong line of sight to practice.

Sam Crowe, Executive Director of Public Health has been acting up as Interim Chief Executive since March 2025.

Our new, incoming Chief Executive, Dr Catherine Howe will join us in August 2025.

Regular briefings take place, and both the Interim Chief Executive and Portfolio Holder participate in quality assurance activities. Vital signs (KPIs) for children's services are included in the Council's Senior Leadership Team performance dashboard and on to Scrutiny Committees. Through their roles in supporting our strategic partnerships and contributing to our Quality Assurance Framework, the Interim Chief Executive and Portfolio Holder (alongside senior leaders from across the partnership) have a close line of sight to performance and impact made against our strategic plans.

In addition, the Interim Chief Executive chairs our Safeguarding Children Partnership Board. Our Elected Member Development Programme provides supplementary learning and development to enable members to better understand services. There is strong Cross-Party support for Children's Services priorities.

Children's Services Leadership Team

Our leadership team have a wealth of experience within Dorset and have been promoted from within Dorset providing strong stability in transition. Our Executive Director of Children's Services has been in post since October 2024. He previously held the role of Corporate Director for Care and Protection in Dorset, from May 2022, and represented Dorset on several regional groups as well as leading on the Families First For Children Pathfinder.

Our permanent Corporate Director for Care and Protection was appointed from 1st April 2025 and was previously the Head of Locality and Strategy for Dorchester and West. Our Corporate Director for Commissioning and Partnerships, has been in post since June 2024 following promotion internally from the Head of Locality for Chesil.

The Corporate Director for Quality Assurance has been in post since September 2024, leading on Quality Assurance across Children's Services, overseeing the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership functions and leading on the DfE Sector Led Improvement Programme. Previously she had been the interim Head of Quality Assurance within Dorset before undertaking a period supporting Plymouth City Council.

Our interim Corporate Director for Education and Learning has worked in Dorset as our Lead for Best Education for All since October 2023, recruitment for the permanent position will take place in July. Our experienced and stable extended senior leadership team group includes Heads of Service and Service Managers. Together they take responsibility for leading continued service improvement alongside the senior leadership team. We have established a culture of continuous improvement through monthly Performance Boards, focused on a strengths-based challenge model of performance data and shared learning across the directorate through our governance meetings and performance frameworks.

Dorset Children's Services Developments since March 2025

Two children's homes have been inspected with Good and Outstanding outcomes.

Youth Justice Service performance rating has been upgraded to the top quadrant nationally.

Care Leaver Offer Review and Post Inspection Action Plan to progress the recommendation in ILACS Report.

Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme has ended, and we have begun plans to align to the Families First Partnership Guidance.

Phase 4 of our Valuing SEND Programme has started.

Launched our Valuing Care Programme .

Launched our 5th Mockingbird constellation, Aquarius.

Further promotion and celebration of Fostering in Dorset.

Developments in our Birth to Settled Adulthood Service (0-25) including a joint brokerage approach.

Further development of our Family Hub's and online offer.

Published our Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People's Annual report 2025.

Developed and prepared for our Education and Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People's Annual Conference 2025 (26th June 2025).

Family Rights Group re-imagining pre-proceedings pilot concluded and evaluation underway.

Completed registration for a new edge of care children's home in the East.

In May 2025, a motion was passed at full council to uphold the rights of the child by implementing a Children's Rights Committee and a Children's Rights Impact Assessment for use across the Council.



Dorset Children's Services Performance Data Comparison

Following the ILACS in March 2025, Dorset's Statistical Neighbours have been changed. Our Business Intelligence service are working to update our reporting and benchmarking to account for these changes.

Our measured performance, using the ChAT, dashboards and other nationally available data to benchmark our performance against other good and outstanding local authorities remains strong.

Our '[Direction of Travel](#)' regarding our key performance indicators, remains consistent.

Our measures include 'activity', 'timeliness', 'children in care and care leavers' and 'effectiveness' – See examples



Measures

Activity - referrals, assessments, section 47, ICPC's, CPP, CIC, CIN (inc. CP, CIC), CIN.

Timeliness – ICPC in 15 days, Assessment in 45 days

Children in Care and Care Leavers - CIC with 3+ moves, CIC in home 2+ yrs, Care Leavers in EET.

Effectiveness - CPP ceased after 2+ years, CPP for 2nd or subsequent time.

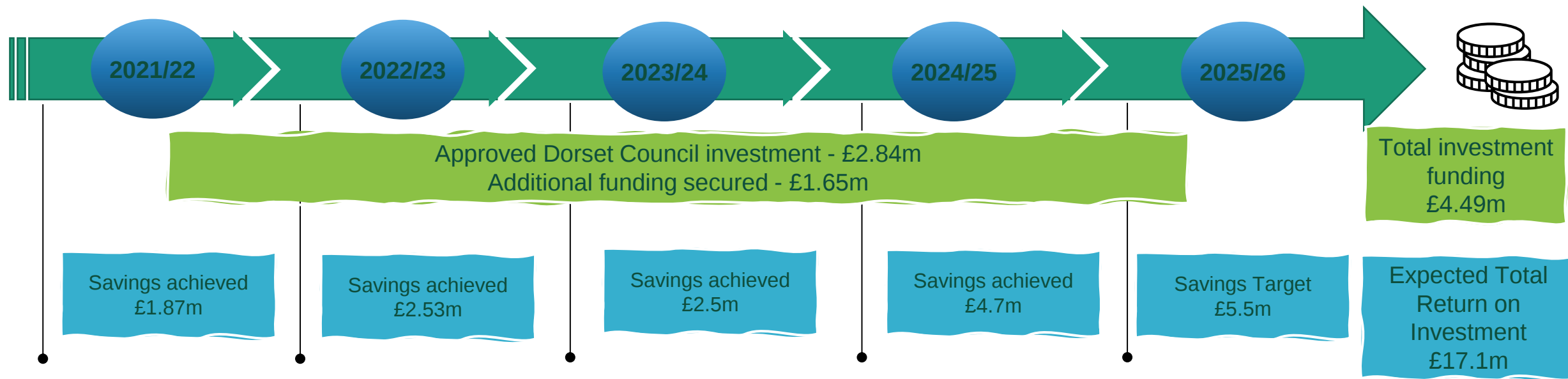
Financial Position

- The Children's Services outturn in 2024/25 was £88.135m compared with a net budget of £87.028m, an overspend of £1.107m (1.3%).
- Nationally, children's services have faced significant financial pressures, leading to widespread overspends. In the 2023/24 financial year, local authorities across the UK predicted a total overspend of £639 million, with children's services alone accounting for £319 million of this figure – nearly 50% (County Councils Network).
- Dorset, although overspending, is not in the same position as most other LAs. The 2024/25 Children's Services overspend represents 16% of the total overspend, not 50%. This is a positive reflection of Dorset Council Children's Services five-year transformation journey, demonstrated through improved gradings and assessment by external agencies, including the recent Ofsted Outstanding grading for Children's Services.
- In 2024/25 the Directorate also delivered **£4.7m (83%) of targeted transformation and tactical savings** during the year.



Transformation Journey

Dorset has a track record of transforming services to meet the needs of our children and young people.



- This investment and savings profile relates to the following **Transformation** projects only (Family Hubs, Mockingbird, Safeguarding Families Together, Birth to Settled Adulthood, Early Support and Digital Family Offer, and Traded Services).
- Children's Services have achieved an additional £7.9m of **tactical savings** over this period (2021/22-2023/24).

Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme:
Total funding secured £5.87m (DfE funding £4.89m and DC Investment £0.976m)

Impact of our Transformation so far

Dorset Council: Children in Care - net weekly cost and number of children

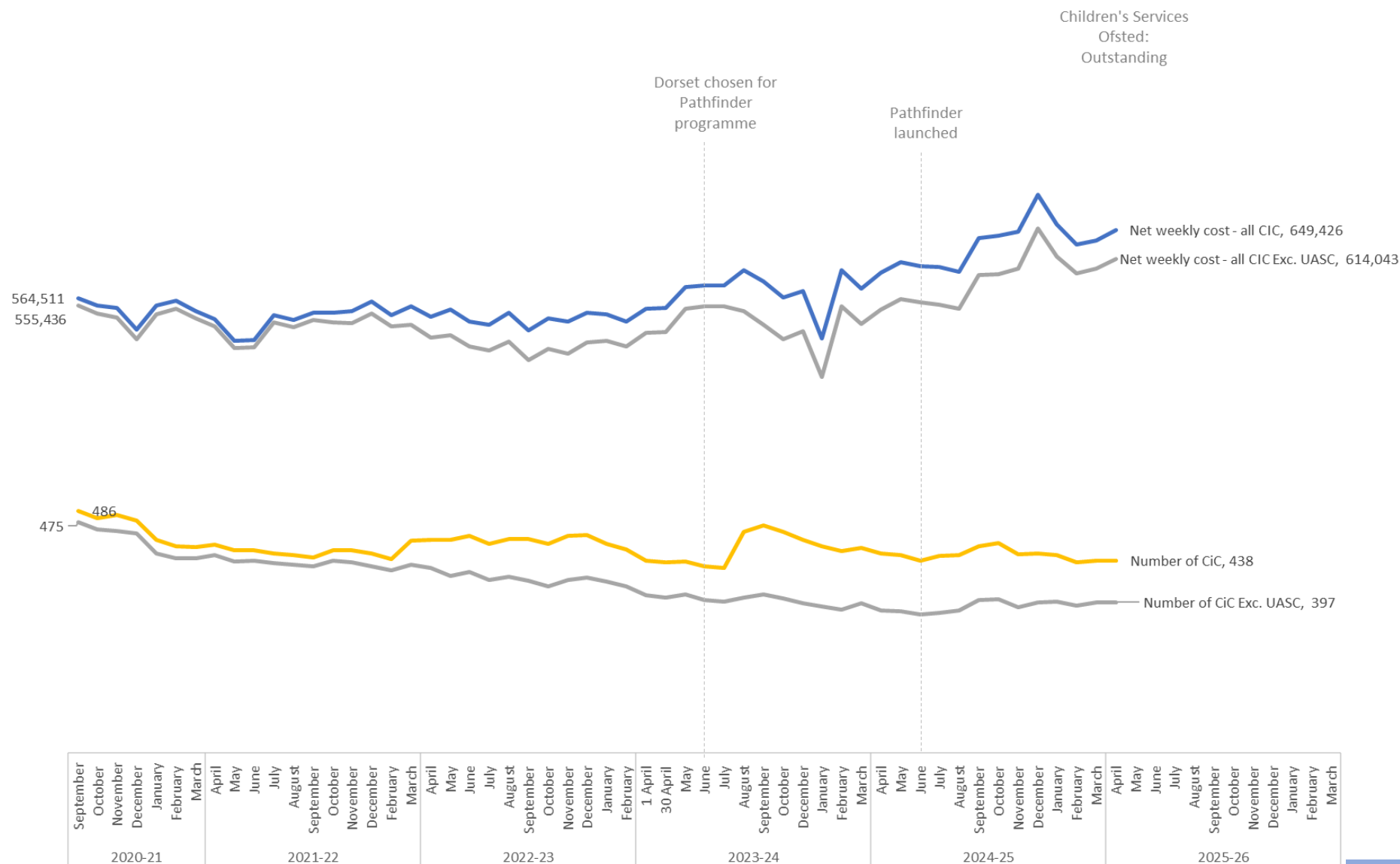
Key Points

The investment we have made in our model and transformation work we have undertaken means:

- We have been able to reduce and stabilise our Children in Care numbers
- Prevent £6.2m of cost if Dorset had remained at the September 2020 number of CiC.

This financial position stems from whole system change and is a function of the management of high-cost placements and investment in early help

Many local authorities will have seen numbers increase year on year.



Transformation Capital and Invest to Save

- **Children's homes**

- Chestnut House - 3 bed - children who are disabled, replaces
- Cherries – 2 bed – children who are disabled, to be repurposed.
- Hayeswood - 3 bed – children who are disabled overnight short breaks
- College House - 3 bed - for children with social emotional and mental health needs – No Wrong Door.

- **Care Leavers**

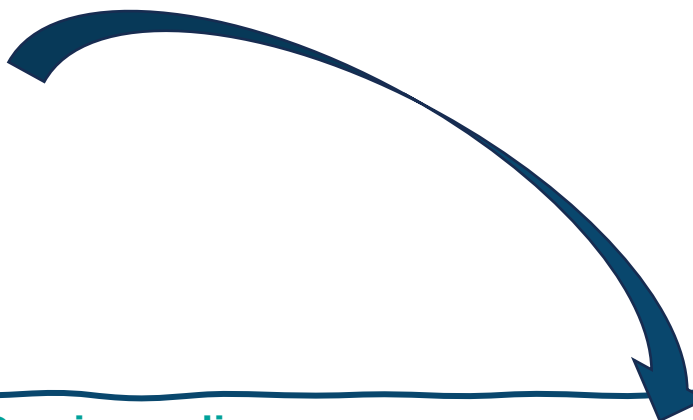
- Clarence House 3 bed
- The Leon Centre 6 beds
- Kirtleton Avenue 12 bed / 8 flats care leaver accommodation

- **Fostering and Adoption**

- £1m pot established to fund extensions and adaptations to foster carer and adopter homes to expand capacity and promote stability and permanence.

- **Family Hubs**

- Eight Family Hubs are now open or in delivery across Dorset.
- Links to the Best Start in Life capital programme for early years and childcare settings



Coming online

- The Rowans - 1 bed Children's Home - social emotional and mental health needs
- Sunnyside – 1 bed Children's Home – disabled young person
- The Chalet – 1 bed Children's Home – short term
- Westham – accommodation for 3 Care Leavers
- Additional care leavers accommodation is the subject of a business case in development.
- Repurpose Cherries



Rebalancing the System

Through our work in the Families First For Children Pathfinder, we are continuing to rebalance the system. Strong partnership work in communities, our conversation-based Family Support and Advice Line, integrated locality model, and expanded innovative edge of care Harbour offer, is delivering the right services and support to families and their children, and at an earlier and therefore lower level of intervention.



We have a broadly similar of numbers of children in need and children receiving an early help service.

We have reduced the number of children subject to child protection plans and reduced the number of children subject to proceedings.

Considering the increase in Unaccompanied Minors, we have reduced the number of children and young people in care and the vast majority come into our care in a planned way.

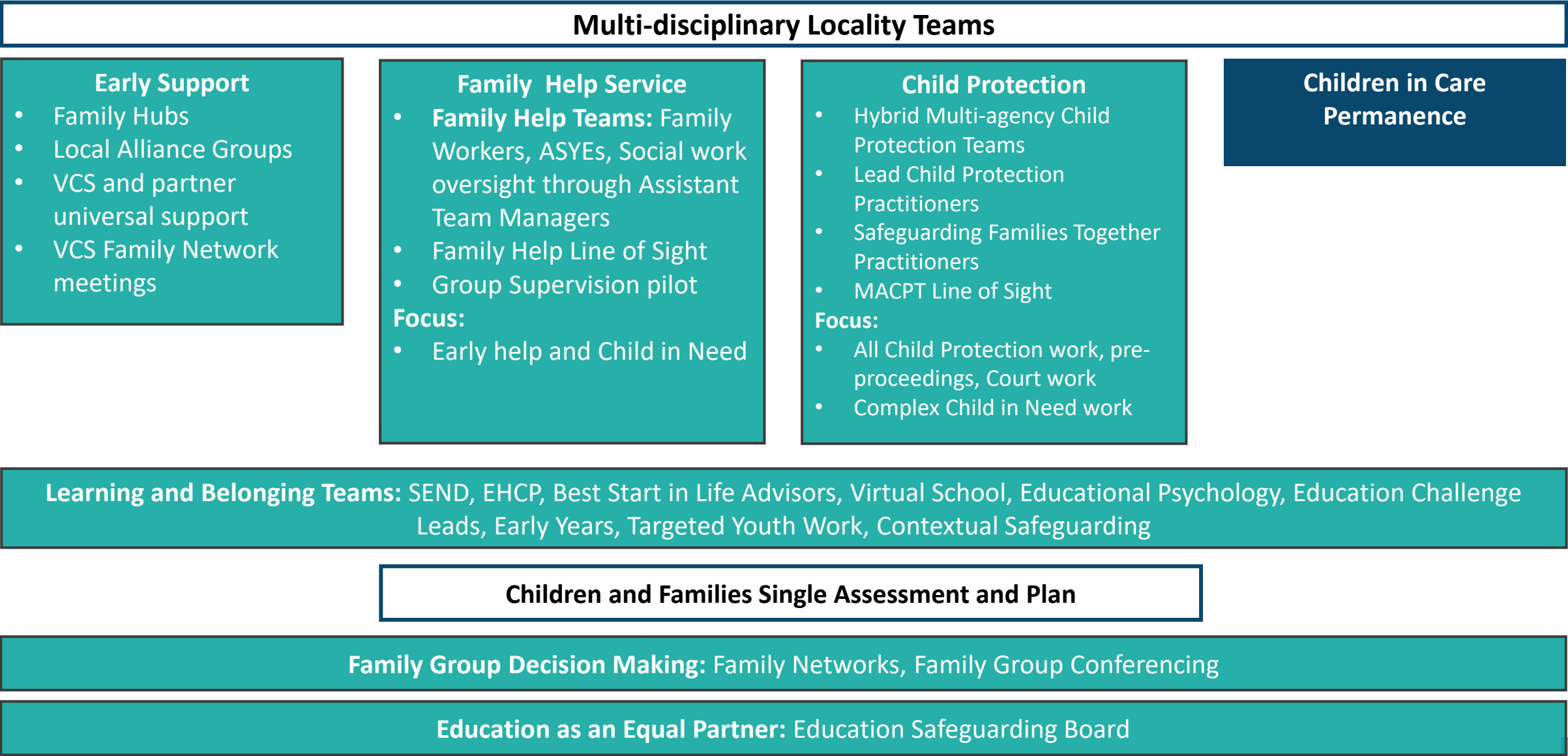


Families First for Children Pathfinder: Introduction

- In 2023 Dorset was selected as a **Wave one Families First for Children Pathfinder**. From the outset we could see that the Families First for Children approach aligned with our thinking and would enable us to go further and deeper with integration, building on our embedded Dorset Children Thrive multi-disciplinary, locality-based teams.
- Partnership is at the core of our model and a senior lead from Health and senior lead from Police were seconded into the Pathfinder Programme Team. Voluntary and Community Sector partners play a key role in advising on and delivering the Early Support element of the model. Our approach and design were informed by multi-agency workshops that have taken place to design each element of the Pathfinder locally.
- Our Education Safeguarding Board is enabling education involvement across the safeguarding system.
- Our programme is led by a Partnership Programme Board that meet 6-weekly (including Department for Education and Ofsted representation) to have oversight of the programme implementation. We have used multi-agency events and reports to committees to ensure a whole system line of sight to the Pathfinder developments e.g. Dorset Safeguarding Children's Partnership Board, Dorset Council People and Health Overview Committee and Integrated Care Board.
- We have adopted a measured and deliberate approach to implementing Pathfinder. Changes have been introduced gradually to safeguard the quality and effectiveness of our practice. Each workstream is underpinned by strong management oversight, clear methods for recording progress, and robust impact measurement. Our implementation has been incremental, with 'go-live' decisions based on readiness and confidence.
- Families First for Children is now integral to how we work in Dorset and as such features throughout our self-assessment. This section provides an overview of our journey and the next steps to **align to the Families First Partnership Programme** guidance and our **Pathfinder role in supporting the national roll out**.



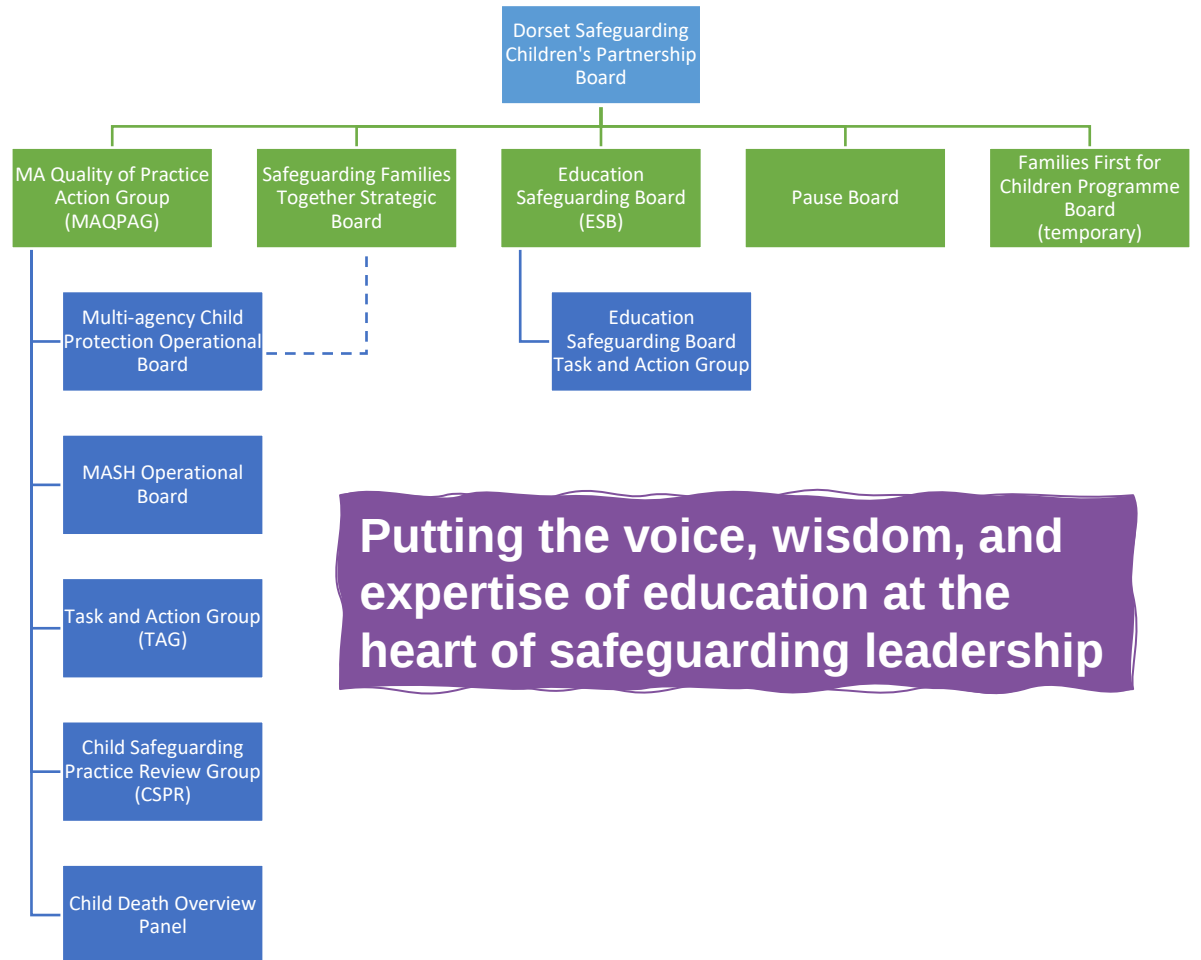
Families First for Children Pathfinder: Overview of our Model



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

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

The ESB – Is made of senior leaders from across the education sector in Dorset. Selected members of the ESB are then members of the sub-groups.



Putting the voice, wisdom, and expertise of education at the heart of safeguarding leadership

Education is represented in all key safeguarding groups

What we are learning – Specific projects

The evaluation has taken 3 main strands:

- A baseline of case file sampling considering the overarching aims of the pathfinder
- Family stories
- Specific projects on each of the main strands of the Pathfinder

The following slides summarise findings and some impact statements from some of the specific evaluations:

- Family Group conferences
- Multi Agency Child Protection Operational Board and Line of Sight
- Family Network Meetings
- Group Supervision
- Youth work
- School nursing

In addition, we closely monitor our performance data and learn from a continual programme of audits to ensure quality standards are met or exceeded.



Key Findings from Evaluation Activities

Family Group Conferences (FGCs):

- 82% conversion rate from referral to FGC
- Families value independent facilitator and transparency
- Event better if: involve families in setting questions, encourage in-person attendance

She took us through the process of what we would be doing when we first got there and really informative and, yeah, lovely to be honest (family feedback)

Multi-Agency Child Protection Board:

- 75% attendance, strong shared decision-making
- Challenge: data sharing in health, consistency across localities

I think it's a really excellent multi agency board. I think it allows us to address issues as and when they happen...because we've got partner agencies on board – we are dealing with things as and when they're coming up and planning ahead.... I think we wouldn't have made the progress that we've made, if we hadn't have had them in place.

Family Network Meetings (FNMs):

- Growing momentum, low staff confidence
- Further training since taken place to boost confidence
- Challenge: perceived family conflict

The person who led the meeting, they really focused our minds on the positive aspects of our family and the things that are really working to remind us that there is a lot of positivity. They framed it in a way that we are dealing with a specific challenge and not that you're bad and you're wrong and not doing good enough kind of thing.

Additional Insights & Impact

Group Supervision Pilot:

- Promotes shared risk, reflective practice, faster interventions
- Even better if: Clearer access routes with defined criteria

School Nurse Assessments:

- Move to face-to-face assessments
- 41% identified new health needs (e.g., hygiene, sleep, emotional health)
- Challenge: Staff workload unchanged so agreed review child protection conferences will only be attended where a health need identified.

Targeted Youth Work:

- Embedded in schools and communities
- Builds trust and engagement with young people
- Positive impact on attendance, confidence, and achievement

I could really....find out what life was really like at home for the young man in my school – that was useful because I could feedback to his teachers and say look this is what he is dealing with on a daily basis ...it's helped us protect the child and nurture the child

The targeted youth workers have been excellent. They put themselves at the heart of the areas and among young people with most need and have become friendly faces who are approachable, helpful and available both in and around the school and in the local community. They have helped us to reach the hearts of some students who would otherwise have been lost to us and their families, despite everyone's best efforts. I can think of a couple of Y11 students who probably would not be looking forward to their GCSEs if it were not for the team's intervention.
(Education)

Alignment to National Specification

Families First For Children Partnership Programme

- The **Pathfinder** concluded on 31 March 2025, and we continue to embed the practice and adapt to align to the Families First Partnership Programme Guidance.
- As expected by The Department for Education (DfE) **all Pathfinders are required to play a role in supporting national rollout** through, contributing to DfE meetings and reference groups to advise on national policy and delivery of reforms, fulfil a championing role on a local, regional and national level, lead from the front as advocates for the reforms, sharing learning with the department and the sector, provide peer support to local authorities on an individual, regional or small group basis. Pathfinders have been aligned to support regions – we are supporting the South-West
- The FFP guidance/specification differs from the Pathfinder Wave 1 and Wave 2 Design Specification. Most notably there is:
 - ❑ more specificity on the role and responsibility of Multi Agency Child Protection Teams and the Lead Child Protection Practitioner than the wave one design specification;
 - ❑ the Multi Agency safeguarding arrangements elements are not included as a specific requirement as these are now set out in the updated Working Together to Safeguard Children;
 - ❑ Family Network Support Packages are not being rolled out and Family Group Decision Making will only be mandated at pre-proceedings but encouraged at earlier stages in the system.

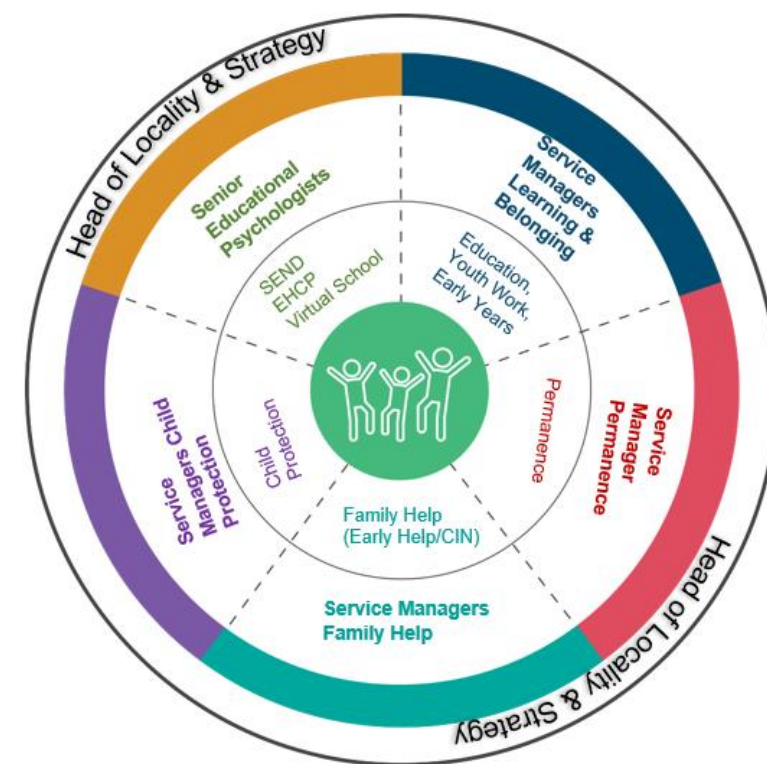
Work is underway to adapt our model to align with Families First Partnership programme, ensuring that the national design specification is met during 2025-26

Our Enhanced Multi-agency Locality Model

Our established and embedded “Dorset Children Thrive” locality model seeks to meet need at the right time. The Thrive locality model’s ability to provide this in practice has been confirmed most recently by Ofsted in March 2025.

‘Children and families receive the help they need at the earliest point through wide-ranging prevention and early intervention services. Dorset’s family help service’s model of one continuous assessment means that children get the right help they need, at the right time, to help them make progress. Children and families benefit from consistent workers, which helps build trusting relationships’

The locality teams are led by a single Head of Locality and Strategy and are comprised of colleagues from across Family Help, Child Protection, Permanence, Educational Psychology, Learning and Belonging including SEND, Detached and Targeted Youth Work and Inclusion services under the leadership of Heads of Locality and Strategy that link together with our ICB Primary Care Networks and public health nursing partners.



Matrix management arrangements (where staff report and consult with more than one person) are used so everyone in the team has access to the specialist support they need. Underpinning the model are our design principles that align to the partnership’s shared values and principles.

We have invested further in our locality model through the Families First Pathfinder and have increased capacity in Leadership, Child Protection, Family Group Conferencing, Family Help, and Learning and Belonging including youth work and SEND. We are integrating further with partners, including CAMHS, in our locality Family Help offer and Family Hubs and our child protection teams.

Central Teams Alongside Localities



Our locality teams benefit from having central services working alongside them.

Our system is underpinned and supported by our engine room teams: Performance Management and Governance and Quality Assurance and Safeguarding



Our Practice Model

We operate a strengths-based and restorative approach to our practice. The independent review undertaken by IPC Oxford Brookes in 2023 of our locality model and our most recent ILACs identified that strengths-based practice is a key part of the Dorset vocabulary across Dorset Council staff and partners and that it is delivered enthusiastically. Persistent, relational practice is evidenced in case files and there is strong engagement with fathers/male carers and wider family members to seek solutions within the family network. These strong foundations supported us to deliver the Pathfinder ambition and unlock the power of family networks.

We have continued to invest in quality assurance. Our Principal Social Worker is supported by specialist Practice Leads. This additional capacity further helps us to continually improve and strengthen practice

Dorset Children Thrive Practice Model

A Strengths Based - Restorative Approach

V3.0 080125



Children at the heart of practice

Here in Dorset, we are passionate about building positive relationships with families. Our model is based on a strengths-based approach with restorative practice that will deliver positive impact and change and places children at the very heart of what we do.

Our priorities:

- 1 Best start in life
- 2 Young and thriving
- 3 Good care provision
- 4 Best education for all
- 5 Local Family Help
- 6 Best place to live
- 7 Safe at Home and in the Community

Voice and experiences of children and young people

- ♥ Children and young people are empowered to have their voices heard, and their wishes and feelings understood.
- ♥ They will know and understand why we are involved and our role to support them.
- ♥ We will listen and respond to their views.

Our commitment is that all children and families will experience quality and purposeful interventions that are right for them

Our top five principles:

- 1 Children and families receive the right support at the right time.
- 2 Keeping families together and where this isn't possible ensuring children have the right permanence and forever homes.
- 3 Proportionate interventions that are focused on outcomes for the child.
- 4 Children in our care have loving and stable homes.
- 5 Children leaving our care will be supported to independence.

Working with families

- ♥ Create and maintain trusting and respectful relationships.
- ♥ Work with families, rather than doing to them or doing for them
- ♥ Families are empowered to make decisions and shape solutions.
- ♥ We will provide person-centred meetings and strength-based conferences that enables the family to lead what needs to change for them.





More information: People - Children's staff can access further resources on [The Children's Hub](#) and book training via [Nexus](#)
For all other agencies, please visit the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership website (www.pdscp.co.uk/dorset) where you can find further information on Restorative Practice

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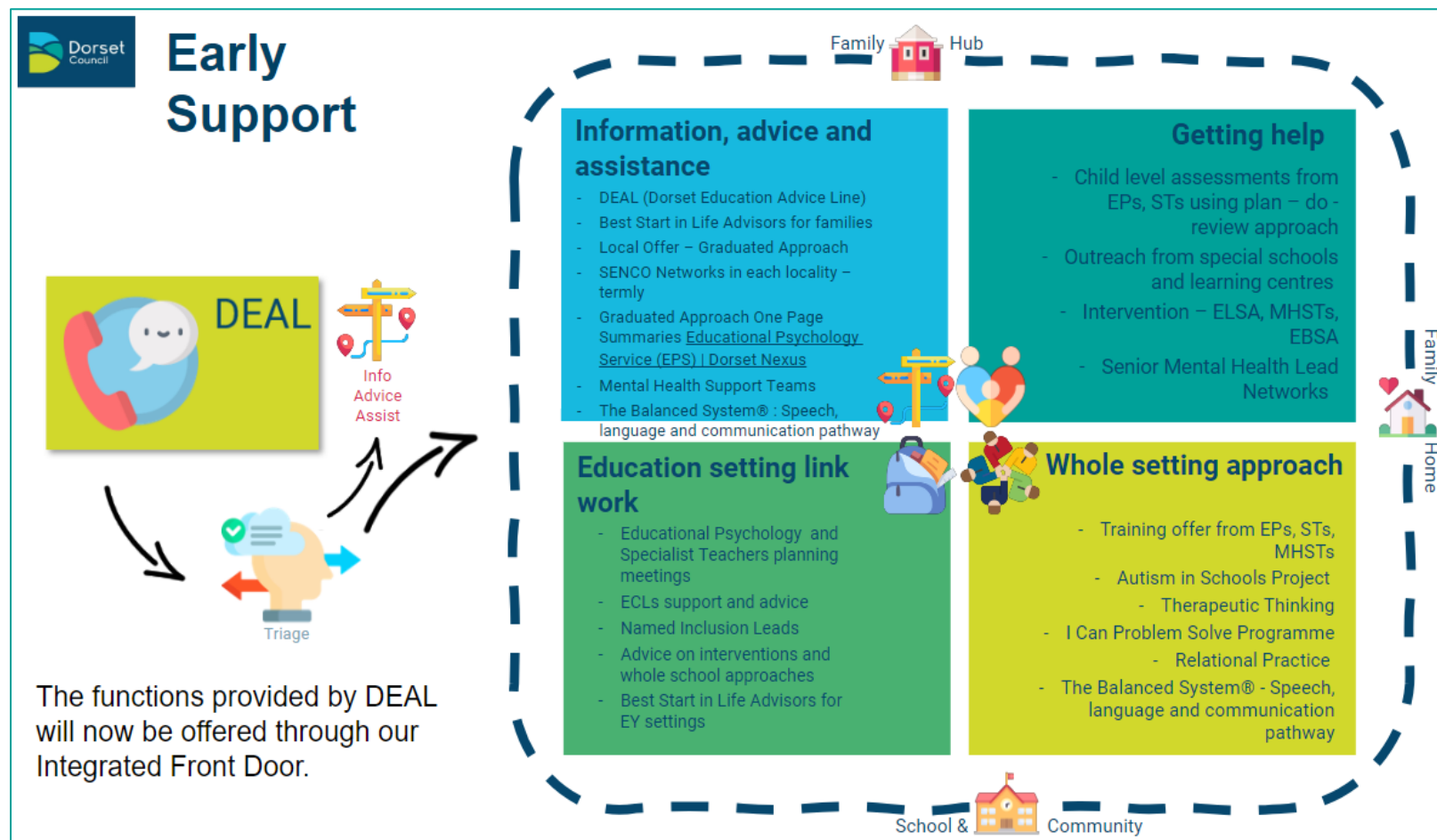
Section Two: What we know about the quality and impact of practice



Early Support and Continuum of Need

We have a **rich model of Early Support in Dorset** to meet the needs of our children and their families at the earliest opportunity.

Our Continuum of Need has been updated to reflect our pathfinder model and provides conversation opportunities to identify a child's level of need and appropriate support for children and families **to ensure the support is offered by the right agencies, at the right time and to prevent their needs escalating to a higher level.** It also helps identify when conversations with specialist or statutory Children's Social Care services, are required.



Early Support: Family Hubs

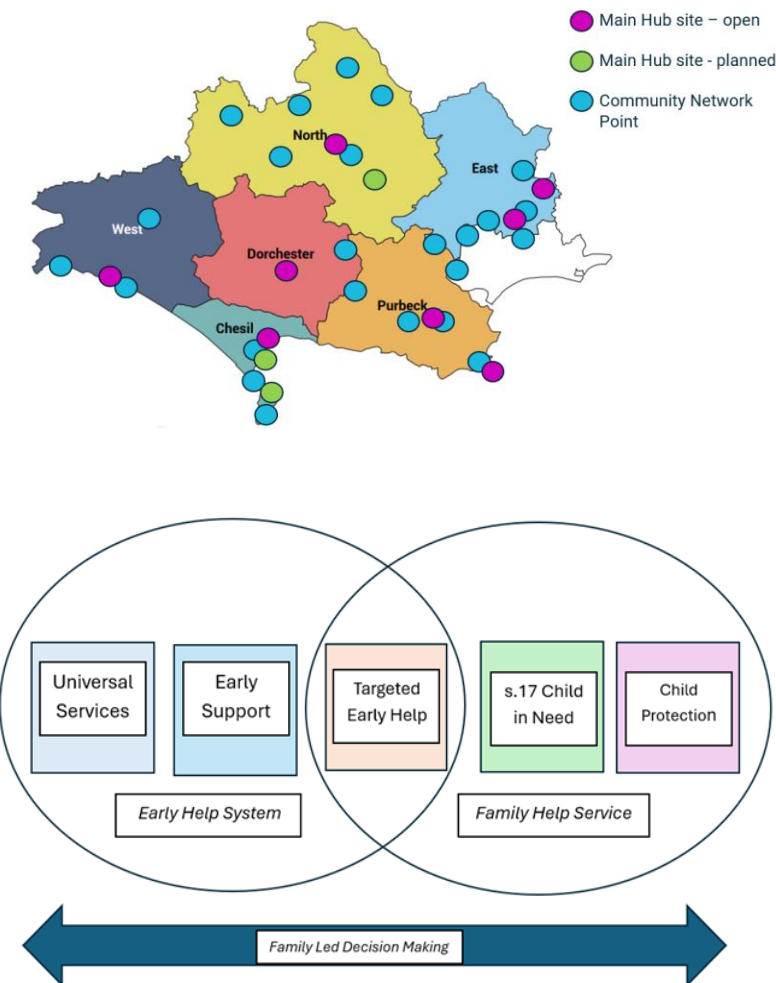
We have a rich model of Early Support in Dorset. We are further strengthening our early support offer through our Family Hubs, which provide multi-agency support and services to families. Family Hubs are seen as a significant vehicle in which we will deliver much of the Strategic Alliance for Children, Young People and Families Plan and the Family Help element of the Families First for Children Pathfinder; enabling non stigmatised Family Help to be delivered within localities.

We are participating in the DfE Family Hub Transformation Programme 1. **We currently have 8 Family Hubs open and advanced plans for a further 3 opening during 2025.** The network of 11 sites is supplemented by associated community outreach points (libraries, community centres, youth centres and village halls) to meet the rurality needs of Dorset.

In line with our corporate priority 'Communities for All', our Family Hubs have and are being developed using an asset-based community development approach, building on strengths in local areas, shifting decision-making into communities and recognising the important role played by the voluntary community sector in the delivery of information and support for families within communities. Each Hub is unique and are developed in partnership with local communities, through innovative partnership approaches such as community asset transfers aiming to build capacity and resource at a hyper local level. This has led to a mixed model of Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and Dorset Council led family hubs designed to meet the needs of each locality.

As part of the Families First reforms, we are building capacity and resource to enable delivery of community and parent led provision through our Family Hub Network. **We have partnered with 7 local VCS organisations to deliver community and parent led support groups in each locality area and with 3 local VCS organisations** delivering perinatal parental mental health peer support in the community.

An online Family Hub provides an overview of the offer as well as a single space to access information, advice and support, and we have published our local partnership Start for Life offer for families.



Family Help: Early Support and Voluntary Community Sector

We know that our Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) partners are well placed to support the programme with its ambitions not least in ensuring that families get local, preventative, community led support in the right place and at right time.

Our Family Help offer is built upon the foundations of strong universal and parent and community led early support provision delivered through our Family Hub network.

Examples of how this is being delivered in practice:

- Local Alliance Groups enable partnership contribution to design and delivery of family hub approach
- Family Network meetings held in early support space facilitated by local charity Daybreak
- Family Hubs being led and managed by VCS organisations
- Collaboration of charitable organisations DorPip, Homestart and Dorset Mind to deliver provision to support parental mental health and parent infant relationships through our family hub network
- Locality based community and peer led support for parents delivered through our Family Hub network
- Forming collaborative relationships with the VCS sector through attendance at 0-25 VCS Forum and working in partnership with organisations such as Dorset Youth.



Family Help: Early Support and Voluntary Community Sector

Family Help is redefining how we deliver early help and prevention services across the alliance. It is an all-encompassing term that is moving us on from an early help system to one that encompasses a system that focuses on early help and intervention, family led decision making, community based whole family working and partnership working throughout the journey of a child.

With the implementation of council led Family Help teams to bring targeted Early Help and CIN together into one service area, **Early Support will incorporate support that is typically led by partners providing that early help intervention that is so fundamental to the effectiveness of a family help system.**

To strengthen the delivery of Early Support by partners we are writing a new strategy for Family Help that will include how partners are supported to deliver services to our families and communities in Early Support. The introduction of tools to assist partners including an Early Support Pathway and strengthening of the relationships between Family Hubs and Local Alliance Groups in communities will enhance the way that partners support our families. **A workforce programme is being delivered to partners to embed Family Help practice including understanding their role of Family Help Lead Practitioner and supporting Family Networks in Early Support interventions.**



Local Alliance Groups (LAGs)

Local Alliance Groups are the governance groups for the Locality Partnership sites and consist of a partnership who have a vested interest in making a difference in the lives of children and families.

The Local Alliance Group report progress through the Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People Board, and support delivery the Children Young People and Families Plan 2023-33, they are a partnership designed to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families by working alongside each other. The purpose is to facilitate, encourage and overcome barriers to effective joint working.

There are seven local alliance groups in Dorset, each representing a different geographical area. The groups identify, agree and develop priorities to create plans to improve things for children and young people in their local area.

LAG members jointly produce outcomes-based planning for the Locality using local knowledge, data and their understanding of local resources and how they can be best used to achieve positive outcomes in the Locality areas, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable.

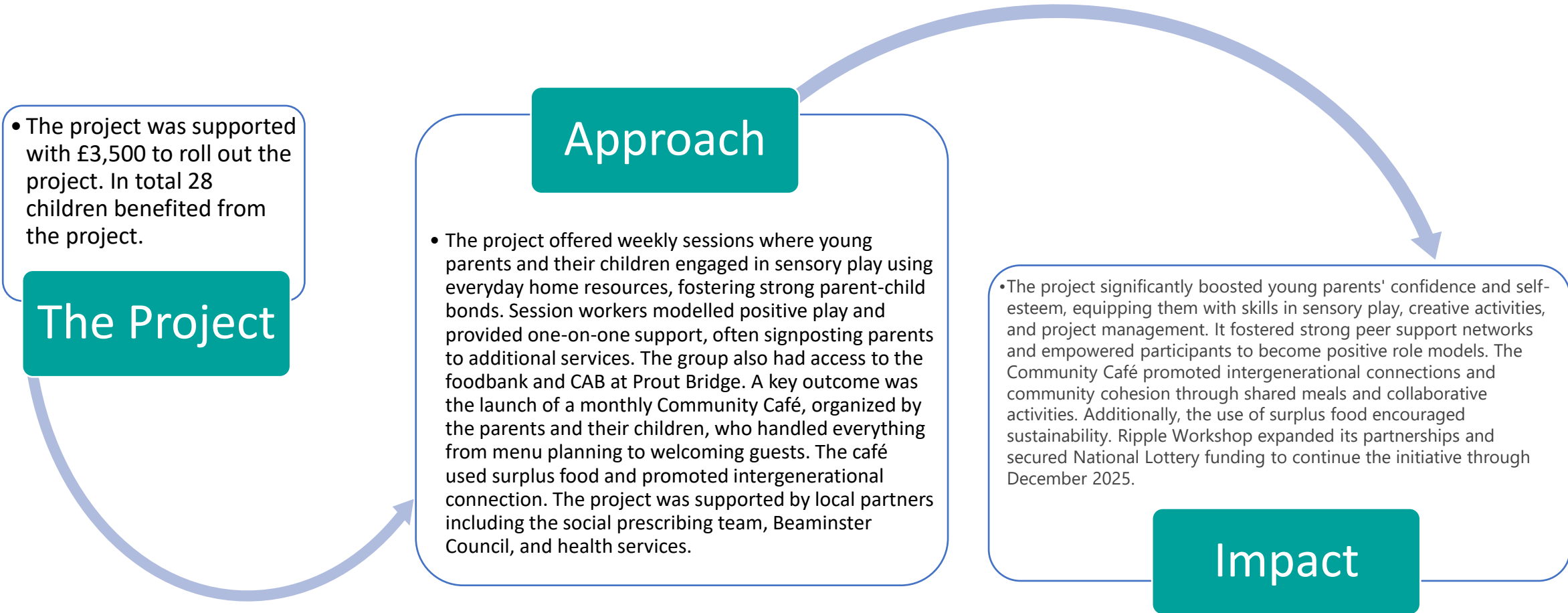
Dorset provide funding to the Local Alliance Groups to support priorities and projects.

Further information on the priorities for each of the LAG's can be found on our website [Local Alliance Group funding for projects 2025 to 2026 - Dorset Council](#).



Local Alliance Group Impact: Beaminster Young Parents Intergenerational Initiative

A project led by a Community Interest Company aimed to support young parents facing challenges such as low self-esteem and stigma by creating a nurturing and inclusive environment. Through sensory play sessions, its aim was to foster secure attachments between parents and their children, encouraging positive interactions and bonding. The project also aimed to provide opportunities within the context of the Community Café for participants to gain new skills in planning healthy snacks on a budget and baking and cooking alongside their children and to gain new skills in project management



Support for families: Chickerell Camp

In November 2023 Dorset Council was advised of immediate plans for Chickerell Camp to be used to provide temporary accommodation to support people from Afghanistan. We welcomed children and families who are **entitled persons** under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) in December 2023.

The intention of initial plans was that Chickerell Camp would be an RSOM (Reception, Staging and Onward Movement) Site with families arriving on short notice and leaving after different intervals of time, according to when longer-term housing is sourced for them. The site has a maximum capacity of 250 People (mixed ages in family groups), housed in barrack style accommodation. The Home Office and Ministry of Defence have given an estimated length of stay of six weeks for each arriving family, however once a family left the site, a new family was flown in. The length of stay has not been as expected, and families have been staying much longer due to challenges in sourcing onward accommodation. Families are no longer being flown into Chickerell and numbers on camp are reducing. Identification of onward housing is challenging meaning families with additional housing needs are staying much longer on camp.

We continue to lean in and provide high levels of support and challenge to ensure quality of service is delivered to those on camp. We also continue to provide vital staffing support on site through the Resettlement Team, Locality and wider Children's services and provide connection across to services in the community.

Children have been allocated school places, and we are continuing that process for those children on Camp of school age on a rolling bases according to length of stay on site, the priority has been the placing of those children who have been resident on site for more than ten weeks.

We have been advised that the site is now expected to be operational until September 2025.

Multi-Agency Forum Arrangements in place:

- To ensure a multi-agency strategic line of sight to support and services provided to families' resident at the Chickerell Camp
- To provide support and challenge to each other to ensure that services provided are of good quality, meet statutory requirements and deliver good outcomes for children and families
- To unblock barriers and support with solutions to ensure a good service is provided to families
- To ensure links between Chickerell Camp and the community
- To ensure appropriate communications regarding Chickerell Camp

LAG funding – Chickerell Camp

LAG funding was utilised to purchase resources to support schools hosting children from the Chickerell Camp. Items purchased and given to schools included:

- 7 English as an additional language (EAL) Toolkits from Mantra Lingua, including Talking Pens and bilingual books
- Beginner's schemes of work
- EAL Beginners Activity Packs
- Picture Dictionaries (KS1 and KS 2 and KS 3)
- Picture Dictionary activity Packs
- Communication games



In addition, training was signposted, and schools were sent information about webinars and resources from the Bell Foundation, including the EAL Assessment Framework. Schools with Chickerell camp pupils also accessed Specialist Teacher EAL training.

Impact:

- “Just to say that the resources are working so well with the boys.”
- “They are exactly what we were looking for in terms of offering a structured scheme of learning.”
- “It is so useful having these resources and knowing about the EAL Assessment Framework. It has helped us to work with other EAL children also”
- “Thank you so much for the amazing pack you have left for me in reception. It is going to have a big impact on the children's progress during their time with us.”
- “We are really enjoying using the resources – they are just what we need to work with the children while they are with us”

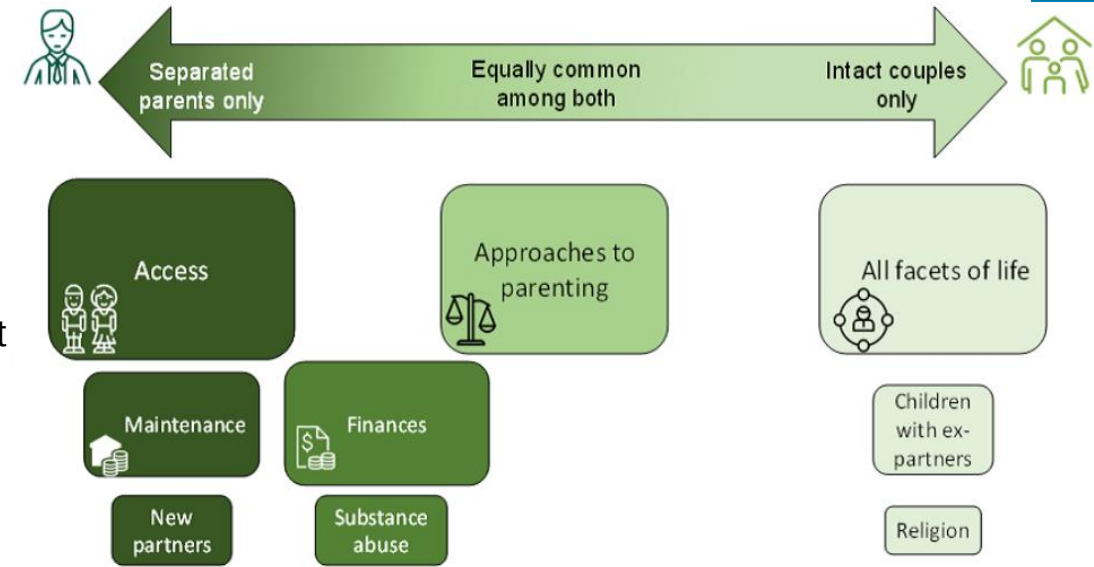
Support for families: Parental Conflict

Parental conflict is an area of support we have had a dedicated focus on for some time and have a strong early help and family hub offer that supports separated and separating families.

We utilise validated assessment tools that are designed to capture the voice of the child and understand the wider context of the conflict to help determine the right support.

Staff in the Family Hubs are trained and can undertake this work and part of our right support right time. This support is also well understood in the front door (Family Support and Advice Line).

Interventions support and reduce issues around possible conflict include Getting it Right for the Children training, Separating better training, Parenting agreements and the Supporting Interparental Conflict Programme, using an agreed pathway.



Size of shapes indicate the number of parents reporting each cause of conflict

In Dorset we have continued our work following the pilot of the integrated domestic abuse court in 2022. We have recently started phase two of the SIPCO programme following excellent feedback from phase one.

- Built on a foundation of early preventative work through our Family Hub Model
- Taking a less adversarial and more investigative approach
- Reducing the re-traumatisation of domestic abuse victims/survivors, including children with specific domestic abuse support being offered
- Engagement in child participation from the start.
- Pathfinder has concluded and is now BAU.
- Partnership QA of our Child Impact reports is showing good quality
- Providing good analysis of strengths and risks is providing a more balanced outcome earlier for families

Impact

"I get to spend more time with my mum"

"You listened to me and I felt you were on my side (I am aware you don't pick sides) but I felt you were doing everything you could to protect X and do what was best for him. So thank you!" Parent

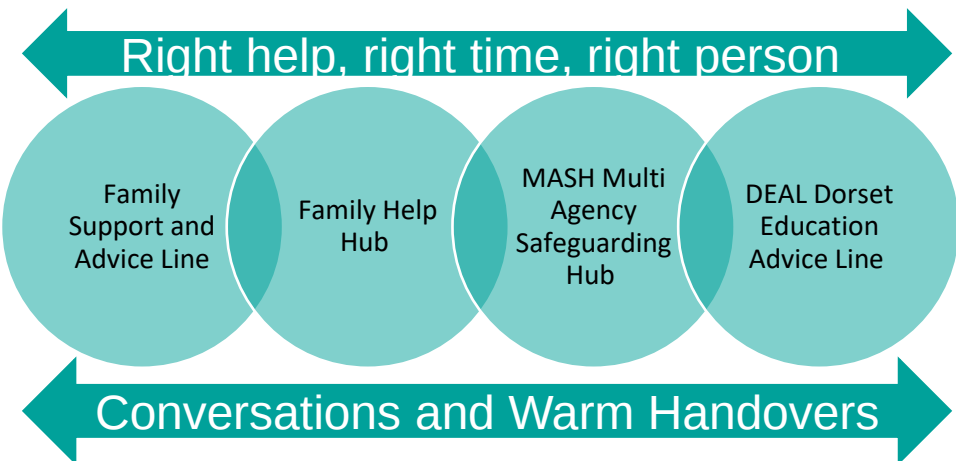
Integrated Front Door – Family Support and Advice Line

Our integrated Front Door has been operating as our Family Support and Advice Line for over a year. The impact of this integrated approach was recognised in the Short ILACS inspection, March 2025:

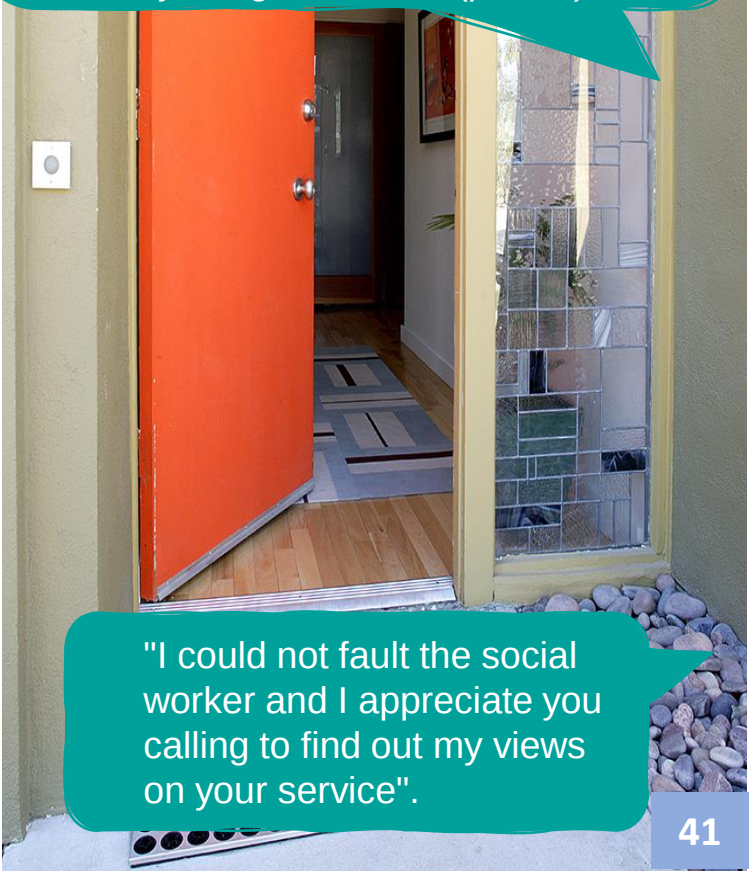
‘Children referred to the Family Support and Advice Line, Dorset’s front door, receive a timely and effective response. For the vast majority of children, decision-making is appropriate. Children’s levels of need and risk are considered carefully to decide the right course of action. Social workers robustly analyse all risks, such as child exploitation, gang violence and domestic abuse. The need for parents to consent to referrals is well understood and consent is routinely sought, although overridden when necessary to ensure children’s safety. Children and families benefit from the same effective response when concerns are raised during evenings and weekends.’

As part of our Families First for Children Pathfinder we will also be **integrating 0-19 Health Service and CAMHS Gateway (Front Door)** presence within the Family Support and Advice Line.

Consent, consultation and conversation-based model



“I felt totally listened to and heard and felt included with the decision making. I felt that the social worker made exactly the right decision for my family. The decision-making processes must be hard as he has to judge me on my responses and then consider our family history and any agency information. The social worker got it just right for us”. (parent)



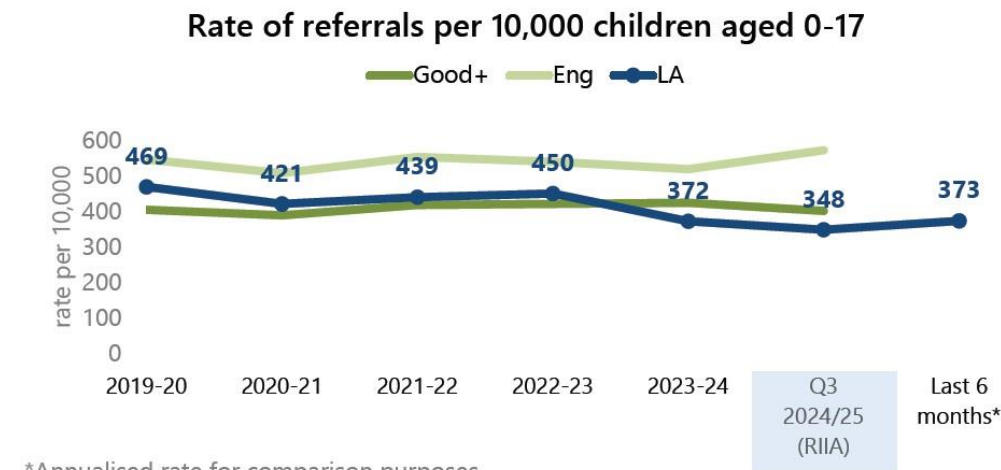
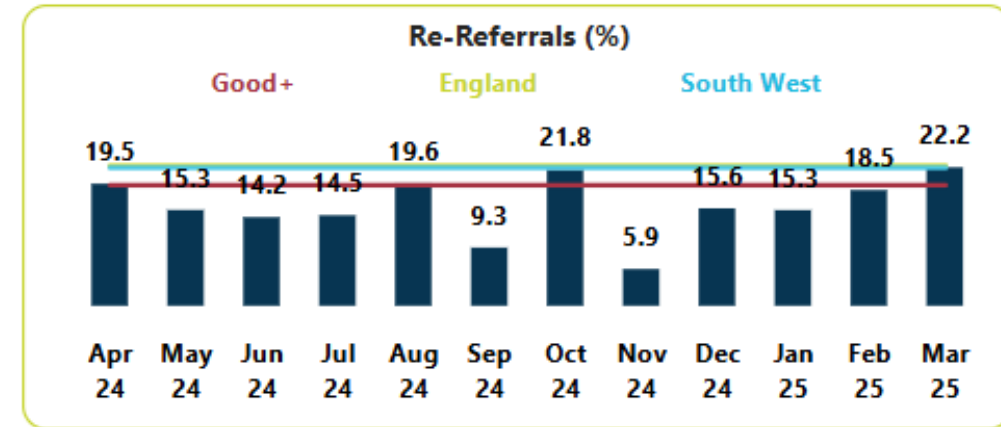
"I could not fault the social worker and I appreciate you calling to find out my views on your service".

Number of Contacts and Referrals

During the last 6-months there were 6491 contacts, with 1227 resulting in a referral (S17). **Over this same period, our rate of CIN referrals per 10,000 are below our good performing statistical neighbours, as of March 2025.**

Our Family Support and Advice Line is supporting good decision making to ensure that children and families are getting help from the right part of the system. We encourage relationship-based practice through conversation and consent, to work with and to promote children and their families receiving the right service, first time, and to act preventatively at point of need to avoid escalation into Children's Social Care, where it is safe to do so.

Over the last year, our rate of re-referrals has fluctuated however, the quarterly re-referral measure remains in line with our expectations. Re-referrals are a good indicator of how not only our 'front door' is operating, but how our whole system works together in getting the right support for children and their families, without the need to transfer from service to service.



*Annualised rate for comparison purposes

We are continuing to work with Public Digital, who have partnered with Professor David Thorpe, to progress the recommendations from the review they supported with on the effectiveness of our Family Information Support and Advice Line (Front door), where they found it to be **a good safe service**

We maintain our partnership with Oxford Brooks who support us with external evaluation.



Better decision-making at the first point of contact helps children and families in the right way at the right time, and stops children unnecessarily drifting into care.

David Thorpe, Emeritus Professor of Applied Social Science,
Lancaster University

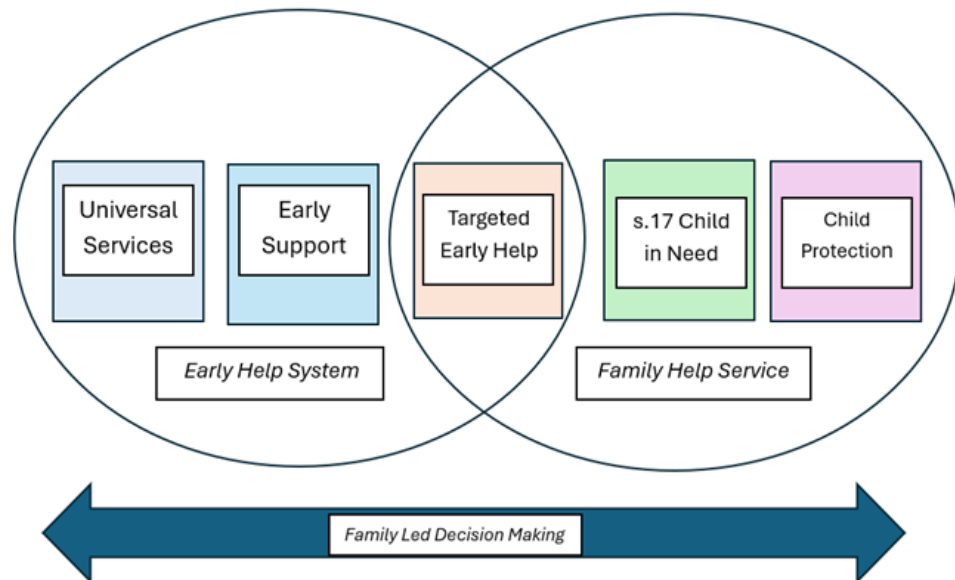
Family Help: Targeted Early Help and Children in Need



Family Help is an intrinsic part of our 'Dorset Children Thrive' model. Our approach is inspired by the Harlem Children's Zone, where different professionals came together to help and support children, young people, and their families. The foundations of this approach are:

- Support for families where they live, play and work
- An ethos of the least disruptive intervention first
- Strong local partnership responses to local need
- Building on community assets to provide early help

Based in local communities, the services and support vary depending on local priorities that are influenced by partners in the Local Alliance Group as referenced through our Early Support information, these groups are key to our approach to supporting families well in their communities. Overall governance is provided by our Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People, through which we continuously promote early intervention at the earliest opportunity in universal settings. Although all partners contribute to the Family Help model, Dorset Council employs a range of Family Help staff to facilitate partnership working and effective Family Help, through evidence-based interventions.



Family Help: Targeted Early Help and Children in Need

Through our Families First for Children Pathfinder we have merged our targeted early help and child in need work. In practice this means that our workers can support families across a continuum of need, with social work oversight. To facilitate this, we have further enhanced our locality based multi-disciplinary Family Help teams.

The teams work collaboratively with partners to provide intensive, non-stigmatising and effective support that is tailored to the needs of children and families. Family Help Teams are made up of Team Managers, Social Work qualified Assistant Team Managers, Social Workers and Family Workers. This model removes the boundaries that existed between early help and Child in Need and reduces hand-offs of families where needs change. Social work oversight is central to this model.

The introduction of a Single Assessment is minimising the need for children and families to tell their stories more than once and brings consistency in assessment practice across all levels of intervention.

The Family Help Lead Practitioner role has been created which incorporates both social work qualified staff and alternatively qualified staff and reflects the broad range of experiences, skills and competency delivering both targeted early help and Section 17 support to our families.

Weekly Family Help Line of Sight meetings take place in each locality (this meeting has replaced the previous model of Step-Up/Down meetings) to agree the right support, resources and assessments for children and families to progress their plan. Family Help Line of Sight meetings provide an opportunity for multi-agency conversation on the needs of children.

Matrix management arrangements ensure that social work oversight is provided through qualified social work Assistant Team Managers and the Multi-agency Child Protection management within the locality supporting and 'leaning in'.

Family Help: Targeted Early Help and Child In Need

Through our Families First for Children Pathfinder we have increased capacity for Family Help and Special Educational Needs support, for example by increasing the number of frontline practitioners and delivering closer integration of these practitioners to ensure timely assessment and casework for children and their families. **We have expanded our support to schools and settings through enhancing our youth work offer and continuing to strengthen our Link Work offer, providing connection to locality-based Family Help teams for our education colleagues.** This enables us to build on delivering early support to prevent escalation, supporting schools to navigate families to help and our youth workers enable us to wrap around the local places and neighbourhoods where children grow up.

Family Help includes but is not limited to direct work with children and families, delivery of group work, supporting partners to undertake early support, supporting children to achieve in education through collaboration with locality-based Learning and Belonging Teams.

Best Start in Life Advisors work within Family Help localities to strengthen services for families including maintaining the quality of early years provision; ensuring capacity and supply of childcare; sustainability support for settings, partnership support for our youngest children with additional needs and/or disabilities; improving social mobility through Dorset Families Matter (Supporting Families); ensuring there is targeted support available for children and families through the Household Support Fund and Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programmes (beyond Early Years).

**Ensuring family decision making is at the heart of all we do
continues to be a key priority**

Family Group Decision Making: Family Network Meetings and Family Group Conferences

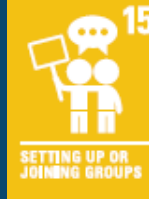
Our Families First for Children Pathfinder has created opportunity to strengthen our work with the extended family and friends' networks of children we work with. We strongly promote Family Group Decision Making in our work with children and families and in June 2024 we launched a Family Group Conference Service. **We have recruited and trained a team of co-ordinator's who have facilitated conferences for 79 families, where children need protection, up to the end of March 2025.**

As part of the Pathfinder, we also developed another Family Group Decision Making forum, namely, Family Network Meetings for children and families in need of help. Both types of meeting can result in a Family Network Support Package being made. The package can include practical and financial support as well as other resources and services. Evaluation and feedback in relation to Family Network Meetings has meant that we take an agile approach and have expanded the offer of Family Group Conferences to all families where appropriate.

We wanted to engage family networks at the earliest possible point and have commissioned a VCS organisation to deliver Family Network Meetings in the early support space. This enables family network plans to be developed and access to family network support packages for families identified by practitioners in universal and community services.



Family Help: Youth Work



Targeted youth work is a distinct and essential part of the wider family help offer.

We recognise the importance and value in youth work approaches and have invested in the expansion and enhancement of the current offer to further develop our ability to respond to young people's needs. Youth workers provide a connection between home, school, and community for those young people we are most worried about.

Each locality has an Assistant Team Manager for contextual safeguarding, a Targeted Youth Worker, and Youth Support Workers to support young people identified as vulnerable to engage positively in their community, and within their education, training or employment. Our youth workers:

- Deliver detached youth work
- Provide group work and targeted planned work in schools
- Take the lead role with families where the concern is primarily with the young person, and support others where the need is for whole family working.
- Support young people with positive relationships with adults to address identified concerns in their transition to adulthood.
- Identify places and spaces where young people may be at risk of extra-familial harm, and work to reduce these risks.
- Support young people where there is an identified concern, providing a targeted approach to our work.
- Respond to the needs of the community and the young people in the locality.

The principles and values of our youth work practice build on the wider principles of the Dorset Council approach of being collaborative, strength-based and restorative.



Case Study: K

- **K had an allocated social worker and was also being supported by the Inclusion Lead and YJS. Youth worker became involved following missing episode**
- **Agreement about what YW would share about K with her SW. YW focused on decision making and consequences especially around friendship groups whilst supporting K's emotional health and wellbeing.**
- **Now seeking an education package and YP has started to explore career aspirations.**
- **YP is better at managing anger and has managed to maintain bail conditions**

Family Help: Youth Work Case Study

Targeted youth work is a distinct and essential part of the wider family help offer.

Targeted youth workers have been leading a contextual safeguarding approach on a holiday park with identified extra familial harm risks. The site was being used for emergency housing for three LA's and there were adults known to pose a risk to children living on the site. The site owners were reluctant to work with authorities and did not want police on the site. The ATM for Contextual Safeguarding has:

- Co-ordinated effective partnership work with traditional and non-traditional partners which has kept young people safe in the community – this has included co-ordinated disruption, diversion, and interruption activities by a range of professionals to reduce risks. Partners including the local GP and surgery; Dorset Fire and Rescue; Planning and Housing Standards have been utilised to disrupt activity and enable access to the site
- Facilitated a Contextual Safeguarding Conference which has been kept at review for oversight and identification of ongoing concerns, and led to two complex strategy meetings and enabled the sharing of critical information to protect children and young people

This approach has

- o Safeguarded approximately 18 children from significant harm through proactive, multi-agency intervention in a high-risk environment
- o Secured CPS charges against one adult male for serious sexual offences against a minor, ensuring accountability and justice
- o Supplied information which supported a criminal investigation which is pending the issue of a Sexual Risk Order (SRO) against another adult male, reinforcing protective measures for children on site and in the local area
- o Supplied information that supported an application for a No Contact Order for an 8-year-old child, protecting them from a further adult male identified as a risk
- o Successfully relocated vulnerable families into permanent, safer housing in partnership with the local housing team—removing them from an unsafe environment. The site is no longer being used for emergency housing

This has truly been partnership working at its best, with input from multiple partner agencies and spanning two Police Forces, providing professional expertise, insights and information that has proven invaluable to the task in hand. The Targeted Youth and Contextual Safeguarding teams involved have communicated issues and discussed resolutions with me as lead investigator throughout this process, working together towards a positive outcome"
**Detective Constable,
Dorset Police**

Children in Need and Child Protection



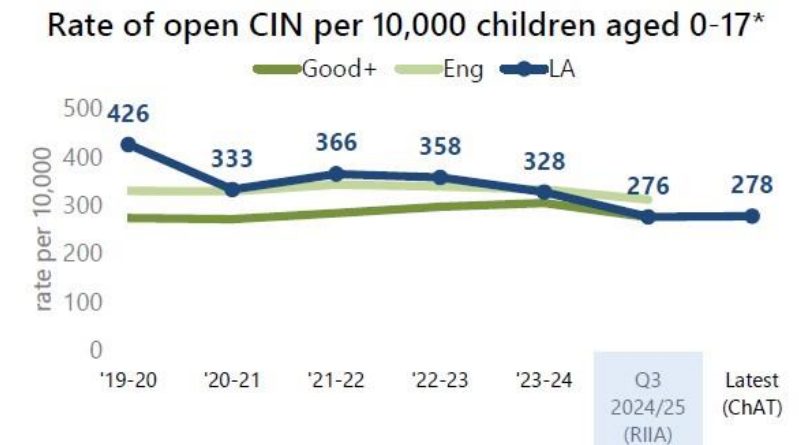
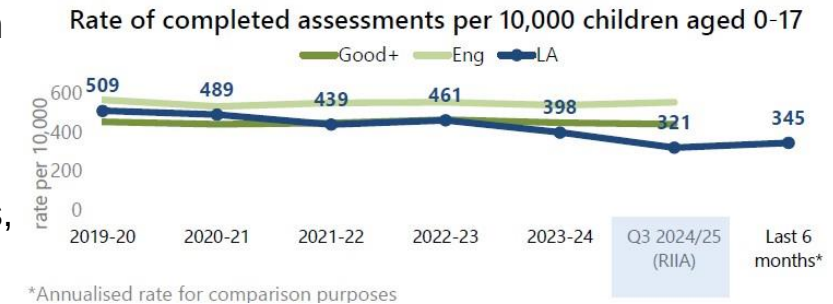
Our Children in Need and Child Protection work is delivered by our six locality services as part of our Thrive model, enabling closer working with partners and minimising hand-offs between workers by reducing transfer points. Significantly, it further develops our understanding of local need through improved relationship-based practice with our families and partners.

With the developments through Pathfinder, we have created multi-agency Child Protection teams and Family Help teams. Our work with children in need mostly takes place in the Family Help teams, with qualified social work oversight provided by Assistant Team Manager's (ATM's). Some of the more complex child in need work is undertaken in the Child Protection teams.

The new approach to 'Family Help' as part of the Pathfinder, brings together targeted early help and children in need work so that we can ensure that we maintain relationships with families as their needs change or emerges as part of building trusting relationships and delivering seamless services for many families.

Performance on Child In Need measures has either been maintained or improved with the implementation of Family Help Teams including the % CIN Plan visits held on time, lower numbers of CIN assessments that resulted in closure, improvement in the number of CIN open 4 weeks+ with supervision in the last 8 weeks.

Lower rates of assessments and open Child in Need cases reflects evolving confidence in our early help system, the strength of our Front Door and strong multi-agency support. These trends suggest needs are being met earlier, reducing reliance on formal interventions while maintaining a focus on quality over quantity.

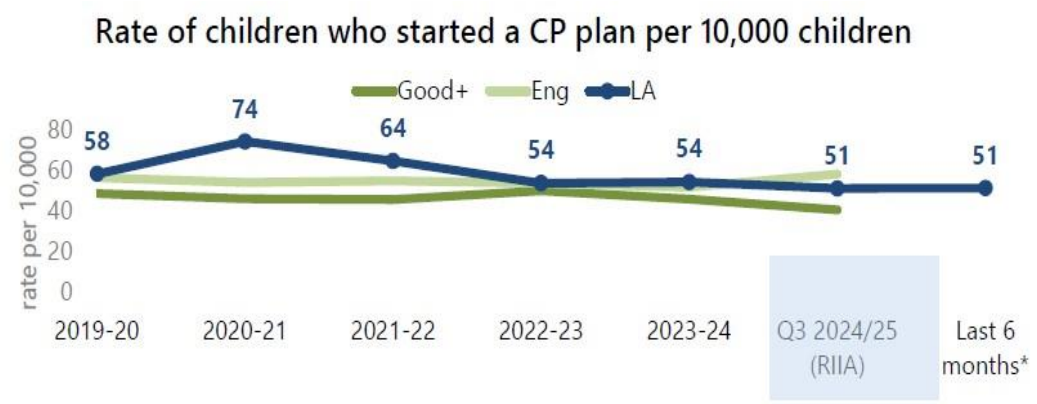
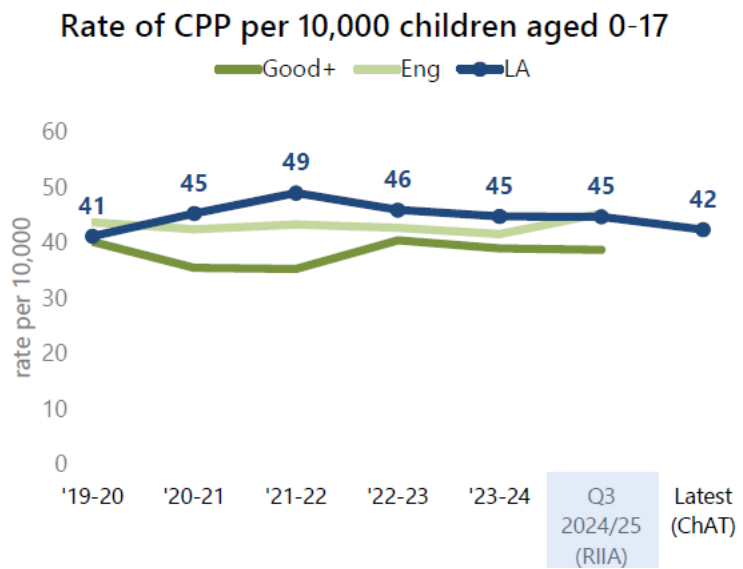


Children in Need and Child Protection

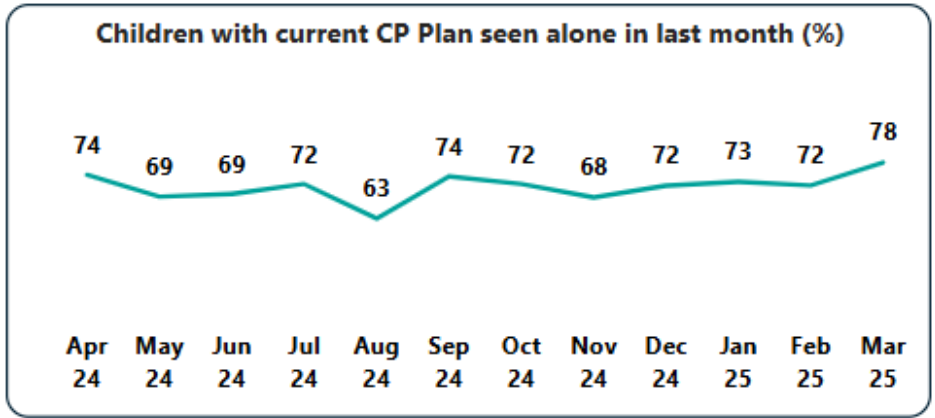
Our overall child protection numbers are beginning to reduce with a reduction in new children starting on Child Protection plans(CP) and an increase in the number ending CP plans.

We have learnt from our evaluation of the SFT pilot that initially there can be an increase in length of time for child protection plans to enable SFT to be put into place for families who have existing CP plans, this has been seen again with the wider roll out.

We continue to have conspicuous focus on the timeliness of child protection visits with 89% of children subject to CP plans in March 2025 seen within the previous 4 weeks, although performance consistently being around 95% over the last 6 months. We have had a focus on ensuring children over the age of 4 are regularly seen alone to hear their voice and understand their lived experience.



*Annualised rate for comparison purposes

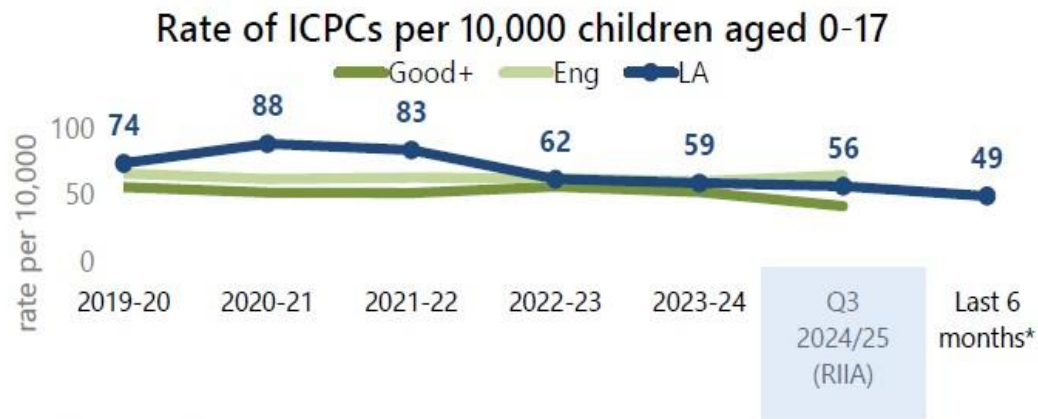


Section 47 enquiries and Child Protection Conferences

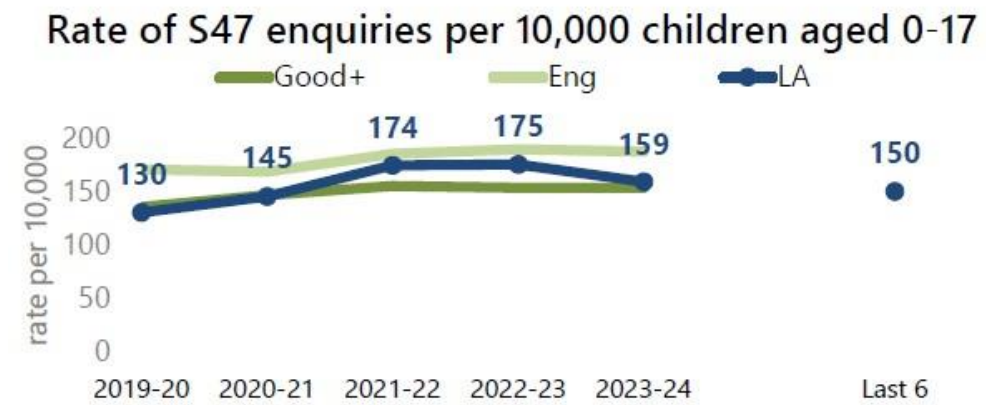
In the 6 months from September 2024 to March 2025, there were 496 Section 47 enquiries, with the rate of Section 47 enquiries per 10,000 being 150 annualised for comparison. This is in line with national rates and good and outstanding rates. 60% of Section 47s did not lead to an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC). We continue to monitor and review this. Of those that did not lead to an ICPC, 33% were either children in care or already subject to a child protection plan. Additionally, some young people will be subject to s.47 enquiries where they have had extended missing episodes and/or at risk of extra-familial harm.

Where children and young people are at risk of significant harm from both intra and extra-familial risks, then a child protection conference will take place. However, where the primary risk is extra-familial harm the child protection process is not always right for families. Young people identified as at significant risk of extra-familial harm are reviewed at our Extra-Familial Risk and Harm panel and will have 6 weekly individual multi agency child exploitation (MACE) meetings chaired by our child protection Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officers (QAROs) to manage and address risks.

In April 2024 as part of the Pathfinder programme we launched a child protection pilot in our Dorchester and West Locality to test out amongst other things social workers chairing their own child protection conferences. The findings from the pilot has lead to modernisation of our child protection process and meetings which were rolled out across Dorset from 2nd December 2024. Based on the findings, we took the decision not to roll out Social Workers chairing their own Child Protection conferences in agreement with DfE.



*Annualised rate for comparison purposes

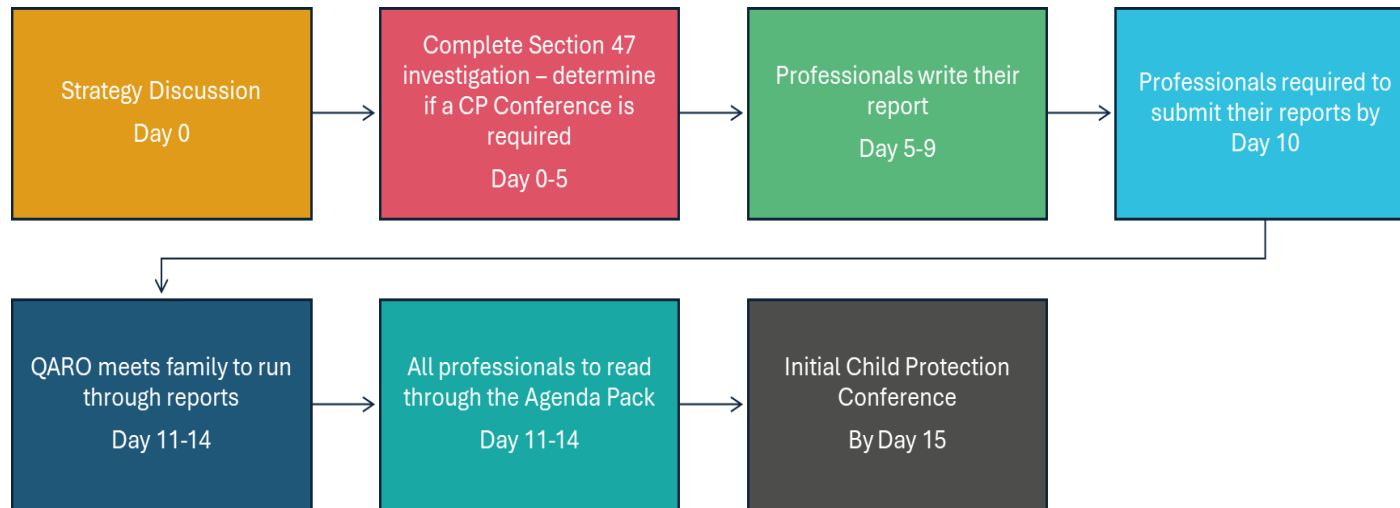


*Annualised rate for comparison purposes

Section 47 enquiries and Child Protection Conferences

We have reviewed the timeframe for s.47 enquiries to support the modernisation of child protection conferences. We now make decisions on whether an initial child protection conference is required within 5 working days of the strategy discussion to enable time for the QARO to meet with the family in advance of the conference, to facilitate the family developing their own plan for the conference. This has been well received by families and has had a positive impact on the quality of the plan and engagement of families. The learning from this pilot has influenced the DfE's specification for Lead Child Protection Practitioners in the national guidance.

New Timeframe for s.47 enquiries and ICPCs.



Child Protection Conference Pathfinder Pilot Feedback

I thought it explained it well. It was very helpful. We were given so much information, it was useful to be able to look back.'
(Family feedback)

you could sense that there was a real focus around that strengths based keeping that ethos of working with our families and capturing their voice, they were constantly checked in with throughout which(gave) a little bit of control back to parents.
(Partner agency)

I've had an old-style conference previously and preferred that. The chairs were more unbiased. I had a QARO come round before the meeting, and I thought that was brilliant. I preferred the previous structure.(Family feedback)

Child Protection: Multi-agency approach

We have significantly strengthened multi agency child protection arrangements:

- Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) Operational Board continues to identify themes for practice improvement, resulting in better oversight of Child Protection work.
- The partnership welcomes dedicated time to reflect on issues and emerging themes such as the introduction of school nurse needs assessments and on decision making such as outcome of section 47 enquiries.
- The Board is routinely planning improvements together. There is a partnership MACPT workshop event planned for July 25.
- Board members and health colleagues are working together to develop a multi agency compassionate pregnancy pathway.

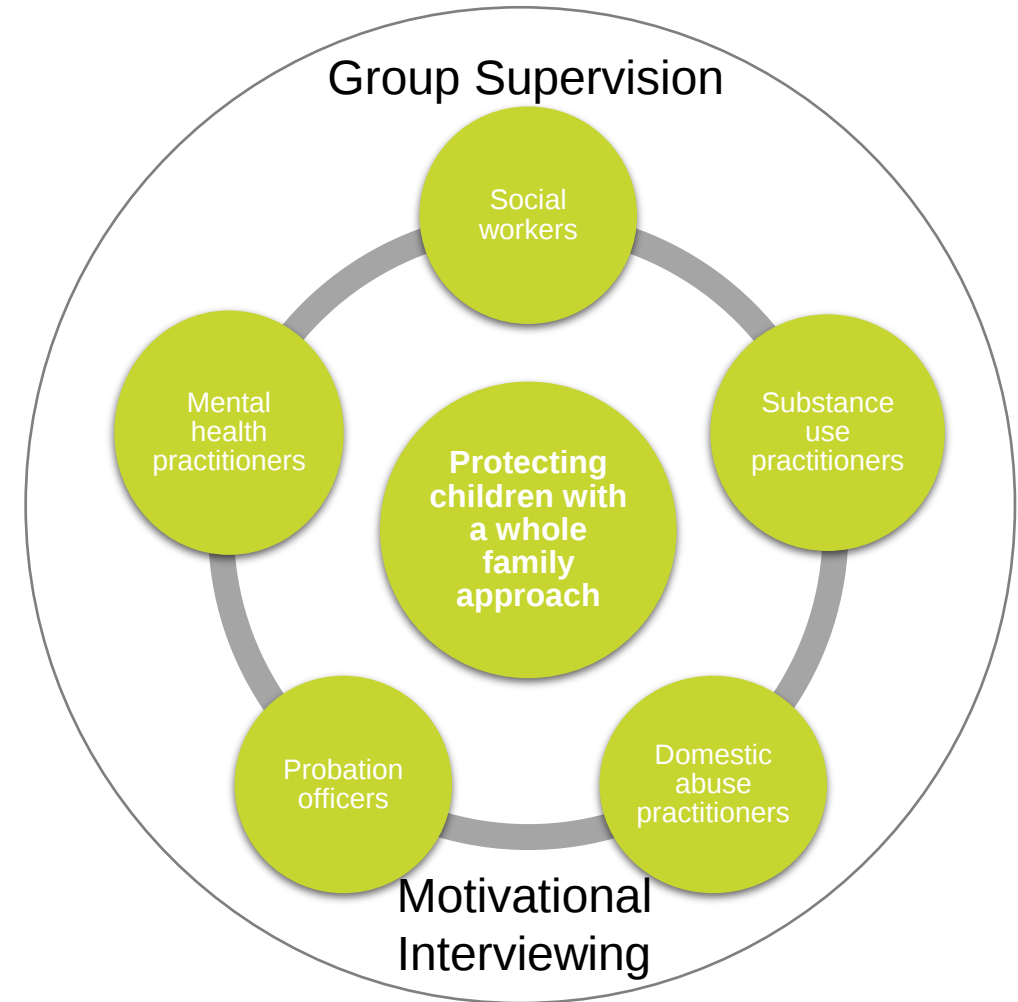


Multi-agency Child Protection Team Line of Sight meetings are deepening relationships inside and outside of meetings enabling greater professional challenge and curiosity and driving practice improvements. Education colleagues who often know our children best are routinely invited to contribute to the discussions. Positive feedback has been received from our health and police colleagues, valuing the opportunity for professional curiosity and challenge. Building these relationships, developing greater understanding and professional respect for one another's roles is having a positive impact on practice across the multi agency.

Safeguarding Families Together

Our Safeguarding Families Together (SFT) model forms part of our locality offer and is based on the innovation designed in Hertfordshire County Council as part of DfE Children's Social Care Programme:

- The aim is for children to remain living with their families where it is safe to do so.
- SFT focuses on supporting parents and carers in relation to specific safeguarding concerns – there is a growing evidence base relating to positive outcomes across domains.
- Initially implemented in three pilot localities in Dorset and following positive evaluation we have now rolled out SFT, and adult practitioners are now embedded across all localities.
- All children with SFT workers involved will have multi-agency group supervision utilising the principles of Safeguarding Families Together model of working.



We will offer the right support at the right time, to improve family life

Safeguarding Families Together

At the end of March 2025, Safeguarding Families Together practitioners were working with 117 families (223 children). Many of these families have one or more adult practitioners as part of the SFT model enabling wrap around holistic support.

61 families (104 children) are supported by mental health practitioners, 84 families (149 children) are supported by substance misuse practitioners, 78 families (152 children) are supported by domestic abuse victim practitioners and 31 families (63 children) supported by domestic abuse harmful behaviour practitioners.

Between April 2024 – March 2025 546 children and their families have received help from SFT

For the children who have closed to SFT, we are now seeing evidence of families successfully stepping down from Child Protection plans or Child in Need plans and sustaining change.

The SFT team won the 2024 Partnership Champions award at the Social Care Leadership awards.

Our families have told us....

" Having SFT Reach and MH workers at the same time was brilliant, it really helped having everyone working together with me"



"I wouldn't have turned my life around without you guys and I'm determined to carry on"

Safeguarding Families Together –Feedback



Further qualitative evaluation has taken place some 18 months after the Safeguarding Families Together pilot commenced in Dorset.

Interviews took place with both families (who had completed their stay with Safeguarding Families Together) and staff from the range of agencies that work with those families.

(Without them?) I worry, what I would have done?
Because I don't know myself....I know I was on
PLO....without that reassurance and bolstering...maybe
I would have had a wobble....would I have caved?
(family)

If a family have got consistent professionals all going working
from the same model like motivational interviewing....we've
really helped some parents really feel supported, not judged that
unconditional positive regard that comes from the SFT team...I
think they tend to see the SFT workers more as allies and the
social worker sometimes more of an adversarial relationship
(practitioner)

It's completely different approach and really
looking at that relationship building. I think
once we're in and we can see that their
barriers are down and sort of we are that
sort of advocate for them and that sort of
bridge for social workers as well.
(practitioner)

And what's lovely, they all know....you don't need to sort of keep saying
every 5 minutes what's happening, everyone's in the loop on what's
going on. That's the lovely thing...they understand, like, why I did what I
did....the abuse, drinking...it's understood. That's what I'm trying to say.
It's not seen as like, oh, you're an idiot (family)

Support for mums: Pause

“Other than seeing my children, meeting with my Practitioner is what I look forward to most. It's the highlight of my week. My experience with Pause was amazing, and I don't think I would be where I am now without you”

“Pause supported me in every area of my life. I went from living off grid to now having my own council flat, which is better than I could have ever dreamt of. I was supported to register with a GP, get specialist dental care and support with my mental health. Pause pushed me to do the things I needed to for myself”

Two areas of ongoing focus

As well as breaking the destructive cycle of repeat removals, Pause Dorset is on track to deliver significant cost avoidance – we are focusing on how to capture this, so that we have a sound rationale for future commissioning decisions.

Pause are working in partnership with Local Authority, Health & Police colleagues to develop a Compassionate Pregnancy Pathway for Mothers and partners who experience Loss through separation. We continue to have conversations regarding support for birth parents' post-removal acknowledging the grief and loss when a child is removed from their parents' care. We would like to see counselling and psychological support offered as a standard. Alongside this, we have been a part of the HOPE boxes steering group. The HOPE boxes are used locally and given to mothers experiencing removal, used as a tool to promote connection between mother and baby, acknowledging maternal identity and supporting grief and loss.

Self Reported impact from women in Community One



Pre-Proceedings and Proceedings

- Our court proceedings work is well managed with strong performance on timeliness.
- As at end March 2025, we had 40 Children subject to pre proceedings across Dorset and 61 Children were open to the family court for proceedings.
- We have concluded the Family Rights Group 'Reimagining Pre-proceedings' project alongside families, the Judiciary, partners, and kinship carers. We have co produced a new 'letter before proceedings' template, implementation is planned for July with training to precede the implementation.
- We are also developing a training offer for staff in relation to court work which we hope will follow on from the July 25 training.
- This work aligns with our practice developments and changes being embedded through the Families First for Children Pathfinder.
- To strengthen the quality of our data, we have recruited a management information officer and have redesigned our Mosaic workflows for legal gateway meetings, pre proceedings and tracking care proceedings which went live on 15th October 24 and will support the development of a BI dashboard. This will enable us to have greater oversight of the inter connectivity between pre proceedings/ care proceedings and our work with family networks/family group conferencing and enable further deep dives into impact and outcomes.
- To strengthen the quality of this work we have increased our Quality Assurance offer with dedicated oversight of the progression of court work, tracking and providing support to social workers who will progress through the careers framework to undertake court work.
- This role will also ensure that the learning from the Family Rights Group pathfinder is embedded into best practice.



Management Oversight

Our front-line practitioners have regular and high-quality monthly **reflective supervision** and there is robust scaffolding in place to ensure leadership and management oversight that helps share risk and respond to need.

Group supervision also takes place as part of our Safeguarding Families Together keeping the child at the centre while reflecting on capacity to change. We are piloting multi-agency group supervision in Family Help as an alternative to one-to-one supervision. The pilot is currently undergoing evaluation.

We have embedded Social Work qualified Assistant Team Manager positions within our Family Help teams which provides **matrix management social work oversight**, particularly for our child in need work. We have also embedded matrix management with our Learning and Belonging teams including targeted youth work with a strong focus on extra familial risk and harm.

We hold weekly Family Help Line of Sight and leadership meetings, where decisions about level of need are discussed and agreed with child protection social work participation and oversight.





Management Oversight arrangements

We have robust management oversight arrangements that enable the matrix management approach of integrated locality working

Oversight



Leadership Oversight Meeting

Decision making meeting on care and care proceedings

Child Protection Line of Sight Meetings

In each locality

Child level meeting to discuss/decision make, wrap around support

Multi-disciplinary

Multi-agency includes Health Visiting, School Nursing, Police and Clinical Leads

Family Help Line of Sight Meetings

In each locality

Child level meeting to discuss/decision make, wrap around support between early help and social care

Management Oversight

Matrix Management arrangements

Individual professional discussion/conversations

Individual reflective personal/case supervision

Family Help Group supervision pilot in North locality (multi-agency)

Safeguarding Families Together group supervision (multi-agency)

Learning Circles – reflective discussion

Working Together



Multi-Agency Child Protection Operational Board

Multi-Agency includes Health, Police, Education, Youth Justice Service, Health Visiting & School Nursing

Inclusion Monitoring Board

To discuss children from all localities

There is also a children in care specific meeting

Multi-agency Resource Panel and Locality Panels

Decision making on provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Specialist thematic work with partners

E.g. Court work, Children in Care Pause Programme

Extra-Familial Harm, Exploitation and Youth at Risk etc.

Partnership

Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People Board

Dorset Education Board

SEND & Inclusion Partnership Board

Designated Safeguarding Leads forum

Education Safeguarding Board

Meeting Together



Locality Management Meeting

Attended by Heads of Locality, Service Managers, Senior Educational Psychologists, Team Managers and Education Challenge Leads from the locality

Whole Locality Team Meetings

Attended by all staff from across the locality

Team Meetings

Service Managers meet with their Team Managers

Team Managers meet with their Teams

Operational day to day working

Colleagues work together with each other and partners on a day to day basis supporting children and families

Through support, advice, guidance and joint working with children and families.

Cross locality development meetings

E.g. Family Help, Child Protection, Learning & Belonging, SEND, Youth Work

Continuous Improvement



Specialist Network Performance and Practice Development Meetings

For Child Protection; Family Help; Schools, Inclusion, SEND and Educational Psychology

Monthly meetings providing an opportunity for managers to come together to focus on their specialist/ portfolio areas

Dorset Children Thrive Monthly Performance Board

Following discussion at Performance and Practice meetings, Senior Managers come together to discuss overall performance at Monthly Performance Board and Quality and Practice Action Group

Dorset Children Thrive Good and Better Board (Quality Assurance and Performance Management)

All Managers to Team Manager level attend our quarterly Quality Assurance and Performance Management Conference 'Good and Better Board'

Audit Programme

We have a monthly case work audit programme, dip sampling, thematic audits and scrutiny

Leaders have an Accurate, Shared Understanding of the Needs of Children and Young People in their Local Area



Case Study

Gaining an Understanding – Chesil Youth Pride

In response to feedback from the LGBTQ+ youth community in the Chesil locality, a team from Dorset Council Children’s Services alongside partner agencies, including education and local youth work organisations, planned the inaugural [Chesil Youth Pride event in Weymouth](#). Services and organisations attended to demonstrate what they can offer the LGBTQ+ youth community, and to sign post to others.

From receiving reports of this vulnerable group feeling ‘unsafe’, ‘unwelcome’ and that they ‘had no space to be themselves’, feedback following the event included comments such as:



The [Chesil Youth Pride 2024](#) have followed the request to be bigger and better. They included a wider range of services and organisations that will follow a young person through their life from early years to employment and volunteering opportunities, a key speaker delivering a talk and discussion on empowering LGBTQ+ young people in holding challenging conversations regarding their identity, hosting Primary Pride and offering music performances.

Our Chesil Youth Pride 2025 will take place at the end of June 2025, led by our Chesil Local Alliance Group



“The Pride event today makes me feel welcome. I felt a small group of people understood but now I feel I can rule the World.”

“This is one of the best days of my life to be safe among other people like me.”



Our Local Alliance Groups (LAGs) support communities to deliver local solutions, events and services.

“Today is the first time I feel proud of being me”

“It is the first time I felt safe being me. I had so much fun!”

Dorset continues to be firmly committed to listening to and acting upon what we hear from children and young people.

Image: Young People from the Youth Council celebrating the UNCRF motion being passed at full council



Youth Voice Team

The Youth Voice Team hosts these spaces for young people to influence change:

- The Network – for care experienced children and young people
- Dorset Youth Council
- Dorset Youth Parliament
- Dorset Unstoppables
- Young Ambassadors
- In Development – Children's Rights Committee

Young people and decision makers

Our Takeover Challenge has evolved as leaders and decision makers are committed to always being in young people's voice spaces so that they can work with them consistently, on change.



The Youth Voice Team were key in helping Dorset Council adopt care experience as a locally adopted protected characteristic.

We have strengthened the team to hear the voices of children and young people arriving in the UK through resettlement pathways or seeking asylum.

Dorset Youth Council

The Youth Council run the Make Your Mark national voting campaign across the Dorset Council area and the results help to shape their manifesto, after further engagement with their peers. Health and wellbeing as the winning priority and the Youth Council's manifesto focusses on:

- Safe Spaces and Places to Be
- Accessibility
- Support for physical and mental health

Dorset Youth Parliament

Dorset currently has 2 members of Youth Parliament. They are being supported to work on their manifestos by decision makers and partners. Their campaigns are:

- **SAFE Dorset:** Raising awareness and improving support for young people who experience sexual abuse
- **Living with grief:** Improving how schools respond to grief that children experience in childhood

Young Ambassadors

Young people from all youth voice groups, can be trained to help with interviews. There are different ways that they can be involved with interview panels, by either taking part in a young person's panel, taking part in the formal stakeholder panel, or by working on a group activity with applicants. Young people have been involved with both the recruitment of the Executive Director for Childrens Services and the Corporate Director of Childrens Services.



The Network

The Network is one of the ways that Dorset Council hears the voices of care experienced children and young people.

As a group they have set their own objectives:

- We are included in the spaces we are in as an equal to the others who attend.
- We make our voices heard.
- Actions are on a list, and we know what progress is being made
- Changes happen that we can see and feel in our lives. These help us to feel happier

Additionally, The Network have their own Network Board who are a group of young people who represent all voices at Corporate Parenting Board.

The Dorset Unstoppables

This is a newly formed group which also has an element to it that includes children and young people's voices through partners and organisations. Young people can be a member of the Unstoppables as an individual, or take part through their youth group or school, for example.





- We ensure that our practice and what we do is informed by engaging with children, young people and their families so we understand their lived experience, this is from point of referral, assessment, planning to service design and delivery.
- In Safeguarding Families Together, we make sure our practitioners are trained in motivational interviewing.
- We take a trauma informed approach
- The direct work we do with children, is age appropriate, empathetic and relational.
- At key decision-making points we ensure that we speak to children, whether that be for their CIC review, 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, ensuring children's voices are heard at all stages.
- On a quarterly basis we collate the children voices from a range of spaces, which is presented to Quality Performance Assurance Group (QPAG) and actions are agreed, so their voice informs our practice improvement.

Feedback from our children in care Quality Assurance Reviewing Officers using Mind of My Own

Its better because they are doing it themselves, in the moment, rather than us adding their views after the event.

J shared a lot more than the would have done in a direct conversation

Express App is such good fun, I love it more than the kids!

It's good for initiating conversations, especially the older ones

L loved it, he said 'this is ace!' he was really excited

Use of advocacy for Children and Young People



We give children and young people choice on how they would like to be supported to share their views, feelings and wishes. This can be:

- a trusted professional
- someone from their Family Network
- an independent advocate from our commissioned provider, National Youth Advocacy Service ([NYAS](#))
- supporting them to self-advocate

We provide [guidance](#) on these options.

2024/25 data

For the 6 months between Oct 24 and March 25 NYAS provided **211** advocacy support sessions.

- **110** of these were for child protection advocacy (52%)
- **101** of these were for issue-based advocacy (48%)

68% of the issue-based advocacy was for children in care reviews and **11%** children in need meetings.

We've worked intensively with NYAS and colleagues to increase access to advocacy:

- In 2024 children and young people were involved in re-tendering our Advocacy and Independent Visitor service. This included shaping requirements in the specification and scoring presentations delivered by providers who bid.
- NYAS were awarded the contract again. We strengthened requirements and increased capacity in the contract to ensure more children and young people can access advocacy. This is also a focus with our ongoing plans to develop the service.
- NYAS's new contract started on 1 August 2024.

- 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 are working with the Family Rights Group to develop Family Advisory Boards, this is building on Safeguarding Families Together evaluation and feedback from families to help provide scrutiny, challenge and guidance on our safeguarding partnership arrangements.
- Regular feedback is sought from families during the monthly audits, after Child in Care reviews and Child Protection conferences, as well as requests sent out to parents and carers upon closure, and we have also added a QR code to our letters to help increase the volume of feedback.

On average, across Family Help, CIN, CP, CIC :

- 98% of families report they understand why children services is/was involved.
- 75% of families report that they think life has improved for their child/young person
- 100% of young people felt listened to and their wishes and feelings acted upon.
- 80% of families said they were satisfied with the service they received.

We give parents choice on how they would like to be supported to share their views, feelings and wishes. This can be:

- a trusted professional
- someone from their Family Network
- an independent advocate from our commissioned provider ([SWAN](#))
- supporting them to self-advocate

We provide [guidance](#) on these options.

SWAN's three-year contract commenced in June 2023 and covered advocacy during care proceedings for parents with learning difficulties. Due to Families First for Children Pathfinder, we widened capacity and eligibility in this contract parental advocacy to cover:

- all parents going through child protection and care proceedings
- any parent with learning disabilities engaging with meetings about their children
- parents with other substantial difficulties can be considered (decided through triage)

SWAN's contract year runs June to May.

June 2023 to May 2024 SWAN delivered independent advocacy support to **80 parents**.

SWAN's latest contract review report from June 2024 to March 2025 (10 months) states advocates were supporting **104 parents** for **2,680 hours** through various proceedings including child protection, court, child in need and child in care.



Let's talk: SEND in Dorset

Welcome, we are glad you could join us.

We have muted your mic and disabled cameras for the presentation.

This session is about listening to you. Please drop your questions and comments in the Q&A.



Each year we provide an Impact Report which describes the SEND Strategy activity undertaken by the Partnership, and the outcomes for children, young people and families. The 2023/24 report can be found on our Local Offer here: [Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\) Strategy Impact report 2023 to 2024 - Dorset Council](#)

We are currently working on our report for 2024/25 which will be published in the autumn.

Each half term we hold virtual 'Let's Talk' events to discuss topics raised by parents and carers. These are well attended and have covered subjects such as the parent carer survey, transport, holiday activities and short breaks, emotional wellbeing, education provision within Dorset, post 16 options, alternative provision and attendance.

The frequency of this has increased due to overwhelming feedback that this provides helpful support and information to families. We complement this with regular Let's Talk Live – face to face events in localities. Families tell us they welcome this human approach and gain a great deal from meeting practitioners across the partnership. They tell us it helps them understand the whole system and get help for their child/ren.

To date, nearly 1,000 people have attended these virtual events. [Let's Talk SEND - Dorset Council](#)



Parent Voice – Best Start in Life

The new ‘Best Start in Life’ pathway of support for children, families and early years settings officially launched in September 2024. As part of our self-reflection, we have recently launched new parent, family and Best Start in Life Advisor surveys almost 1 academic year since launch.

Indicative feedback from parents/carers is telling us that our involvement:

1. helps them navigate how to find suitable settings
2. supports children to communicate with unfamiliar people
3. makes them feel understood
4. provides teaching techniques to use in everyday learning

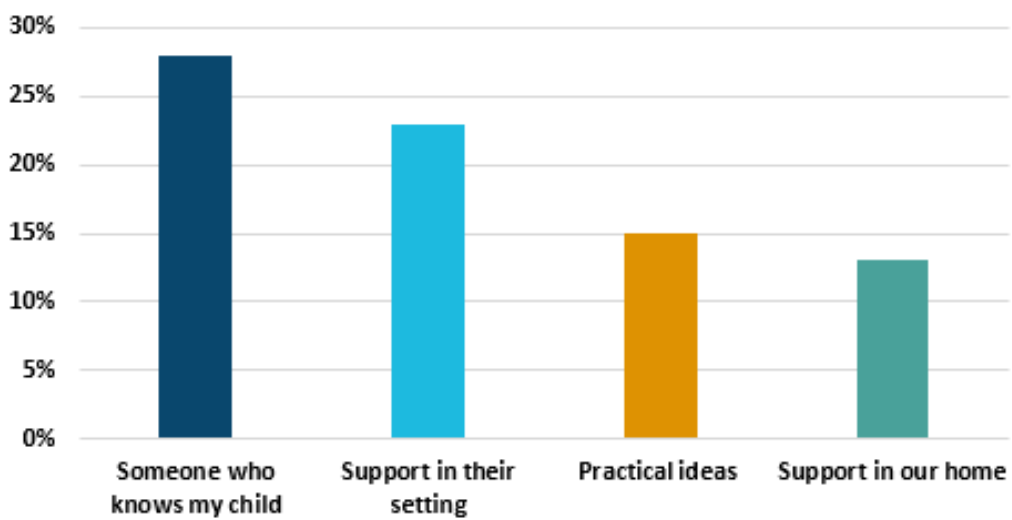
We also know families value:

- support provided through their early years setting
- receiving written feedback following visits
- activity and parenting groups/sessions with other families

Information, advice and guidance:

- ✓ 62% are aware of the local offer
- ✓ 77% are aware health professionals have a duty to inform the LA through Section 23 notification about children’s anticipated needs
- ✓ 77% know about the SENSational Story and Play sessions run in Dorset libraries specifically for children with SEND and their families
- ✓ 54% are aware of the Dorset Parent Carer Council
- ✓ 77% are aware of support through the National Portage Association for families
- ✓ 25% are taking up the offer of a conversation with Dorset Parent Carer Council and Dorset Council Principal Lead for Best Start in Life

Percentage of respondents telling us what makes a difference to their child's development



Children and Young People with Specific Vulnerabilities

Extra-Familial Risk and Harm (EFRH)

- Our Extra-Familial Risk and Harm Panel has been in place since September 2023 and a new extra-familial risk and harm assessment was launched in February 2024.
- The extra-familial risk and harm assessment enables a wider lens to identify, understand and analyse different forms of risk outside of the home and includes serious youth violence and high harm and contributes to ensuring children and young people get the right help and the right time.
- We have launched our multi-agency [Extra-Familial Harm Strategy](#) which is based on the 'Joining the dots' framework and has adopted the 8 practice principles. ([Tackling Child Exploitation – Research in Practice](#)).
- A multi-agency action plan has been formulated from the strategy and was presented to the EFRH Tactical Group in May 2024.
- Specific training has been delivered across Children's Services to increase awareness and understanding of EFH. Plans in place to roll out further training jointly to new staff and the Neighborhood Policing Teams jointly with the police Safeguarding Hub from September 2025
- We have had an increase in context assessments and contextual safeguarding conferences held to identify and address risks within locations and agree actions that will positively impact all young people within those contexts.
- In March 2025 there were 17 children identified at 'significant' risk of Extra-Familial Risk and Harm, 45 at moderate risk and 23 emerging/ reducing risk. This has reduced from the previous high number of 28 children at significant risk in September 2023 with the introduction of the EFRH panel and assessment.
- The Police Safeguarding Hub identify that there are currently no active county lines with links to exploited children in June 2025

Children and Young People with Specific Vulnerabilities



We have invested in the provision of Targeted Youth Workers across our localities to work directly with young people and to link with and support schools.

Due to the effectiveness of this, as part of our Pathfinder developments we have invested in a further 14 Targeted Youth Worker posts to enhance this approach further.

In the Pathfinder model we have 4 Assistant Team Managers for contextual safeguarding across the localities to lead the teams of youth workers and provide leadership across the system on contextual safeguarding and extra-familial harm.

The Assistant Team Managers will lead on contextual safeguarding across the localities and are currently reviewing and updating training along with strengthening our existing Contextual Safeguarding toolkit, which was launched in 2021 and based on research from the University of Bedfordshire and the Contextual Safeguarding Network.

Our Targeted Youth Workers lead on Youth At Risk Meetings in the Locality.

Quality Assurance Officers continue to provide independent scrutiny and oversight by Chairing the MACE meetings for children and young people identified as significant risk of extra-familial harm.



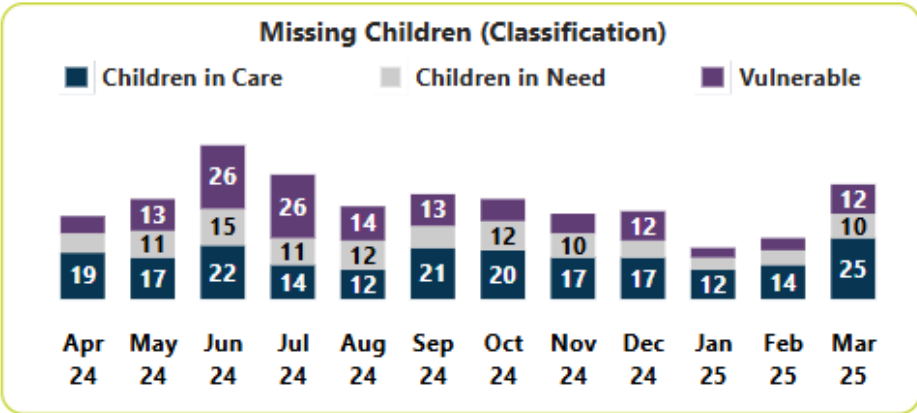
Children and Young People with Specific Vulnerabilities

Missing children

We continue to strengthen our work through daily 'Missing' meetings with police and their dedicated missing persons team. The daily Missing meeting report's themes and trends to the EFRH Tactical Group. Our most frequently reported missing young people are having their needs considered at extra-familial risk and harm or youth at risk panels. The learning and actions required are overseen by the EFRH Strategic Group to inform practice development and multi-agency responses to children reported missing.

We have continued a downward trajectory for all children reported missing across 2024/25, which is in line with the proceeding two years. This trend is starting to slow and across 2025/26 we would expect this to now plateau. Our Children in Care who are reported missing remains consistent, rather than escalating. We are wanting this indicator to improve and believe this will happen following a partnership practice event where we relaunched the recently revised Philomena Protocol amongst practitioners, foster carer, and care settings, as a key tool to reduce incidents of missing.

With dedicated missing practitioners within our Harbour service, providing a consistent independent person to discuss missing episodes with our children, we are now able to better analyse our missing records to reduce the likelihood of missing episodes and reduce possible harm whilst missing. A recent planning day with these practitioner and youth practitioners has identified how we will strengthen our records with greater analysis of the risk in those missing incidents and sharing relevant information sharing.



Children and young people with specific vulnerabilities

Transitional Safeguarding

- We recognise that the extra-familial harm that young people can experience does not stop when a young person turns 18 and can at times increase with reduced support and changes to how young people are viewed. We have had led a working group jointly with Adult Services which has developed our approach to transitional safeguarding.
- We have developed a pathway, flowchart and practice guidance to support improved transitions from children's services to adult safeguarding where there are young people at risk of harm where Care Act eligible needs have not been clearly identified but there may be a prevention duty under s.2 Care Act 2014. This was launched at the Safeguarding Adults Board Conference on 20th November 2024.
- We have Adult Safeguarding representation at our Extra-Familial Harm Strategic Group and Extra-Familial Risk and Harm Panel to support information sharing and planning for young people.

Prevent

- Dorset work closely with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole through our Pan Dorset Prevent Partnership Board, promoting awareness raising and training.
- Dorset have an established joint child/adult channel panel chaired by Children's Services/Adult Services Corporate Directors.
- Over the last year we have seen a similar number of referrals to previous years, 54% of these referrals come from education providers.
- There has been an increase in incel ideology (up to 7% of referrals). Primarily referrals relate to mixed, unclear or unstable ideology or vulnerability with no ideology.
- Over the last 12 months there has only been one active channel panel case relating to a young adult which was linked to mental health needs.

MAPPA

- Further demonstrating our good multi-agency working, MAPPA, led by our police colleagues, has strong participation and attendance from relevant agencies within the partnership.
- MAPPA has improved how risks for associated children are considered and this leads to proportionate intervention and support, where we support our partners, namely probation and police, in making joint decisions regarding child safety.
- Good joint multi-agency MAPPA training offered to all partners in October 2023 following SAR completed by Probation Service.
- Continued MAPPA quality assurance work is being completed across the partnership to meet the recommendations of the SAR.

Children and young people with specific vulnerabilities

The Pineapple Project

The Pineapple Project is a project which seeks to address hidden harm that young women may face outside of their homes. This is an innovative project that focuses on Dorset Children's Services partnering with non-traditional safeguarding partners to create community guardianship in certain towns in Dorset.

'I love the idea of safe spaces for young women in the town. I have daughters myself and I would want to know that if they felt vulnerable when out of the house that they could go to a safe space for help and support'.

"Fireworks nights are the most dangerous nights because there's so many people we don't knowit's so nice to know that you are out tonight and that there is somewhere to go if I need help"



In November 2024, the first Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Conference was held . Attended by partners across all sectors the conference and was a resounding success.

The Pineapple Project has been successful in securing £10k from the Serious Violence Duty intervention fund to deliver an arts based focused group with a young women's group and develop a peer mentor scheme.

There are currently 51 individuals, and 19 businesses signed up as community guardians in Dorset, with continuous recruitment.

The project is now established in Weymouth and is expanding to other areas - Portland, Dorchester and Swanage with further roll out planned across the county.

The Pineapple Project has been recognised for an [Outstanding Contribution Award](#) from the Dorset Criminal Justice Board and nationally received [highly commended in the recent Children and Young People Now Awards 2024](#)



Children and young people with specific vulnerabilities

Children in the early years

Since January 2020 when our data analysis highlighted an increase in younger children needing support through child protection and coming into our care, we prioritised children aged 0–5 years in our early help responses. We have continued to prioritise this age group, recognising the potential impacts of lockdown on social, emotional and language development.

- Routine, proactive conversations and information sharing with health colleagues and settings about children needing early help, in each locality.
- Prioritisation of children aged 0–2 in allocation for direct work by family workers and in response to contacts with Family Support and Advice Line.
- Increasing support to early years settings who are initiating early help through our locality-based 'Best Start in Life Advisors' and the ['Request for Support'](#) approach.
- Implementing [Operation Encompass](#) in the early years to ensure all children experiencing domestic abuse receive timely support in their setting.

We have further strengthened our work for our youngest children and have redesigned services based on feedback from families, stakeholders and staff. We have re-shaped our approach to supporting children under 5, their families and early years settings. Our locality-based Best Start in Life Advisors use the nationally valued 'Portage Principals' to support children with additional needs and their families in the home and their settings. Each 'Advisor' has a caseload of settings and supports them to meet the needs of all children identified as having specific vulnerabilities.

Due to the success of the pilot in Chesil locality we have embedded the Team Around the Setting (TAS) initiative in our offer. The 'team' includes a panel of professionals from the locality team and partner agencies who come together to meet with local early years practitioners. The pilot project showed that this approach builds strong professional relationships; improves communication and creates a better understanding of each other's roles and the challenges and collective strengths. This 'OneTeam' approach to how we offer support, information, advice, and guidance to EY providers includes multi-agency professional development opportunities for staff and supports early years practitioners in their practice and decision-making.

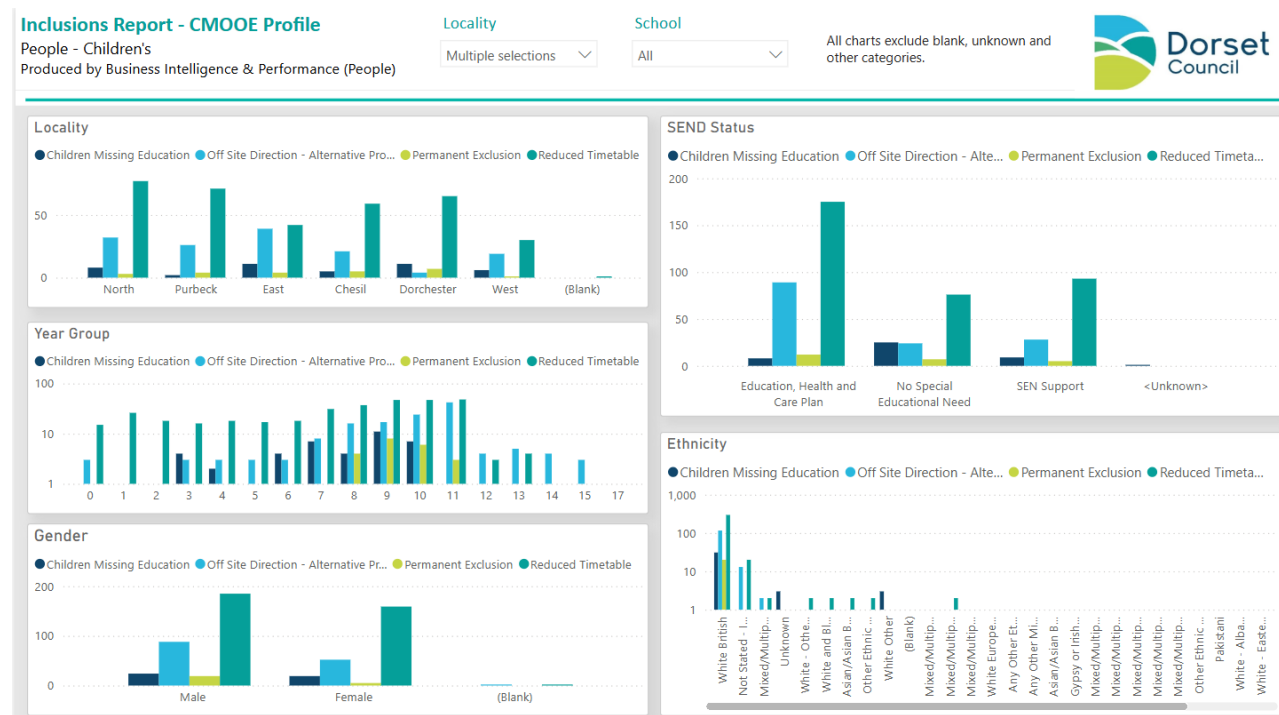
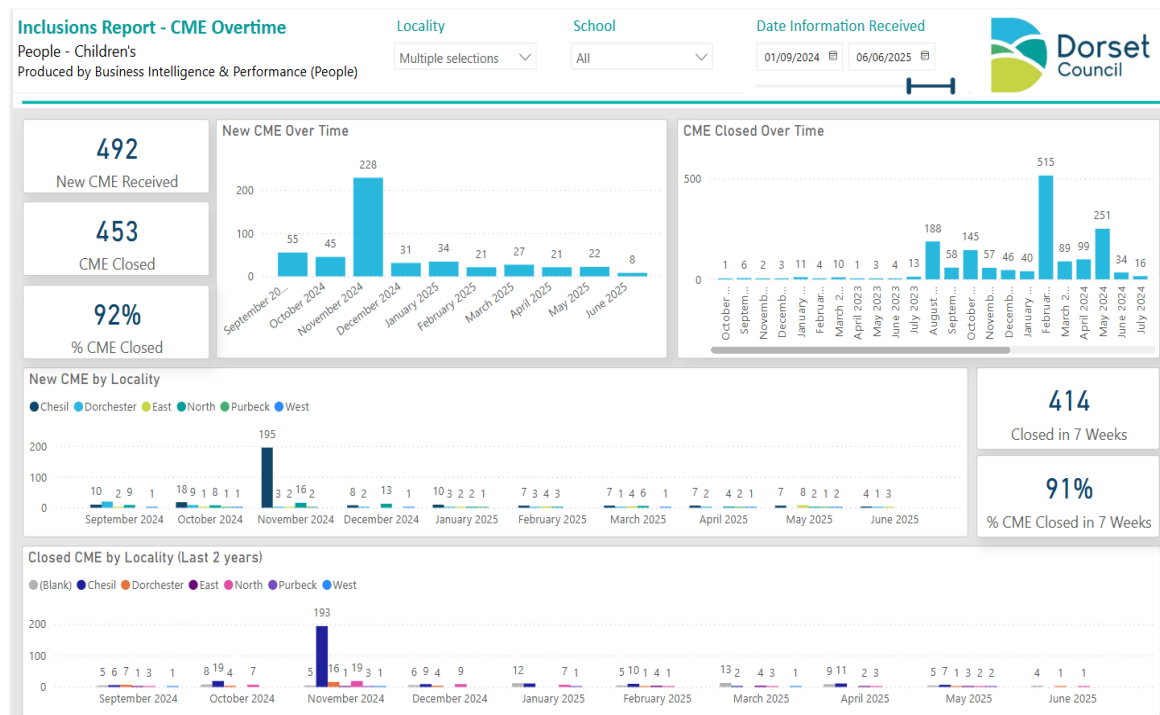


Children Missing Education

- Our arrangements to monitor children who are missing education, missing out on education or not in receipt of full-time education are embedded across our localities. We have 9 Inclusion Leads working across localities, their role is to monitor and support Children Missing Out On Education (CMOOE) back into suitable education and stable placements.
- The Inclusion Lead role in each locality works as part of a multi-agency team that have knowledge of local schools, their communities and work with key partners to support children. Sharing of information is critical and Inclusion Leads work in partnership with teams that are involved with CMOOE, such as Family Help, youth justice and health partners.
- Inclusion Leads have a rounded view of each child which enables them to work collaboratively with schools and other professionals to ensure that effective action is taken to reengage children in education. Each school has a link Inclusion Lead who holds termly Inclusion Panels to discuss children and young people with severe/persistent absence.
- A weekly Central Learning Centre Panel considers requests for Permanent Exclusion, dual registration and medical placements. Any requests for alternative provision are presented to the Locality Panel (held weekly) for consideration and a decision as to whether this is suitable and agreeing a review period to ensure appropriate safeguarding and oversight/audit.
- Children are reviewed at a fortnightly Children Missing Out on Education (CMOOE) Inclusion Monitoring Board for monitoring and scrutiny of next steps and intervention where needed. The Board is Chaired by the Learning and Belonging Service Managers, which ensures escalation of matters which may need senior Education Leads' attention. Discussions may need to be held with Academy Trust Chief Executives and Headteachers of schools and academies about strategic concerns. Inclusion Leads attend with key partners involved in cases to present progress and updates on key actions.
- Children's Services and schools use *Orchestra*, a system which collects attendance data directly from schools' management information systems. This enables us to analyse and act upon live information on the movement of children on and off roll, their attendance, and the codes for their absence. The system will also include information about the child's SEND, pupil premium and social care status. Further information on children with part time timetables and in alternative provision is obtained and updated using the ACE system. Training and briefings to schools on the importance of collecting this data is undertaken on a termly basis and there is an Attendance Task and Finish Group which meets regularly.
- We also use our Inclusion dashboard to track and respond to trends in CMOOE which informs analysis and decision making both strategically and in localities.



Children Missing Education



We are able to monitor children who are missing through our performance dashboard as shown above. We are able to identify children/young people to discuss at the Inclusion Monitoring Board and ensure robust oversight. As an example of how this leads to active support, as the Youth Justice Service (YJS) attend, as of 14 May 2025 we have been able to identify **46** young people for the YJS Re-Engage programme; **24** have either received or are in the process of receiving a speech and language assessment. **10** identified as having a working diagnosis of Development Language Disorder (DLD); **5** identified as having working diagnosis of language difficulties; 4 mild language difficulties **1** identified as having receptive language difficulties. **12** schools in Dorset have referred to this programme, and 11 children are receiving therapy/coaching sessions.

Safeguarding in Education

Safeguarding Standards Advisors

- We have made significant investment into our Quality Assurance Service area including implementing Safeguarding Standards Advisors to support our schools and settings.
- The team provide comprehensive support and advice to enable all education providers to create and maintain a safe learning environment for children and young people.
- The Safeguarding Standards Advisors have extensive safeguarding and child protection experience with a Social care background. The Quality Assurance and Partnerships team also has access to a wide range of professional expertise and professional relationships with other agencies.
- The team provide guidance and support to all education providers to become and remain compliant with their statutory safeguarding responsibilities.
- Through Pathfinder, we have strengthened this further, with the implementation of the Dorset Safeguarding Education Board, which forms part of our Safeguarding Partnership arrangements.



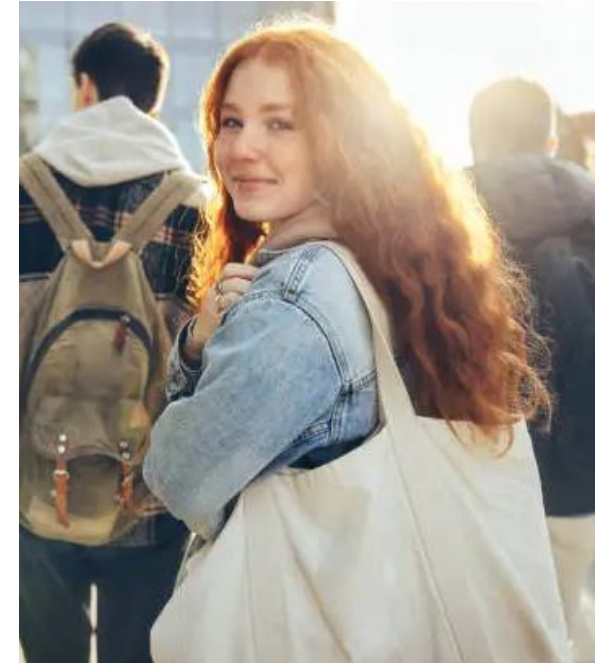
Elective Home Education (EHE)

Inclusion Leads in Dorset Council have been recognised by Education Otherwise Association and awarded their Gold 'Kit' award for excellence when working with and supporting families who have elected to home educate (September 2024). The award has been developed by the association as a quality mark to reflect the collective experiences of home educated families, with respect of the support they have experienced.

- To support co-production and engagement with home educators and the voluntary sector a Working Group has been created and continues to work towards the LA EHE Delivery Plan. The Delivery Plan has been jointly created through the Working Group to offer continuous monitoring and improvement to EHE developments in Dorset Council.
- In line with national trends, EHE registrations have risen in Dorset. The Inclusion Team's work is key to ensuring that children are receiving a suitable education, and families are supported when they choose home education. At the end of March 2025 95% of annual suitability checks were carried out, despite growing numbers of children.
- The CEOs of MATS (MAT Leaders Roundtable Group) have agreed to include EHE numbers as a key performance indicator for our priority for inclusion.
- We see an opportunity in "Education as an equal safeguarding partner", to both provide more systems leadership and formally involve EHE parents and carers in our Education Strategy and Best Education for All plan.



- Our NEET rate is higher than we would like it to be, up from 3.3% in March 24 to 4.2% in March 25, although our Not Known rate remains very low at 0.4%. We have undertaken analysis of those that are NEET, looking at their Y11 education and working with schools to enable smoother transitions into post-16 provision.
- We are using funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the CEC to invest in intensive support through our Marvels programme to enable Y11 students into a 'sustained destination', with an 84% success rate.
- We integrated the Pan-Dorset Careers Hub into Children's Services from March 25, which has enabled closer collaboration between our EET Team and Careers Hub, including targeted careers events for those more likely to become NEET including young people who are EHE, CiC and EOTAS.
- We are reaching out to high performing statistical neighbours to understand their model and practice and look at what can be learned.
- We are also supporting with our largest FE College as they redesign their 'Routes Into' pathways to enable further progression in a wider range of curriculum areas to ensure we can communicate changes to our young people.
- We have noticed more of our NEET young people are struggling with their emotional wellbeing and our Educational Psychologists are supporting the EET Team in recognising this and working alongside to support us better meeting their needs.



Attendance

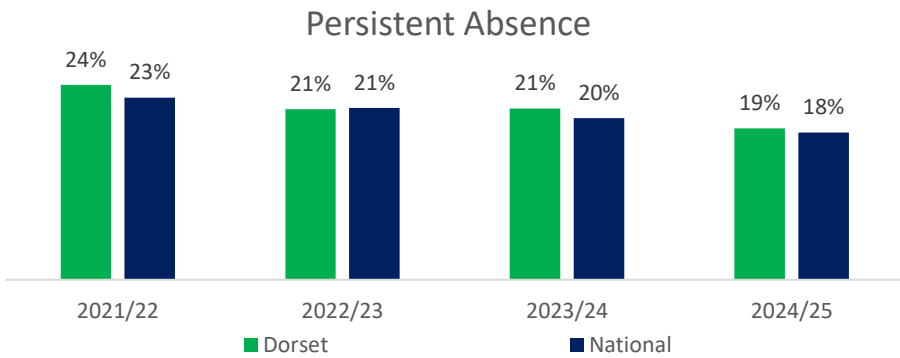
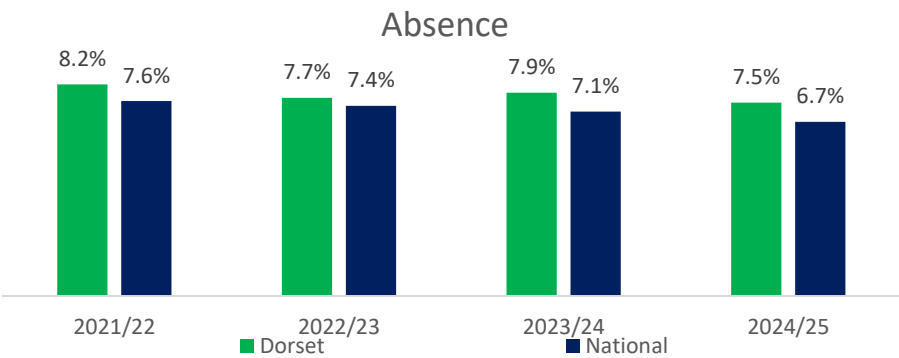
Good school attendance is a key part of our inclusion work, we maintain focus on the whole child and family and what support is needed to help overcome underlying barriers to attendance

- Children with low attendance in the early years are more likely to be at a disadvantage to their peers. In early years settings, children who attend regularly benefit from exposure to language, cognitive stimulation, and social interactions. We know poor attendance habits established early may persist into school so we have ensured that this will be routinely monitored through discussions between the settings and their Best Start in Life Advisor, through our revised practice model.
- The DfE have identified that Students attending over 95% (up to 2 weeks missed) are twice as likely to achieve grade 5 in English & Maths than students attending 90% of the time (up to 4 weeks missed). A key area which has been identified to focus on to improve attendance is for those children missing the occasional day '0% - 15% absence accounts for 44% of total days missed at SECONDARY' (DfE). The 'Monitor your attendance tool' was shared with all headteachers following the in person LEADS meeting in April 2025. This tool gives resources and data analysis using 'absence bandings' to support schools to identify those young people who are within the 5% - 10% bracket and target intervention.
- We have the Orchestra system to draw attendance data through a live link from our schools on a weekly basis, enabling us to identify attendance issues rapidly so we can deliver support by mobilising locality practitioners to work with schools and families at the point of low attendance, instead of the point of missing significant amounts of education. We are rolling out our new ACE (All Children in Education) system to collect information on children missing education, this includes making better use of attendance information to ensure that no child falls through the net.
- The Attendance sub-group of the Dorset Education Board that has representatives from locality teams, educational settings and health has delivered on updating attendance practice and processes. 'Promoting Educational Attendance in Dorset' following the publication of *Working together to improve school attendance Statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities August 2024*.



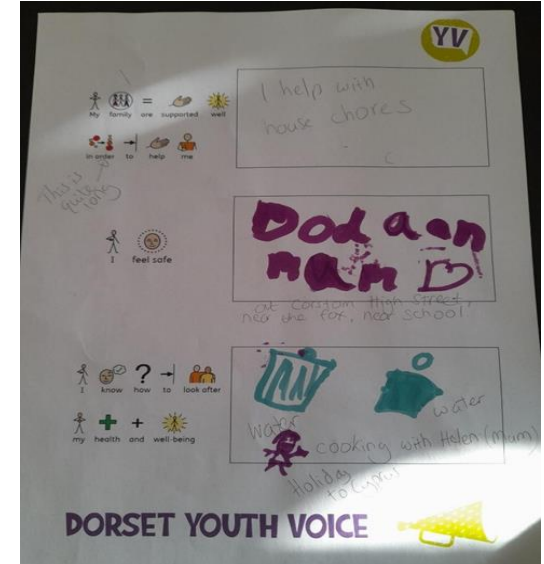
Attendance

- The [“In this together”](#) campaign features a mix of social media, local media and family engagement to increase awareness of routes to support for families who are struggling to get their children to school.
- Successful bids by the Education Challenge Leads (ECLs) has led to additional 'emotionally based school avoidance' training to set up groups in schools to support families with children where their attendance has reduced. For this year (to date), absence is below national for primary and special schools, but higher at secondary.
- Persistent absence rates are slowly improving. However, severe absence remains an area of focus and challenge. We are working closely with families to understand the reasons for prolonged absence to understand the cause and challenges.
- For those eligible for free school meals, unauthorised absence is 0.7% above national, whilst authorised absence is 1.3% above. Unauthorised absence is higher in years 9, 10 and 11. A focused project with QE School has seen attendance improve. Absence is higher on Mondays and Fridays, with both authorised and unauthorised absence highest on Fridays.
- Our Let’s Talk event on school attendance May 2024 had a major focus on enabling families to access mental health support as anxiety is most often the reason cited for longer term absence.



Birth to Settled Adulthood Service

- In April 2024 we launched our new 0 to 25 Birth to Settled Adulthood Service for Children with a Disability and complex needs.
- This is a partnership between Children's Services, Adult Services, the Health Service, and Dorset Parent Carer Council, and managed within Children's Services.
- It is designed and committed to the provision of a consistently good service for disabled children and young people and their families, which continues seamlessly from childhood to young adulthood.
- We continue to see the benefits of co-working improving knowledge and understanding across areas and implementing changes alongside the service re-design.
- A dedicated workforce plan is supporting with development, training and co-production.
- We have worked closely with the Dorset Parent Carer Council and our children and young people, to both formulate our plans and vision.



Ofsted: 'The introduction of the Birth to Settled Adulthood service helps children and young people to access help smoothly, well into their futures, which is not age dependent.'



Birth to Settled Adulthood Service

Phase 1 launched on 30 April 2024

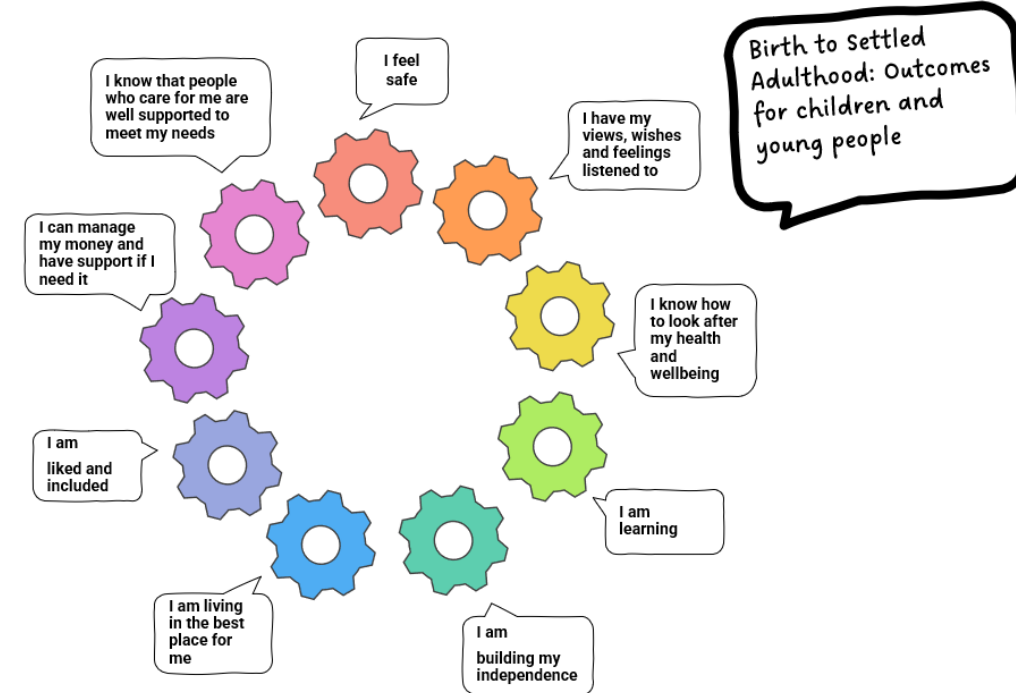
- Creation of a flexible 0-25 service model for Dorset Council
- Right workers supporting the child, young person and family at the right time
- Support to navigate the Local Offer, information advice and guidance
- Education Health and Care Plans play a key role in joint working and have a stronger focus on Preparation for Adulthood outcomes
- Earlier planning to develop Preparing for Adulthood Plans
- Maintains and enhances statutory Safeguarding and Short Breaks functions.

Phase 2 – integration with Health Services

- Development of Keyworker service for young people on the dynamic support register
- All Age continuing health care
- Joint commissioning

Internal changes

- Management of the service hosted in Children's Services
- Shared responsibility for Key Performance Indicators
- Embedded specialisms within the service including early years Best Start in Life Advisors. This includes the transfer of the Young Carers Service into Birth to Settled Adulthood.
- Appointment of a dedicated Head of Service for Birth to Settled Adulthood who will also hold the DSCO role.
- A shared budget and jointly agreed funding decisions in accordance with the legal frameworks.



Outcomes Framework

We have co-produced 'I Statements' with children, young people and parents and developed 'We Statements' as the basis of our Outcomes Framework.

Links

[Birth to Settled Adulthood Joint Declaration video](#)

[Birth to Settled Adulthood webpage](#)

[Preparing for Adulthood Guide](#)

B2SA Service Model



Short Breaks

We commission targeted group-based activities, as well as specialist daytime and overnight Short Breaks

Providers collect feedback from young people and their families to tell us about the impact of Short Breaks, here is some of what they tell us:



17,196 hours of targeted Short Breaks activities were delivered in 2024-25



1,657 externally commissioned overnight Short Breaks were delivered in 2024-25



835 hours of externally commissioned specialist daytime short breaks delivered in 2024-25

What words describe your day?
"Good, fun and safe, happy, wonderful, wet!"

"I have a calmer child during half terms, gives me a break as something I wouldn't get, can spend a few hours with my other child."

"My son has been going to Hayeswood every other weekend since April last year. They have always supported him and allowed him to grow to the best of his abilities."

B2SA and Short Break – Case Study

This case study follows the journey of J, an 11-year-old child with diagnoses of ASC, learning difficulties and Global Developmental Delay who is non-verbal, as he was provided with opportunities to grow independence and build relationships with others through access to a Short Breaks package with support from the B2SA Early Help team.

Due to J's early diagnosis of autism at age 4, the family have been supported by the specialist school J attends. The family were able to manage J's complex needs and gain respite during his younger years with the support of a grandparent. As J has grown older, he continues to require constant supervision by his parents to keep him safe both at home and out in the community. His communication struggles have meant further frustrations for him and increasing dysregulation at times. Due to ongoing need and increasing age, his grandparent is no longer able to provide respite, meaning that while parents are protective and inclusive of J's needs, in the long term, this would not be sustainable for them without additional support.

"During a home visit, I signed hello to J. He then took my hands and placed them over his ears. Parents shared this was his tactile response which showed his level of comfort with me".

Family Worker

Following a school referral to the B2SA Early Help team, the family were supported by an allocated Family Worker to access a Short Breaks package for J. For several hours during term time and school holidays, J is taken out into the community by a Direct Payment carer to enjoy places and activities he enjoys, such as walking at National Trust gardens and at the beach. This allows his parents to gain a break in care, providing them time with one another and to enjoy activities and events that may be unsuitable for J.

Impact and Outcomes

J's parents have been provided with a break in care of his complex needs and requirement for constant supervision, to look after their own wellbeing.

J has been able to build a relationship with his new carer, also building independence out in the community.

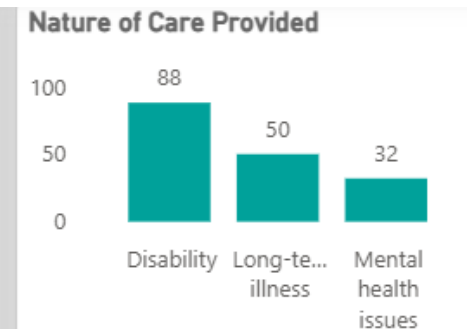
The family will continue to be supported by B2SA Early Help as J gets older, with regular reviews of J and his family's needs.

- The Young carers Team moved into B2SA in June 2024. This has been positive in ensuring the needs of young carers are highlighted and well supported. Young carers may have a disabled sibling or have a parent or adult who has disability and needs support.
- This change has enabled a whole family approach with the young carer, the disabled child, and parent carers being supported at the same time and the assessment process being coordinated.
- At the 31st March 2025 there were 103 young carers open to the B2SA service.
- The service supports the wellbeing of young carers by exploring sources of charitable funding to support them to attend the young carers festival each year, social and leisure activities. Additional support is commissioned through the Carer Support Fund and partnerships with MYTIME (Young Carers Charity) to provide support to schools and opportunities for short breaks for young carers.
- Following the move of the young carers service into B2SA and since the development of the integrated approach with Adult Social Care, there has been further developments to strengthen the working with the Adult Services Carers Service. There are now regular meetings between B2SA young carers team and the Adult Carers Service. There is also work in progress to prepare young carers for their move into Adult services as they approach 18. Joint visits can take place with the Adult Carers Services and recommendations for the Cared for Person to have a Care Act assessment completed by Adult Social Care.



It also tell us the young carers status in relation to Child in Need and Child Protection to focus on those in immediate need.

Every summer, YMCA Fairthorne Manor hosts the largest festival in the world for young people with a caring responsibility at home. The Young Carers Festival is delivered in partnership with The Children's Society. Dorset Council along with funding from charities fund the places for the festival, and Dorset Council also provide staffing over the weekend to support the young carers to attend. The festival provides the young carers with the opportunity to establish new friendships, experience new activities, and have their voices heard to influence political change. Some feedback from young carers and their parents is below:



"I really enjoyed going to the festival, shame it was my first and last time there, but if I had the chance I would definitely go again and first time camping also...was good."



Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service

Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service is a Pan-Dorset partnership comprising Dorset Council, BCP Council, NHS Dorset, Dorset Police, and the National Probation Service Dorset. The Youth Justice Service is a multi-disciplinary team which includes youth justice officers, police officers, probation officers, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service nurses, speech and language therapists, a part-time psychologist, parenting workers and restorative justice practitioners.

The last inspection report for the YJS was published in January 2023, rating the service as 'Good'. In February, a themed YJ inspection was undertaken focus being Out of Court Disposals. (OOCDD) - a grading is not provided for each LA for this themed inspection, although a report will be published in summer 2025 covering themes identified from the eight LA Youth Justice services inspected. Feedback received from this inspection identified strong strategic and operational partnerships, good practice and robust decision making.

The YJS prioritises strong relationships with children, responding to each child using assessments by the YJS Speech and Language Therapists, and trauma formulations by the YJS psychologist and CAMHS nurses.

Designated Youth Justice Service staff have access to the Dorset Council Mosaic and Synergy systems to support integrated working, assisted by strong working relationships with social care, family help and education colleagues at practitioner and manager levels in the localities. The service works closely with 'The Harbour' (Adolescent Residential and Outreach Service). The service is also represented on the Extra-Familial Harm Strategic, Tactical and Champions groups and participates in the locality-based Youth at Risk and Extra-Familial Harm meetings.

The number of First-Time Entrants in the Dorset Council area has dropped from 106 in 2018/19 to an average of 48 in the 5 years to March 2025, reflecting partnership work to divert children from formal justice outcomes. Dorset continues to see low levels of custodial sentences. Two Dorset children were sentenced to custody in 2024.

The YJS delivers the MoJ 'Turnaround' programme to strengthen local diversion options for children on the cusp of the youth justice system. More than 50% of school-age children on the YJS caseload in October 2024 have experienced school exclusions in the past 2 years and have been assessed needing an EHCP or SEN Support.

The YJS Partnership has funded a 2-year pilot programme from July 2024 to provide SALT assessments and support for children at risk of school exclusion. The aim is to reduce school exclusions and prevent future offending, meeting partnership priorities to improve education outcomes and to reduce contact with the justice system.

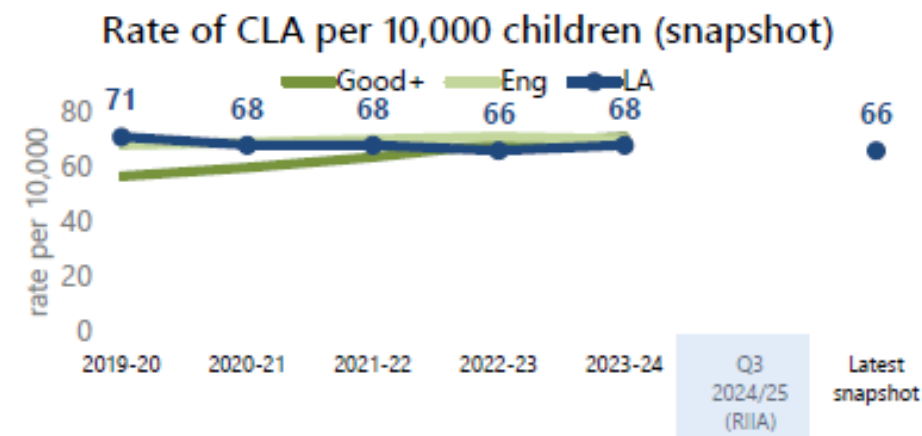
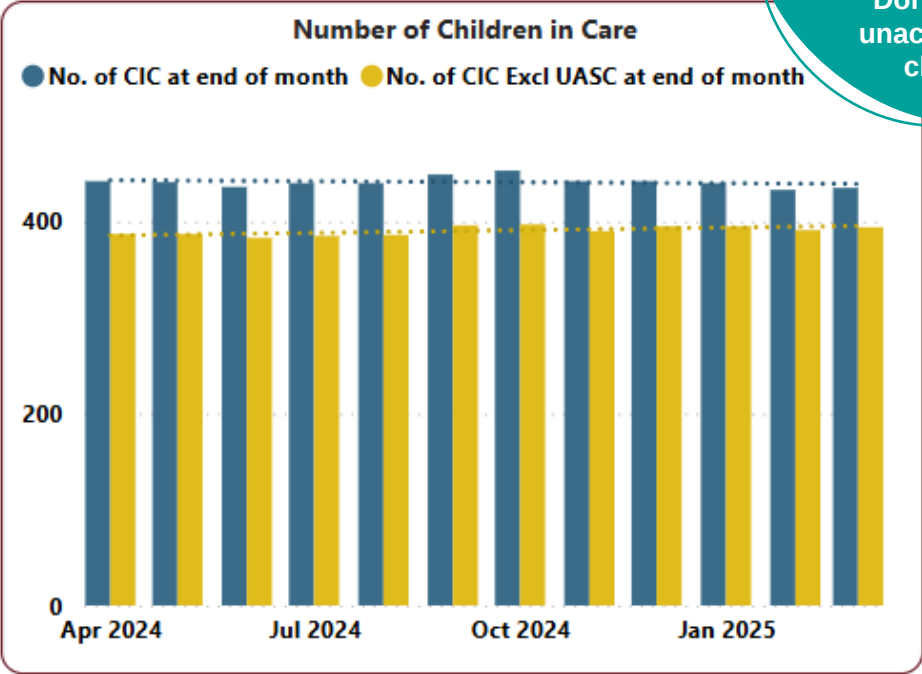
At the end of March 2025, we had 435 children in our care, with 394 children from Dorset and 41 unaccompanied children.

Children In Care

Children in Care are supported by social workers across locality teams, and by the Birth To Settled Adulthood Service for children who are disabled. Within the Locality Teams the 4 locality-based Permanence teams support our children in care from 0-18 years of age where it is clear children are not returning home. The Permanence Teams are embedded within our place-based structure.

Our Dorset Children Thrive model ensures that workers build and maintain lasting relationships with their children who they support throughout their involvement with children’s social care services.

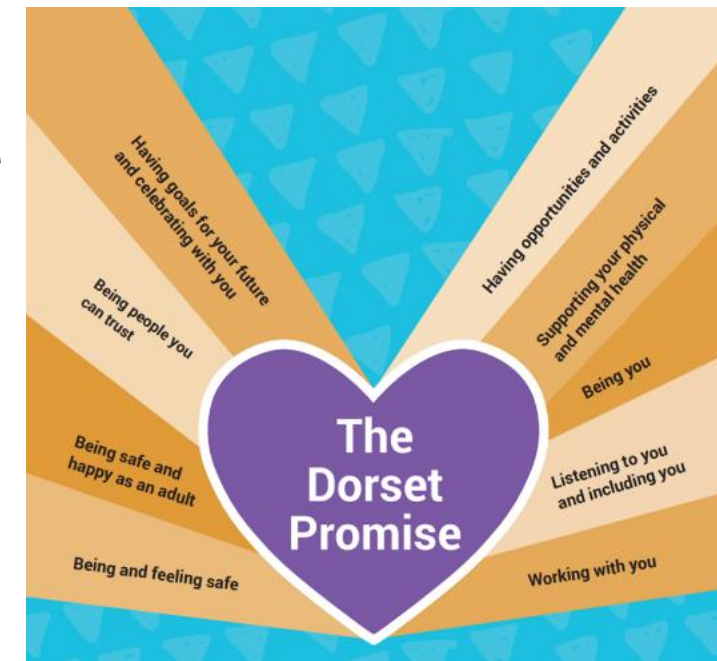
We have seen a reduction in the number of children from Dorset in our care during 2024/25, however our overall number of children in care has remained similar as we have welcomed a growing number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to our care family. Our rate of children in care is 66.64 per 10,000 population. Children continue to mostly enter care in a planned way through the oversight of weekly Line of Sight Meeting and Leadership Oversight and via planned court intervention.



Corporate Parenting Board

We have published our [Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-27](#), building on our 2020-2024 strategy. We have 5 priorities:

- **Priority 1 - Safety and Permanence** – supporting children and young people to be and feel safe and for us all to be people they can trust
- **Priority 2 – Education and Employment** – supporting children and young people to have goals for the future and celebrating with them
- **Priority 3 – Physical and Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing** – supporting our children and young people's physical and mental health
- **Priority 4 – Identity** – supporting children and young people to be themselves, to listen to them, include them, and work with them
- **Priority 5 – Next steps towards adult life** – supporting our young people to be safe and happy as adults



The Board ensures young people know how their voice, insights and lived experiences have impacted decision making and service development and delivery. The Corporate Parenting Board meets a minimum of seven times a year including informal meetings. In October 2023 Dorset Council agreed to treat 'care experience' as a protected characteristic.

Placement Sufficiency

We refreshed our [Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers 2024 to 2027 - Dorset Council](#)

We have continued to move at pace to address our sufficiency gaps so that more of our children and young people can stay close to their homes and families. We are increasing placement sufficiency, including expanding in-house residential provision, and implementation of a plan to increase our fostering provision and support to foster carers. This plan is focused on increasing the volume and skill-base of our in-house foster carers to provide greater sufficiency and stability. This includes strengthening our marketing and recruitment processes. A focus on peer-support, meaningful engagement, accessible training and the deployment of the Mockingbird model will support the resilience and retention of our existing carers.

We are participating in the Southwest regional pilot trialing a regional fostering recruitment and retention hub.

A higher proportion, 70% of our children in care, live in foster homes compared to our good or outstanding statistical neighbours and the average nationally.

39% of children who are in care (ex-UASC) live outside Dorset. Although we are better than the national average, we still have too many children placed out of area. We are ambitious for our children to remain close to the people and places that are important to them and continue to develop local homes, both in-house and through partnerships. We have 188 Dorset Council foster carers, of whom 25% are connected persons. 37% of our children in care live in homes provided by private and voluntary sector organisations.

Unregistered Provision – as of 31st March 2025 we have no children under 16 living in unregistered provision



The Harbour - our in care and edge of care service for young people

Harbour and in-house residential provision

The Harbour multi-disciplinary team has grown steadily under consistent and committed leadership. The Harbour offers a combination of outreach, fostering and residential children's homes. All homes have been inspected and are graded as Good. The duration and intensity of support varies according to the needs of children. The **impact** of the Harbour Model includes:

Supporting young people to safely remain at home.

Reduction of children age 13+ entering care

Reduction of new child protection plans for children age 13+

Improved family relationships

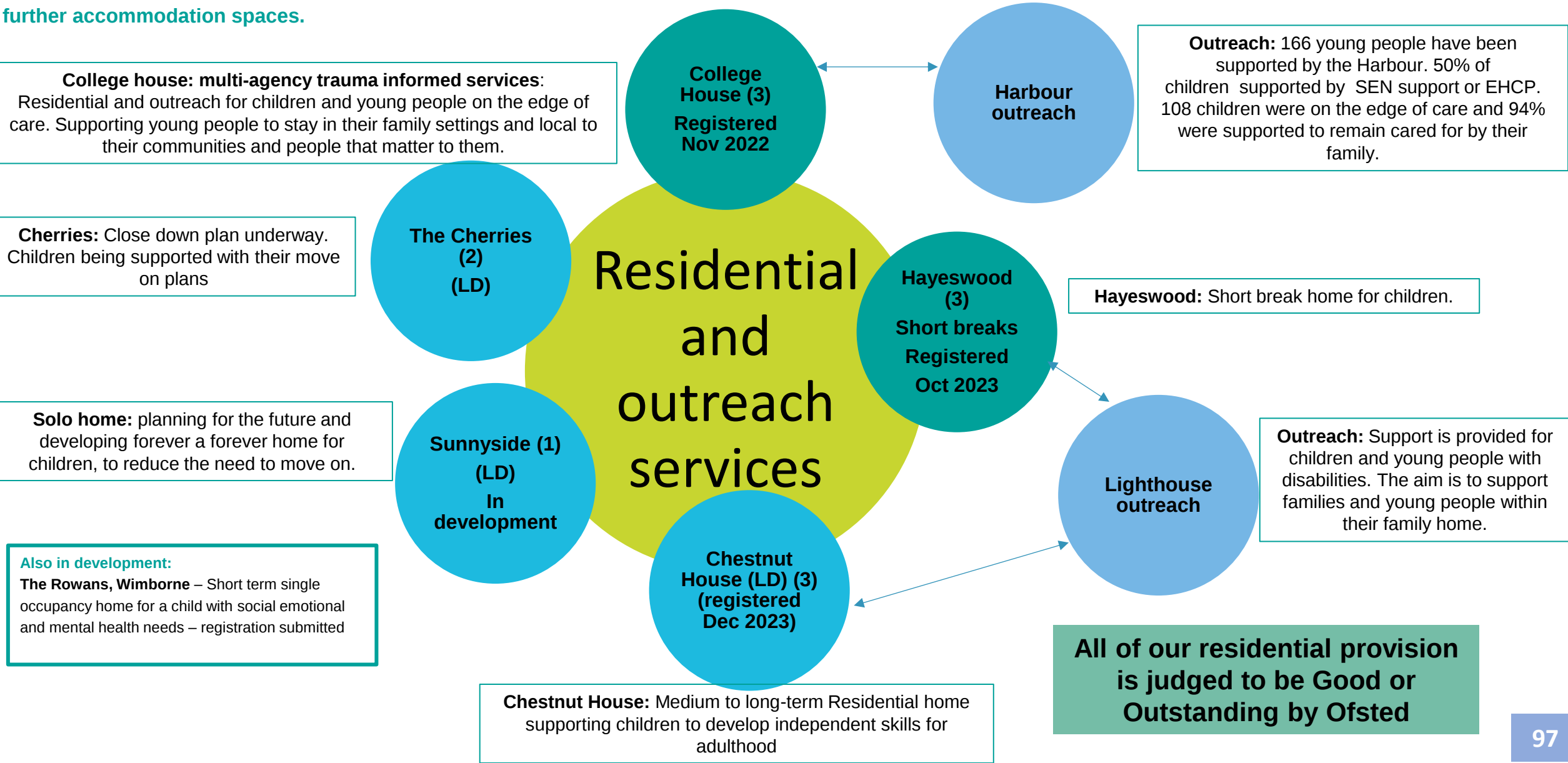
Improved placement stability

Following the impact of The Harbour in Weymouth, we launched Harbour East in September 2024

An application was submitted in November in the East to register an additional short- term home, this application is ongoing, and we hope to complete registration in July 25

In-house residential and outreach services

We have continued to expand our in-house residential provision and are continuing to develop further accommodation spaces.

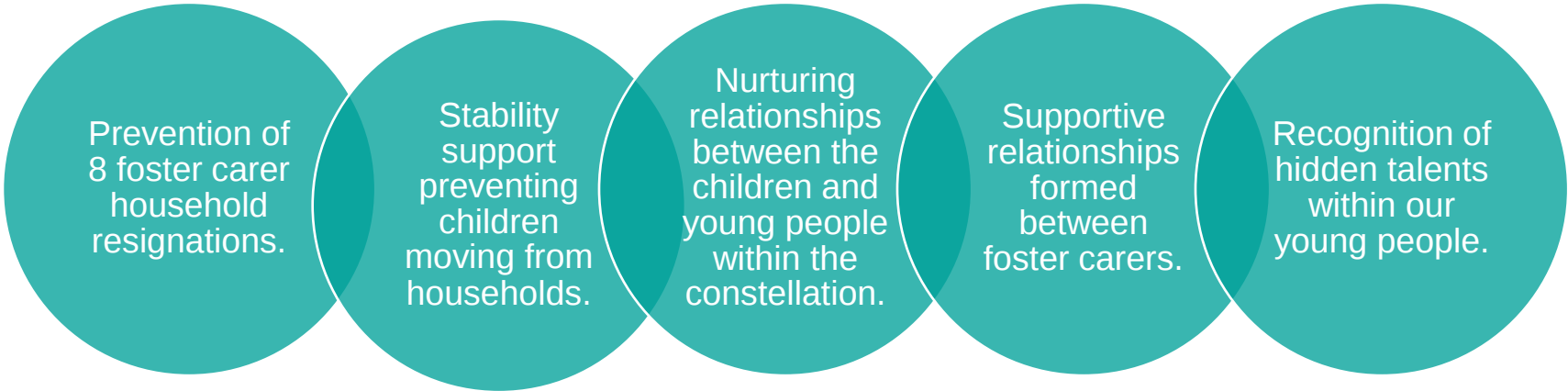


Mockingbird Family Model of Fostering

We launched our first Mockingbird Constellation in November 2022. We currently have 5 Constellations, Draco, Orion, Gemini, Pegasus and Aquarius, and we are identifying our hub home carer for our established 6th constellation. We aim to have a total of 6 Constellations by the end of 2025. Children and young people continue to select the name of each constellation.

The Mockingbird Society in Seattle (creators on the model) have been so impressed with our progress that they invited us to Seattle to share our learning and achievements.

We are seeing a real **impact** for the foster carers and the children they are caring for:



- At the end of March 2025, 69.89% of our children in care are living in a foster home. Over 2024-25, the percentage has been 68-72%, which is higher than national average and good+ statistical neighbours.
- Mockingbird has made a significant contribution to short term and long-term home stability both of which continue to be strong and above national average and good + statistical neighbours.
- We remain ambitious to enable our children to live in settled and stable homes. The proportion of children in care with 3 plus home moves in the last 12 months at end of March 2025 was 11%.
- **In March 2025, the proportion of children in care for 2.5 years who were in homes of two years or more was 78.21%.** We are pleased that this is a significant improvement compared to March 2023 when performance on this indicator was 64%.
- As part of our strategy to improve home stability and permanence outcomes, **the Council has approved a capital investment of £1m to fund foster carer and adopter home extensions and adaptations** to secure additional capacity, and to enable sibling groups to be placed together where accommodation space might otherwise be a barrier.



Permanence Planning – A Forever Home Built on Love



- From the moment we start working with children we think about the range of permanence options. We already have a strong emphasis on family networks and potential kinship options and expect to enhance this work through the Pathfinder work. We maintain a strong focus on the importance of sibling relationships, potential lifelong links and reunification pathways.
- Our pre-proceedings and care proceedings work is undertaken within the Locality Teams, and we have 4 Permanence Teams who undertake the work with children in care following the conclusion of proceedings.
- We are now routinely offering Family Group Conferences when we enter Pre Proceedings, if this has not already been provided to explore family networks and the support or care that they can provide for children and families.
- Our desire to continue to promote and secure permanence for as many of our children as possible has resulted in the creation of a new Permanence Service Manager role. The Permanence Service Manager line manages the Permanence Teams and provides matrix management across the system. This allows for even more focused attention to be given to securing permanence for our children.
- As well as routine Permanence Planning Meetings, all children in pre-proceedings, care proceedings and in our care are considered at monthly permanence tracking meetings. These meetings are chaired by a senior manager and include representatives from Aspire (Regional Adoption Agency) and Birth to Settled Adulthood in relation to transition planning.
- As part of our new Family Network Strategy and Pathfinder developments, from April 2025 we brought our Special Guardianship work back in-house and created a specialist 'kinship care ' service to improve and streamline the approach to permanence for children with kinship carers – for example undertaking just one proportionate assessment for both Fostering Panel and Special Guardianship Court requirements and developing a tailored support offer for kinship families.

Permanence Outcomes



- The proportion of children who have a completed Permanence Plan was 96.51% at end of March 2025 of which 81.91 % (exc UASC) had been updated in the last 6 months (excluding Achieved Permanence).
- We continue to deliver strong performance for the number and proportion of children in care achieving permanence through Adoption and re-unification. Improved pathways for reunification are being embedded to ensure that children remain in our care only for as long as is necessary.
- The proportion of children in care who left care via adoption in the last 6 months ranged from 11% - 16% better than national average and good+ stat neighbours.
- Adoption timeliness is strong. The most recent data, March 2025, shows the **number of days between coming into care and being placed for adoption on average for children adopted in the previous 12 months was 360 days.**
- The latest data from March 2025 shows the number of days on average between a Placement Order to the date the child was matched was 201 days.** Both of these timeliness measures are better than the previous national target and good + stat neighbours for adoption timeliness.

Early Permanence Placements – we made a total of **12 Early Permanence Placements in 2023/24**, a significant improvement on the 2 made the previous year. Since April 24 to March 2025, we have made 7 Early Permanence Placements.

Special Guardianship –As part of our Pathfinder developments, we will be bringing the Special Guardianship Service back in House from Aspire to create a specialist kinship care service tailored to the needs of kinship carers

Special Guardianship Orders - The proportion of children who left care via Special Guardianship in the last 6 months is **5%.**

Re-unification – March data confirms 15.4% of children left care through family reunification, over the preceding six months.

We do know that the increase in our unaccompanied children population in Dorset has contributed to the performance data in relation to permanence. The proportion of our children in care population who are unaccompanied is now larger. Almost invariably none of these children leave care via adoption, SGO or family re-unification, impacting on the overall proportion of children in care who leave via these routes.

Children in Care: Health

The latest data indicates that performance on all health indicators has been maintained.

Annual (review) health assessments

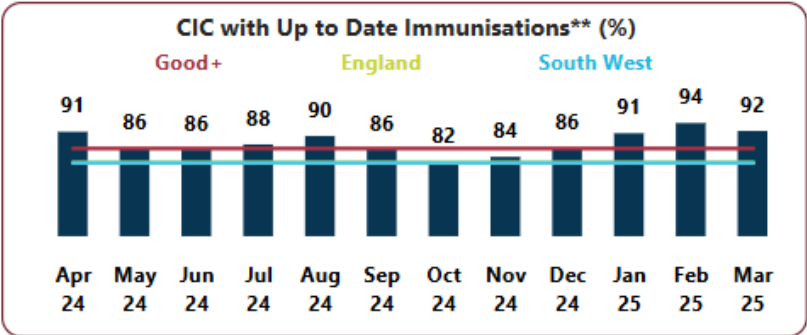
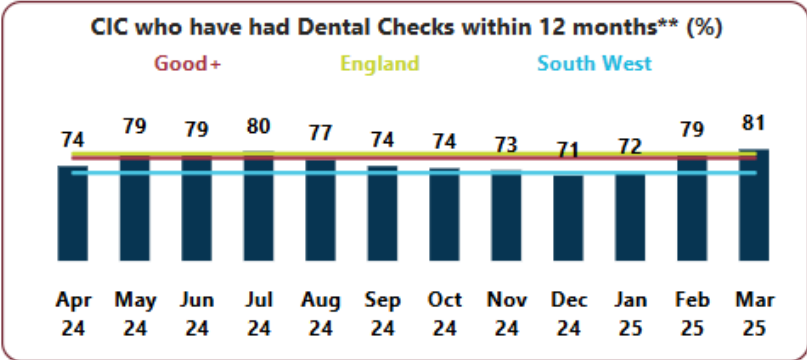
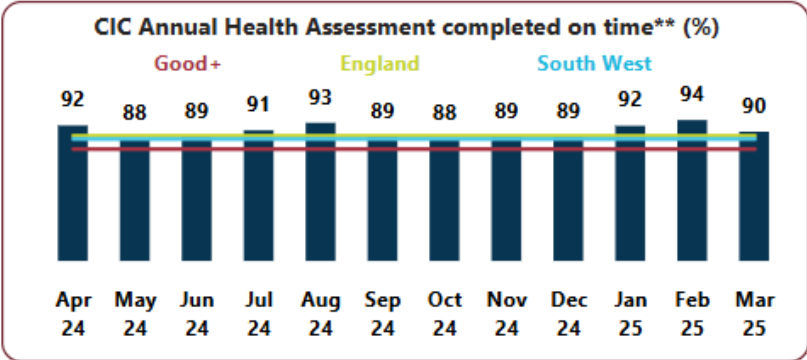
It is positive that the timely completion of annual health assessment reviews has been between 88 and 94% over the past 12-months.This continues to be an area of focus for the ICB Designated nurse.

Dental health

We recognise the importance of good dental health and that this has been an area of challenge for us in Dorset. We continue to work with our foster carers, carers and health colleagues to ensure that timely dental appointments are made for our children. We are also moving forward with Children in Care premium and 11 dentists have now signed up.

Immunisations

Completion of immunisations has remained between 82% to 94% in the last 12-months



Children in Care: Health

Emotional wellbeing and mental health

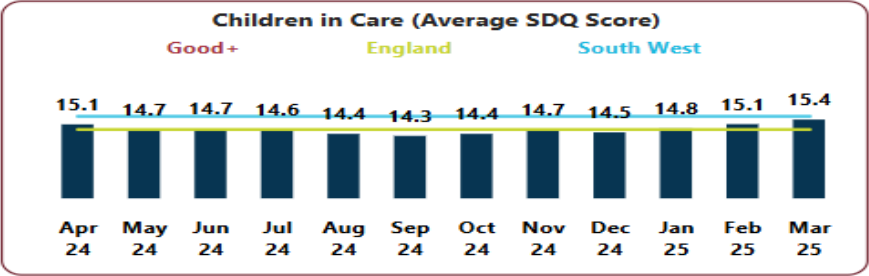
We are working to improve the completion rate for Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs). In the most recent informal Corporate Parenting Board children and young people spoke about how they experience the SDQ questionnaire and have requested more opportunities for free text and to understand the purpose. This is being taken forward by the Head of Children Thriving in Education who also holds the role of Principal Educational Psychologist with the CYP network group.

The average score, for our children in care aged 4-16, for those that had completed, has remained between 14.3 and from 15.4 between April 2024 and March 2025. Following an internal review of the needs of the children in care from evaluated SDQ scores and the services children received, we are working with CAMHS, Dorset Healthcare Trust and NHS Dorset programme leads to scope a partnership agreement for a virtual team with a multi-disciplinary approach.

The aim is to bring a range of services and practitioners together to improve outcomes for our children in care by reducing duplication and hand-offs. The child in care Clinical Psychologist, the Clinical Psychology service for Adoption and Permanence, the CAMHS social workers and the Emotional Wellbeing Practitioner are some of the services and practitioners we aim to bring together alongside our Virtual School and Educational Psychology service.

This year has seen the start of the development of a Psychology Hub located at The Harbour under the oversight of the Service Manager for Residential Services, with clinical line management being provided by Clinical Lead - Specialist CAMHS for Care, Adoption and Permanence. The Hub offers a shared space for clinical psychologists who deliver services to Adoption, Fostering and Kinship Service, alongside the embedded Harbour psychologists.

As part of this development and process a new guidance and procedures process has been co-produced by Dorset Healthcare, CAMHS and Dorset Council that will help frontline practitioners to develop their understanding of emotional wellbeing and mental health using the iThrive Framework. All services will adopt the prompts to improve their understanding of the child and their needs and what may be the best fit intervention.



Children in Care: Health

Our Foster Carers have identified an increased level of need for support, advice, and guidance from the Children in Care Psychologists for adoption and permanence. We are developing a model of practice that improves the skills of the supervising social workers to provide the direct support to the foster carers. This is consistent with Dorset Council Children’s Social Care’s restorative practice model.

Through consultation and group supervision, support and joint training foster carers will have an improved understanding of the emotional needs of the children in their care and how to respond to these.

Core CAMHS prioritises access for Children in Care, offering a 24-hour response for urgent referrals and an 8-week response for all other referrals. [Digital](#) platforms for the service were developed quickly during the initial phases of the pandemic and the website has been updated with signposting and podcasts. The service now uses a hybrid approach to support. We have established an operational monthly meeting to track children in care open to CAMHS and the Emotional Wellbeing services, both within and beyond Dorset. To embed the processes and standards for emotional wellbeing and mental health we have planned a training programme for social workers, managers, foster carers, Virtual School staff, teachers, and health care professionals.

We are confident that we have the appropriate systems and processes in place now to better understand, record and respond to the emotional health needs of our Children in Care. A partnership agreement was implemented in April 2022 which we continue to review alongside the remodelling of CAMHS, to ensure that it is bringing about the positive impact we require for our children and young people. Early Help staff also support with children’s mental health and advise on the availability of other local support for families. Professionals or families can make a request for support directly. Future development plans to embed CAHMS into our locality model are being progressed through CAMHS transformation and business case is progressing through the ICB.

We have been working with our Health colleagues to mitigate the lack of Tier 4 provision locally and nationally by developing and delivering multi-agency outreach support and health commissioned CQC and Ofsted registered (SC1 submitted) care provision for one of our most complex young people.



Dorset Virtual School

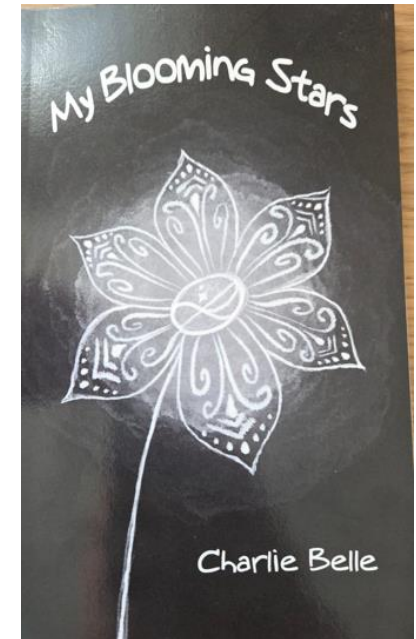
- The aim of our Virtual school is to ensure that all Children in Care, Care Leavers, children previously looked after, children in kinship care arrangements and children with a Social Worker feel they belong in their educational setting and thrive in their learning. We aim for our children to have their needs met and to aspire for their futures whilst feeling safe in education and their lives.
- Our ambition is to ensure that all our children thrive and achieve through the targeted monitoring of and challenging of attendance, progress, attainment and exclusions within the Virtual School. This includes the reduction of children missing education, a reduction in the number of persistent absentees and exclusions. The Virtual School aims to deliver targeted interventions for schools and settings to support inclusion and raise aspiration for their Children in Care and Care Leavers, as well as children with a social worker.
- As part of the pathfinder model, the Virtual School has expanded its role to have strategic oversight for all children with a Social Worker, working alongside our locality colleagues to support the attendance and progress of our children and young people. This is raising the profile as education as an equal safeguarding partner and supporting the locality teams to consider the impact that education can have for our children.
- The Virtual School is also working alongside our kinship care team to provide guidance and support for our children in kinship care arrangements. This ensures that there is monitoring of our children and families and guidance for educational queries and has been modelled on our current work supporting children previously in care.



Children in Care: Education Impact

- A residential visit to Jamie's Farm was undertaken in February 2025 with a focus on young people who had a SEN need who had missed education due to emotional well-being. Feedback from young people was positive with an 8.2% increase on emotional well-being scale 6 weeks after the event.
- The Virtual School has supported one of our young people to produce and publish their own poems using Pupil Premium Plus funding to support the process of meeting with a publishing company and design team to ensure that their work would be recognised.
- In response to our young people's voice about further understanding in education settings about being a child in care, the Virtual School have produced a reading list for all settings with stories about different types of families as well as key themes that our young people wanted to see within their libraries.
- The Virtual School has developed a targeted offer of continued profession development (CPD) for its settings, including a rolling annual programme, the annual Virtual School Conference (99 participants attended with 94 saying the conference would have good or significant impact on their role).
- The Virtual School has developed a Dorset Virtual School Toolkit for Belonging and Inclusion in collaboration with UCL's Knowledge Exchange Project (Promoting the achievement of Children in Care). The Virtual School are in its 4th year of collaboration with the project to encourage sharing of best practice and this has supported 19 settings to undertake action research to improve outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers with a further eleven settings starting this programme in 2025.
- Attendance for our school aged children in 2023/24 was 87%. However, currently, (March 2025) our attendance sits at 89% with all year groups above 90% apart from year 9 (86%), 10 (83%) and 11 (80%). This is above the Welfare Call's 95 Local Authorities attendance at 88%.

You can see some of the work of our Virtual School in this [short film](#)



"I learned that true happiness is possible"

Dorset Child in Care

Children in Care: Education Impact

- There has been an improvement in achievement rates at GCSE with 28.57% of our cohort achieving a grade 4 or above in maths. Targeted tuition and an online learning platform have been offered to our young people in year 11 to help close gaps and enhance learning.
- Children in year 1 are performing well in their phonics screening test in comparison to the previous year with all children given access to the Virtual School literacy intervention during the year.
- Children in year 2 are performing well in their Key Stage 1 assessments in comparison to the previous year.
- Children in year 4 have performed well in their multiplication check during the year.
- The school had five young people in year 13 undertaking their final year of their level 3 qualification. 100% passed with all progressing to a university course or higher apprenticeship, ranging from animation to economics.
- Increase in timeliness for Personal Education Plan (PEP) completion in 20 calendar days from 92% to 93% in the Spring Term. 96% PEPs in the Spring Term were graded as good or outstanding with governor dip sampling supporting this quality assurance process. There has been an increase in attendance at PEPs for children, social workers, Personal Advisors and Designated Teachers compared to the previous year. This ensures that the child's voice is heard and at the centre of our work. It also ensures that progress, attendance and outcomes are scrutinised.



Children in Care: Education

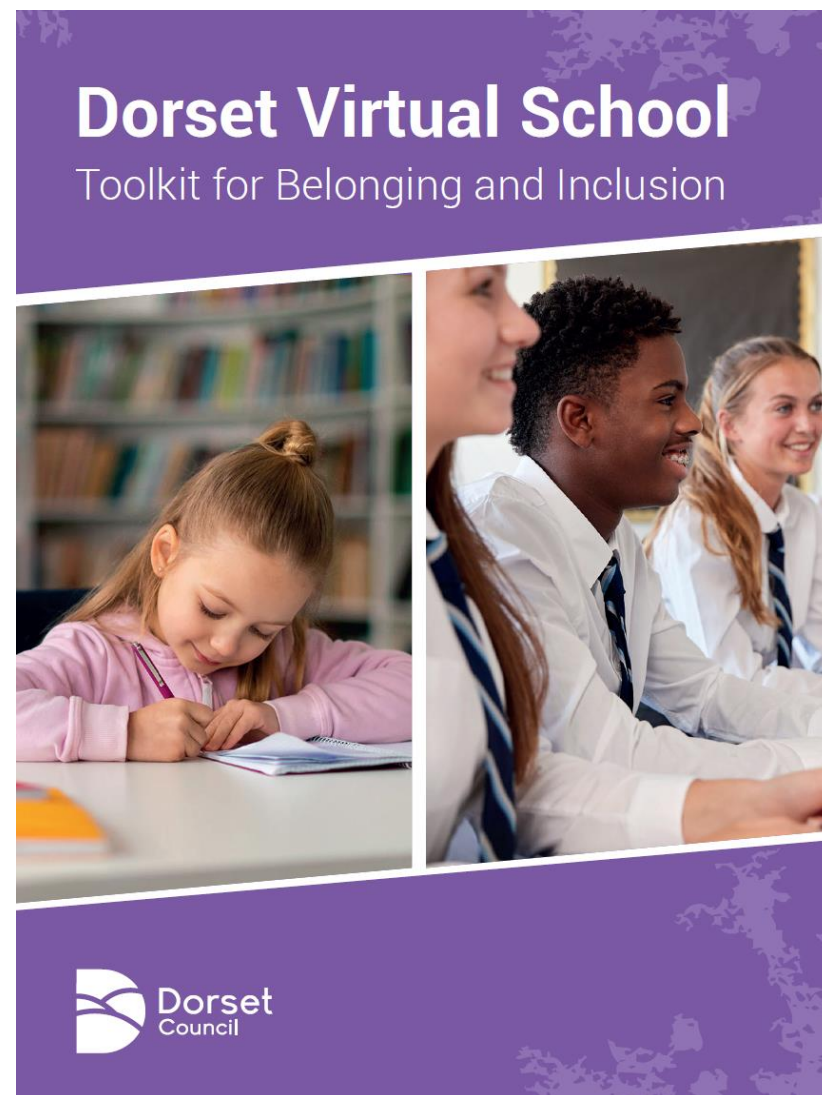
What do we need to improve?

2 of our children in out of county settings had permanent exclusions in 2023/24.1 in 2024/25 to date.

In 2024/25, there has been a reduction in suspensions for Children in Care over time compared to all Local Authorities using Welfare Call (95 LAs). We want to reduce suspensions further.

We will focus on reading standards in Key Stage 2 to ensure that more children are working at expected levels. The Virtual School have focused on literacy interventions and PEP targets to focus schools on this aim.

We will focus on improving outcomes in GCSE English to ensure that our young people have the best opportunities for lifelong learning. The Virtual School have focused on targeted literacy interventions and CPD for the team as well as developing a mentoring programme for 2024/25.



Voices of Care Experienced Children and Young People

Annual surveys, are one of the ways that our **children and young people lead the Youth Voice priorities and activities**. Our annual surveys for Children In Care and Care Leavers focus on wellbeing and are conducted in partnership with Coram Voice ([Bright Spots Programme - Coram Voice](#)). Our Children in Care survey for 2025 is in progress and we will be able to include an update at the annual conversation in June 2026.

Children in Care Bright Spot survey feedback 2023

- All of children (8-11yrs) **had a trusted adult in their lives**.
- 97% of children (8-11yrs) and 95% of young people (11-17yrs) reported that they had **spent time outdoors** (e.g. woods, beach) at least once this week. This was a greater proportion than for children in the wider population
- 97% of young people (11-17yrs) answered that they were **taught life skills** at least 'sometimes' (like cooking healthy food, washing clothes or using money). This was higher than the average proportion in other local authorities (89%).
- Areas for development highlighted which we are working on include; children and young people liking school, friendships, family time and preparing to leave care

Care Leavers Bright Spot survey 2024

- **Survey completion** rate increased each year **33% in 2020 to 79% in 2024**
- **99%** found it **easy to contact their worker**, slightly **higher** than in **other authorities**
- **91%** of care leavers **felt involved in their pathway planning** 'all or most of the time' / 'sometimes' compared to care leavers nationally (87%).
- Areas for development highlighted which we are working on; Having a good friend, loneliness, feeling safe in rented accommodation and feeling positive about their future

Bright Spot survey 2025

- We're completing the activity and collating the responses.



Together with Coram Voice and the Network, we are developing "Ask me What Matters" programme, to enable us to understand more about the emotional health and wellbeing for our children and young people in care. These are questions designed by the young people and will be embedded within our care and pathway planning and will help us to design and deliver the right support to our children in care.

Voices of Care Experienced Children and Young People

The Network, replaces the 'Children in Care Council' and 'Care Leaver Forum'. Children and young people have said that the names of these groups can act as barriers to them taking part.

We want children in care and care leavers (our experts by experience) to feel a sense of belonging as a member of The Network. A place where they can show up as themselves and use their voice at different times and in different ways.

The Youth Voice Team have conversations across 'The Network' to work with children and young people to understand their priorities from the results. The team continue to work with The Network to co-design solutions, presenting these to Corporate Parenting Board for consideration and action.

We will be working with the Hadley Trust to consider how we can embed the data from the Brights Spots Programmes across our data collection systems, making sure that we are also reporting on the areas that are most important to children and young people.

The Youth Voice Team work collaboratively with the Fostering Team and the Virtual School at shared informal events across the year. These spaces allow everyone to meet in fun and engaging ways, that help build safe trusting relationships.

The Virtual School and the Care Leavers Team have heard how children and young people want their achievements to be celebrated. Celebrations happen all year and in personable ways, with annual celebrations also offering an opportunity for everyone to come together.

National Care Leavers Week is also a time for young people to be celebrated in ways that matter to them. In October 2024, care leavers chose the theme 'we all bloom differently' for a local art exhibition of their work. This celebrated their incredible artistic talents and their unique paths into adulthood, sharing what helps them to bloom.

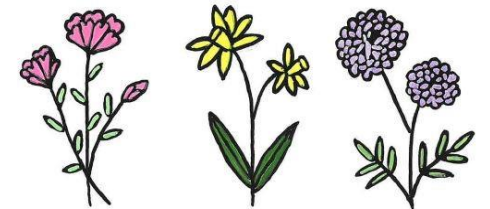
Our children are seen regularly. In March 2025 78% of children in care had an up-to-date visit within the last 6 weeks.

NYAS deliver our advocacy and independent visitor service in Dorset, supporting our children and young people to have their views independently represented. They are also supported to self-advocate and make formal complaints when needed. Care experienced Young Commissioners helped to design the specification for this contract and evaluate bids.

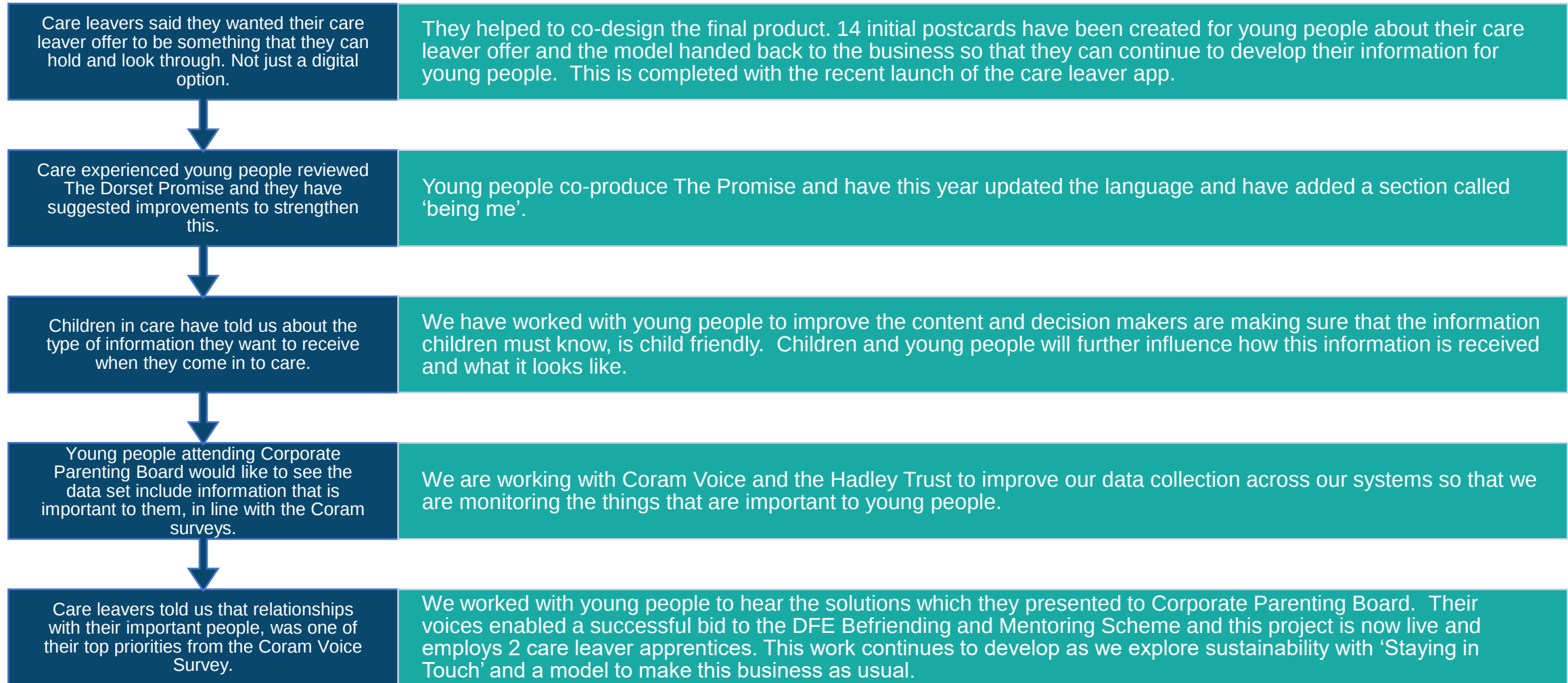
Happiness jars from a Fostering Family Day - exploring what to do on a difficult day



National Care Leavers Week art exhibition displayed at Summer Conference 2025



We all bloom differently



'help children and care leavers to go back and visit friends they may have lost touch with when they have moved as a result of being in care'

'Allow us to keep in touch with staff when they move on (with consent from both sides)'

'Staff allowed to keep in touch with care leavers on social media once past the age of 25'

'Some friends you can be really close to. It's important to me. You need friends you can trust to keep your information safe'

Promoting and Celebrating Diversity



Our children and young people have asked us to truly see them and consider what makes them “one of a kind”. This was the theme of our annual conferences in summer 2024, where we celebrated uniqueness and highlighted the things that unite us. Children and young people led the conferences.

We have invested in a project to identify and support as many children as possible to transfer seamlessly from their early years setting to Year R. The project enables the school setting to ensure they are ready to meet the child's needs and aims to build parent / carer confidence. As at March 2025, 53 settings are involved in the project.

LGBTQ+ young people made a film communicating their experiences for the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Conference. As a result, a gender identity task group has been formed and has recently drafted a practitioner toolkit. This has been shared with the corporate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Board and we will seek to continuously improve our provision for children who are gender questioning.

One of our Executive Headteachers provides leadership in celebration of racial heritage and hosts learning walks to see a rich curriculum that celebrates racial diversity, in action. This is influencing other educational settings to develop their own reflection and celebration of cultural heritage.

Our schools in Weymouth have welcomed children from the ARAP scheme on Chickerell Camp into their learning communities and local people have supported with donations of clothing, toys, bikes and scooters.

Mind Of My Own has been introduced and seeks to offer children and young people, with and without SEND, a more interactive way to capture their thoughts and views

We are continuously seeking more ways to offer information, advice, guidance and services such as parenting support digitally, to enable families to access

Care Leavers – Care Leaver Offer



Our Care Leaver Local Offer sets out the support available and provides information about rights and entitlements.

We have shaped our local offer using feedback from Dorset's care leavers on what they need from our services.

The support YP get is different depending upon when they came into care and how long they have been, or were in, care.

The Care Leaver Legal Status is also detailed in the offer Eligible, Relevant, Former Relevant



Offer accessible via app and or the internet.

Available in a choice of languages

Includes a tutorial function

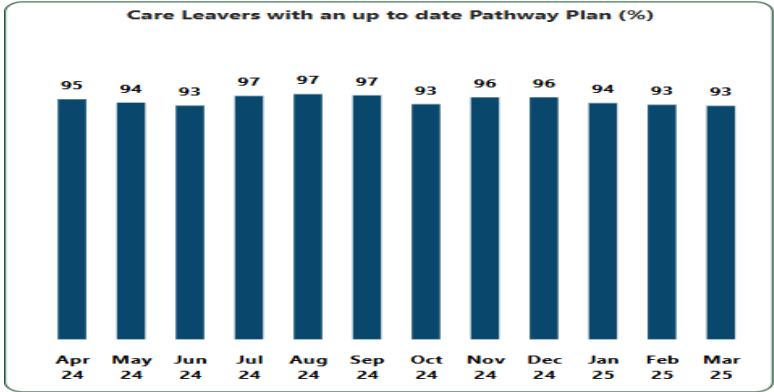




Personal Advisors

We have high expectations and aspirations for all our care leavers. When young people are preparing to leave care, we want to ensure that they feel as ready as possible and know what to expect.

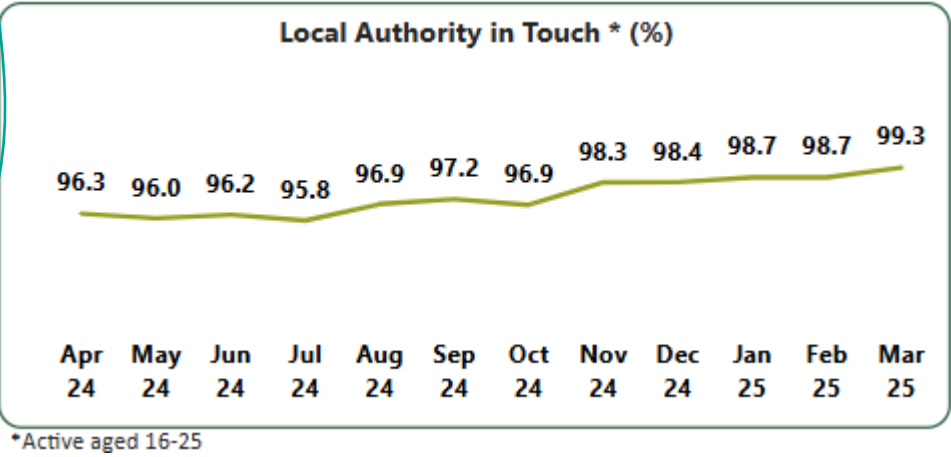
Our model of interdependence aims to ensure that our young people have the support of the Personal Advisor (PA) to guide them around key areas. Personal Advisers are secondary allocated to young people as soon as possible after their 16 birthday. This is to enable a smooth transition from their social worker to the Care Leaver service once they are 18.



Relational practice is at the heart of our work with young people, building trusting, supportive relationships. Our care leavers consistently tell us that they have a positive relationship with their PA which is evidenced through the records of visits, calls, and communication.

We continue to contact all our care leavers at least annually to share information on what they are entitled to and the support we can offer them, at any point until they are 25. Over the last 12 months we have continued our focus on pathway planning. At the end of March 2025 93% of care leavers had an up-to-date pathway plan. This is a continuing area of focus; we need to ensure that all our young people have an up-to-date Pathway Plan that is ambitious and supports our young people to move towards independence.

We are consistently in touch with 99% of our care leavers



Care Leavers: Accommodation

Over the past 12-months over 98.00% of our care leavers have suitable accommodation. This remains a priority for Dorset Council, and we continue to work at pace to ensure that all our care leavers have safe, stable, and permanent homes. Very few live in unsuitable accommodation and if, (or when) they do, there are systems to ensure that additional management oversight is in place. This helps to ensure that more appropriate housing is provided as quickly as possible.

Extract from Dorset's ILACS Report – Inspection March 2025:

'Care leavers are helped to live in a range of safe and suitable accommodation that meets their needs, with strong management oversight on rare occasions when this is not the case. The availability of appropriate accommodation for young people has significantly improved due to a forward-thinking approach and investment in additional properties. When care leavers find themselves in a housing crisis, the service responds quickly and effectively. There are a very small number of care leavers in custody. Support to these young people is effective, and early planning for their release is evident.'

Dorset Council commissions 88 local supported accommodation places (up to 18 months duration) for young people aged 16-25 through its Supported Accommodation Framework, of which 18 are for unaccompanied young people seeking asylum who are in care; 30 places are for children in care or care leavers and 40 are for young people aged 16-21 who are at risk of homelessness.

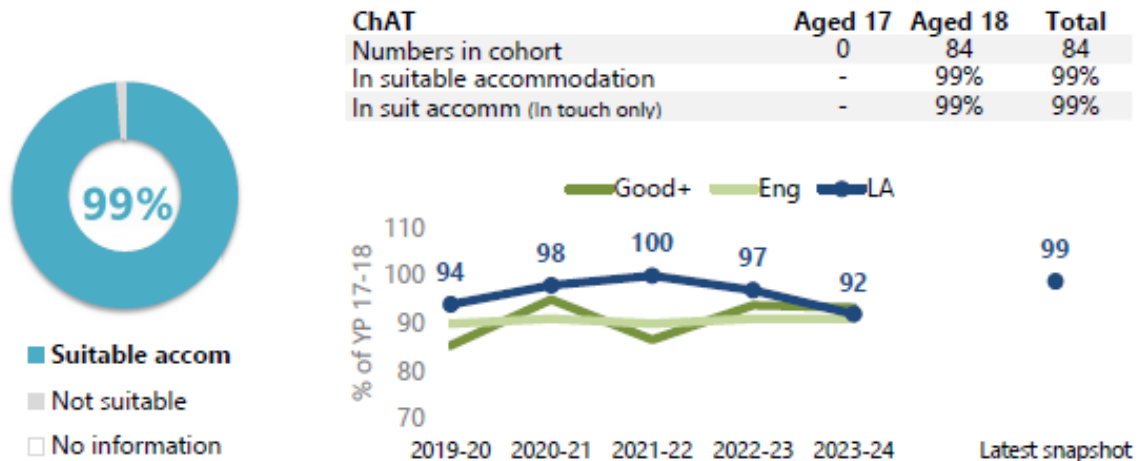
Care Leavers accommodation

For those young people in unsuitable accommodation (such as B&B, custody or staying with friends on a temporary basis), their pathway plan is updated and there is a higher frequency of visits by the PA, an offer of practical support and exit planning.

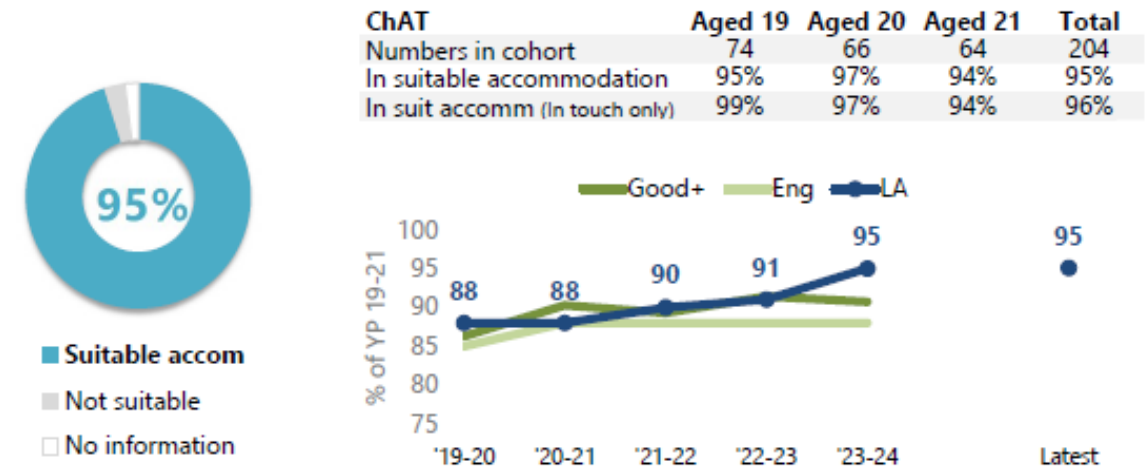
Consistency in the quality and timeliness of supervision has improved over the last year, ensuring our management oversight is driving forward our planning for children.

We are consistently at 100% for supervision held every 4 weeks to review and reflect on the impact of unsuitable housing or circumstances for these young people.

Accommodation suitability of 17-18 year olds (relevant/former relevant)



Accommodation suitability of 19-21 year olds (former relevant)



Staying Put

- There are 30 care leavers in a Staying Put arrangement with their previous foster carers. We continue to look at how we are supporting foster carers to continue to provide a safe and stable home for our young people after they turn 18 and are actively recruiting supported lodging hosts as we know this is an area of growing need for our care experienced young people.

Supported Lodgings

- 17 care leavers live in a supported lodgings arrangement. We are working closely with our partners in fostering to recruit more supported lodging opportunities to meet the needs of care experienced young people who may not be able to remain with their carers and are not ready to live fully independently.

Staying Close

- In 2022 Dorset was successful in being awarded a 3-year DfE grant to pilot ‘Staying Close’, This is helping young people stay in touch with and get ongoing support from Children’s Home carers after they move on. Our Staying Close project has seen young people retain links through formalised support arrangements. We are actively supporting 15 young people under Staying Close arrangements. We are anticipating an additional 10 care leavers will access staying close over the next 12 months, as staying close is now embedded into our pathway planning.

In-house accommodation provision

Kirtleton: 12 self-contained flats	Clarence a shared house for 3 care leavers	Leon : flats for 6 unaccompanied care leavers
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- All of these are in the Dorset area and close to the Hub. The hub provides a base to provide support to care leavers with personal advisors, care leaver nurse and other professionals regularly providing drop-ins for care leavers.
- The information packs, created to support young people requiring emergency accommodation, a recommendation from ILACS inspection in 2021, are fully embedded in practice.
- As a team we have reviewed our financial support available to care leavers when they are needing to privately rent. We will provide rent deposit, rent in advance, act as a guarantor and in some situations “top up” rent so they are able to maintain employment or further education.

Care Leavers: Education, Employment and Training



Our strategy for improving EET outcomes includes:

- A lead PA for Education, Employment and Training in the Care Leaver Service and a PA mentor linked to the pathway to employment team
- Pathways to Employment – now supporting **9 care leavers in Council apprenticeships**. We have ambitions to develop a further 10 apprenticeship positions across the council throughout 2025/26.
- Development of corporate partnerships – **Hall and Woodhouse, John Lewis, and Wessex Water** offering apprenticeships, employment, and work experience, **Sky** provide free broadband packages. Over the last 2 years we have supported 4 young people to secure employment with Hall & Woodhouse, 3 young people have taken part in the John Lewis/Waitrose 'building happier future's' programme with 2 young people gaining employment in the John Lewis partnership. Locally we have supported 2 young people to gain work experience through the Merlin Group (Sea Life Centre) and 2 young people were then offered seasonal employment.
- Strengthened relationship with Young and Thriving team (EET advisors) which includes tracking and intensive support for 5 care leavers who are employment ready
- Delivery of new DfE funded mentoring scheme – delivered in partnership with voluntary and community sector
- Improved financial support to remove barriers and incentivise engagement with work experience and employment opportunities
- Partnership working with health partners through NHS Dorset to identify pathway to employment within NHS



Care Leavers: Education, Employment and Training



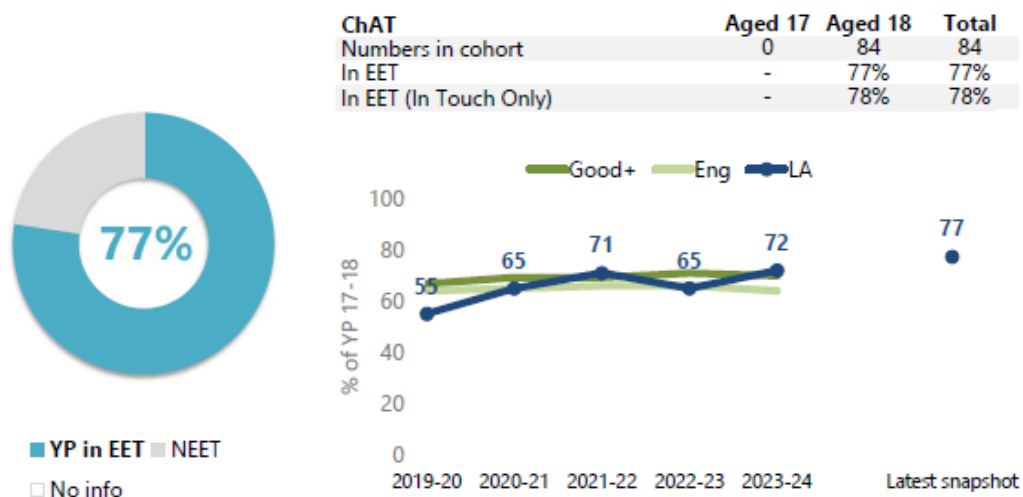
We continue to have high expectations for our care leavers to access education, employment, or training as they move into adulthood.

Our partners are supporting this through:

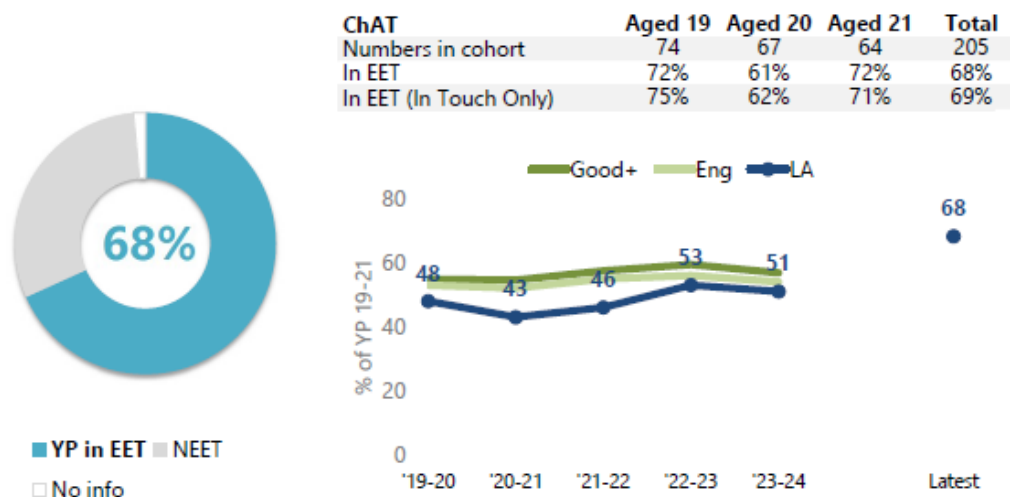
- Delivery of new DfE funded mentoring scheme – delivered in partnership with voluntary and community sector
- Improved financial support to remove barriers and incentivise engagement with work experience and employment opportunities
- Partnership working with health partners through NHS Dorset to identify pathway to employment within NHS

Over the last 12 months we have seen an increase in care leavers (17/25 active) engaged with education, employment or training being 68% at the end of March 2025.

Education, Employment, or Training (EET) of 17-18 year olds (relevant/former relevant)



Education, Employment, or Training (EET) of 19-21 year olds (former relevant)



Care Leavers: Health



As corporate parents we continue to work closely with our health partners to consider what support is being put in place to maintain physical and emotional wellbeing through effective prevention and promotion.

Improved access to health support is one of our key priorities. We have a Care Leaver transition nurse which offers signposting and wellbeing support to care leavers up to the age of 21, up to 25 years with an EHCP.

We know that around 33% of Dorset care leavers identify with high anxiety levels. To help with this we have a dedicated care leaver nurse, 126 care leavers have signed up and 66 have accessed “Ask Jan” which is a counselling support service for care leavers. In Dorset we have worked with Everyone Active so all our care leavers can have free gym/leisure membership.

We have worked with the Dorset Insight and Intelligence Service to build a specific page for care leavers, pulling in data from NHS and social care, which helps to identify where care leavers are registered with a GP and allows for the breakdown of population health data.

The care leaver app is a national app bespoke for care leavers, with detail around the geographical area in which they are living, and the health support services available .

NHS Dorset signed up to the care leaver covenant and is one of the pathfinders to implementing a vocational scholarship for care leavers wanting to pursue a career in the NHS.

Our 'Local Offer' sets out the range of support and services available to care leavers. This includes access to the leaving care nurse, help to register with GP, dentist and opticians, support to attend medical appointments, access to specialist substance misuse services in Dorset, support to access sexual health clinics, free sanitary products and provide information about a variety of wellbeing services that are available locally.

Dorset Children's Services Self-Evaluation

Section Three: How do we know it?



Quality Assurance Framework

Our Quality Assurance Framework is fully embedded and has received positive external validation through peer reviews, Full ILACS, Joint Youth Justice, Care Leavers Focused Visit, Children's Homes inspections and Local Area SEND inspection.

Within our QA framework we utilise a range of tools and mechanisms that supports us to understanding the quality of practice and the workforce needs



Quality Assurance Functions

We continue to adapt and adjust our resource in line with the evolving needs of the service and have invested in additional assurance activity supporting quality of practice in line with pathfinder changes across both Child Protection and Family Help through two new Practice Leads. We also created additional assurance of SEND practice and the impact of this role was evidenced in our SEND inspection with the improvement in the quality of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP's). We have strengthened QA oversight of the quality of our court work and have recruited a new QARO to specifically focus and support with children subject to PLO and care proceedings, this is improving the quality of practice and planning.

Overview of our Quality Assurance Functions

Workforce Development
& Recruitment and
Retention

Quality Assurance
activity (Audit,
observations, Reg 44's,
FRO's & quality of court
and adoption work

Principal Social
Worker (practice
development - practice
leads)

Quality Assurance
Reviewing Officers (CP
and CIC Meetings, S47
advice and support)

Managing Allegations

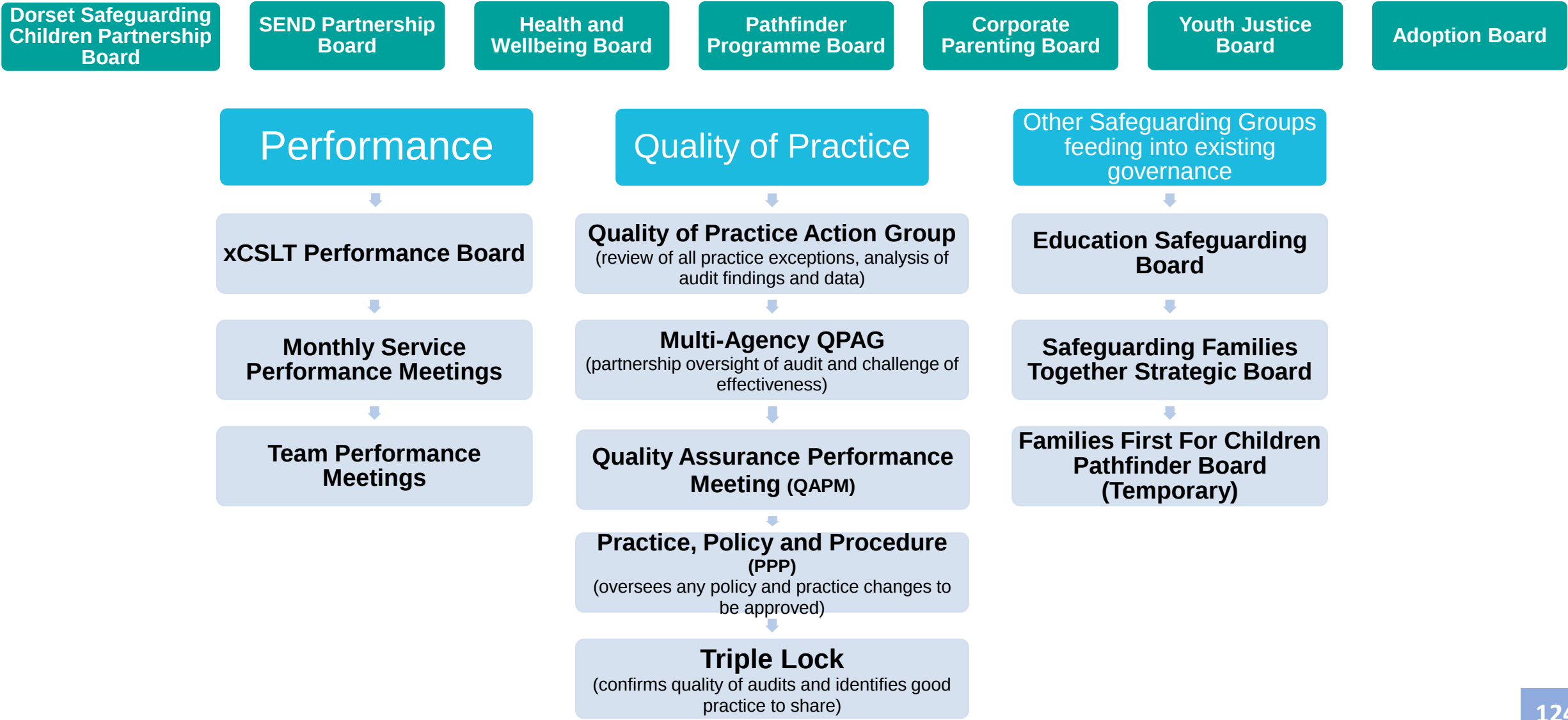
Safeguarding in
Education

Family Engagement
and Feedback

Family Group
Conference (access to
support packages)

Quality Assurance Governance Arrangements

Strong governance arrangements are in place that feed into our partnership governance: See page 9 for strategic governance



Quality of Practice

Collaborative Audits

The collaborative practice learning audit approach undertaken by operational managers within the service alongside the locality practitioners, facilitates improvements in the quality of practice. This is further strengthened by a moderation system that reviews approximately 20% of the audits undertaken (selected randomly) with the moderator providing assurance that we know what good looks like. A proportion of those audits are then moderated by a moderation panel made up of Senior Managers (SM's and HOS) both from QA and Localities to provide independent assurance and identify good practice examples to share the learning (Triple Lock). To ensure we obtain an accurate representation of the quality of practice; audits are selected at random and thematic audit is scheduled as part of testing the impact of improvements or where data and audits highlight where there is a need for a detailed thematic review. Our auditing takes place across all of children services, this enables us to fully understand the impact of the services that our children, young people and families are receiving.

The collaborative approach across the locality workers involved with the child enables a reflective conversation with the practitioners to support holding the child at the forefront of our practice and review what is working well or what we are concerned about. This particularly supports how we work together for example when a child may be open to Youth Justice Service (YJS) ensuring we have a good understanding of how best to support the child and family. When audits identify any concerns in our practice a robust process is in place to ensure any immediate safety or practice concerns are addressed.

Feedback from children and families

Feedback from children and families is an important part of our audit process and we continue to work to increase the take up both within audit and as a wider service. Including a revamped text survey that is sent to parents and carers at closure and the ongoing roll out of Mind of My Own app for children to use. We have developed a separate quarterly feedback report that enables us to focus on what our children and families experience and how this will be utilised to shape further service improvements and build on positive areas of practice. Audit learning reports are produced quarterly and shared at a Quality of Practice and Action Group (QPAG) with Service Managers, Principal Social Worker, Quality Assurance Practice Leads, Heads of Locality and Corporate Directors who are all involved in agreeing either localised action plans or strategic practice improvements for the service to facilitate closing of the learning loop. The headlines are reported to the monthly performance board chaired by our Executive Director. The QA team are launching their QA podcast called Quality Matters on the 20th of June, which replaces the QA newsletter, this will contain learning and findings from both audit and family feedback to be shared with wider workforce and identifies practice, policy or procedure changes as well as training needs.

Quality of Practice

Audit Dashboard

An audit dashboard allows us to review findings and learning from audit and facilitates effective tracking and completion of all audit actions. We also re-audit any cases deemed inadequate to ensure the child's circumstances have improved, and all actions completed. QA is embedded as part of our everyday practice within the teams, and our advanced practitioners (APs) in the localities and our practice leads in QA work alongside our staff to support practice improvement through focused reflective discussions and thematic auditing. The Principal Social Worker supports the practice leads to work alongside staff to deliver focused improvements from QA activity such as new practice or procedure changes. The thematic auditing is vital in gaining assurance that learning is embedded and to better understand practice challenges when these are identified to facilitate consistent quality of practice across the service. This is supplemented with scheduled dip sampling aligned to our Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership plan.

Principal Social Worker

Our Principal Social Worker is driving quality of practice and keeping front line practice at the forefront of strategic improvements. They continue to report the key performance indicators linked to our strength-based restorative Dorset Children Thrive Practice Framework. The impact of our framework is monitored at the Quality Practice Action Group (QPAG) through our dedicated performance indicators aligned to set outcomes for children. The principal social worker has focused on strengthening supervision which includes the development of practice standards, policies and procedures that are aligned to the Families First approach and legislation changes. We are currently supporting 20 ASYE's. We had 7 completed their ASYE in 2023 and 17 completed their ASYE in 2024. To further support the service with the increased number of NQSW's we have dedicated practice educator resource supporting with quality assurance and guidance reducing demand on the locality managers.

Quality Practice and Action Group

Quality practice and action group monitor compliance with policies and procedures: evidence strengths and good practice; identifies gaps and areas of development; drives learning and service improvement with a key focus of how this contributes to the quality of practice. Good practice is highlighted so it can be used as a model to implement across our work with families. Where practice needs to develop, we work with the teams to develop and monitor this improvement. Our practice leads will support the development of our practice.

Quality of Practice

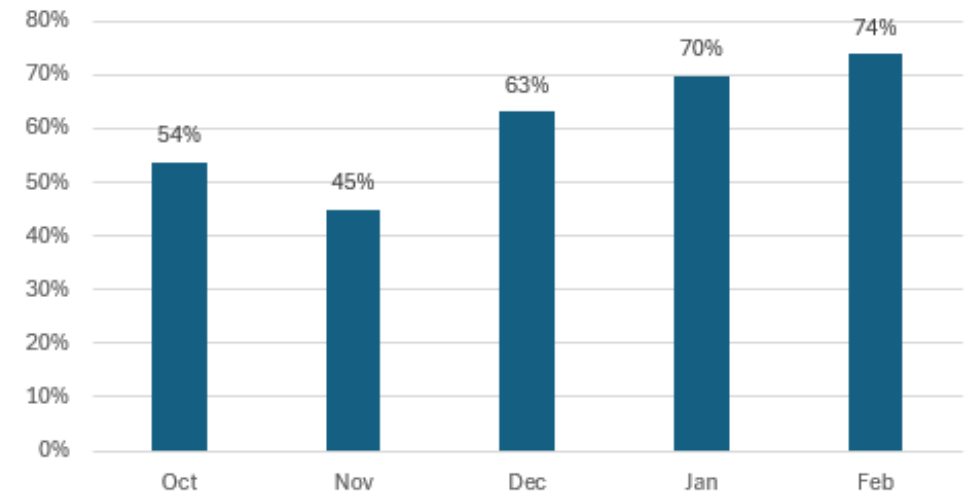
Audit outcomes

Our audits identify good practice, areas to improve and learning to be shared.

Over the past 6-months, audits have demonstrated:

- Consistency in the quality of supervision, ensuring our management oversight is driving forward our planning for children.
- Through reflective supervision, our Social Workers know their children and families well and can talk about the work that they are undertaking.
- Direct work is child centred and increasingly being informed by the voice of the child. The child's voice is reflected in our recording and informing our planning.
- There is clear management oversight.
- Where children are entering our care, they are entering in a planned way.
- We have a schedule of Multi-agency Audits and scrutiny Audits which also informs our evaluation of the quality of practice.

% Good and Outstanding Audits



Ofsted Report: *'The local authority's performance management framework is strong and follows Dorset's integral theme of putting families first, which is seen in the requirement for auditors to actively seek families' and young people's views first to set the direction of auditing activity. A significant amount of auditing, based on intelligence gathered, is carried out to help inform senior managers' line of sight to practice. This approach ensures that a range of practice is reviewed so that learning is identified and shared to improve practice. Opportunities for learning and audit themes are shared with managers and staff regularly, whether this is the quarterly conferences, practice weeks, takeover days, newsletters and management discussions.'*

Families First for Children Pathfinder: How do we know about impact?

We were clear from the outset that we wanted to deeply understand the impact of our enhanced model at every step of the way. To that end we made the decision to employ an experienced research and evaluation professional as part of our team. Our Evaluation Lead works closely with colleagues leading implementation and alongside our Engagement Lead, who is directly connecting with parents, carers, family networks, children and young people.

Baseline evaluation has taken place routinely from the outset of introducing Pathfinder enhancements and at key touch points so we can begin to understand the impact for children, families and on practice. This supplements our existing quality assurance and performance management.

As part of our evaluation and in addition to business-as-usual methods to gather staff views, we have undertaken 'Listen and Learn' events. At these events our Evaluation Lead and Programme Implementation Director spent time in locality offices and front-line practitioners and managers 'drop in' to provide essential feedback on how things are going. This has led to ongoing improvements such as a focus on Learning and Belonging to continuously strengthen practice and outcomes for children.

We have further developed our Performance Management Framework and reporting to reflect Pathfinder changes and have updated our Quality Assurance Framework to ensure that we can understand the impact of our work.

What inspectors said about Families First Pathfinder..

In all of the Pillars **effective social care practice has been evident**, while statutory duties continue to be fulfilled.

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 bring 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.

In addition to the **significant governance and oversight that the Pathfinder partnership programme brings**, the local authority has a strong learning culture and invites external scrutiny to improve services.

Senior leaders have a robust understanding of how practice and overall performance impact on children and families through a wealth of management information and sophisticated performance reporting mechanisms, alongside feedback from children and families

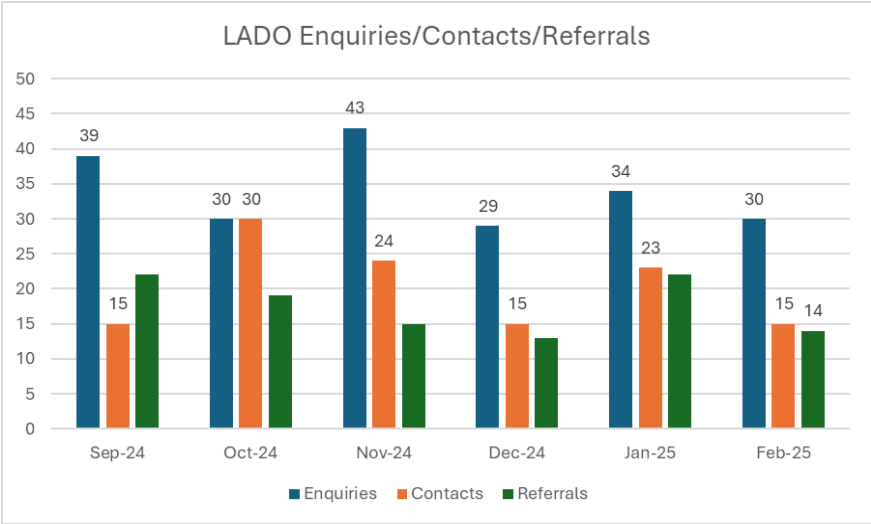
This knowledge is deepened and understood from a multi-agency perspective, with health, education and police partners drilling down to children's experiences at an individual level through strategic and operational boards.

Safeguarding - Designated Officer

The Designated Officer (DO) role sits within our Quality Assurance and Partnerships Service. We have continued to undertake improvement activity as part of our Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership Plan. Practice Standards are embedded and have been further strengthened by the implementation of standard operating manual that sets out how the DO role is undertaken in Dorset.

A data dashboard supports management oversight, tracking and monitoring and this is used in conjunction with the existing tracker. The strengthening practice plan is improving the quality of employer investigations and seeks feedback from professionals on their experience of the service as a mechanism to further enhance the service provided. Work continues to strengthen our communication with partners to raise the profile of the DO in Dorset. The DO is now providing training to new recruits in the Police and meets regularly with the police leaders to support consultation taking place with the DO about management of allegations involving police staff. The DO has delivered training to a range of local provisions/services including locality social work teams and the military. We have also been working closely with corporate colleagues within the council raising awareness of the types of considerations required in their directorates as to when a referral is required and understanding transference of risk.

The DO continues to work closely with fostering colleagues to ensure oversight of allegations about foster carers are managed proportionately to ensure risks to children are managed. Also recognising the differentiation about standards of care and what should be managed through fostering as opposed to a managing allegations process. Both the DO and fostering are acutely aware of the stress the management of allegations process can place upon our carers and the need for support and timely resolution is firmly embedded.



Children's Safeguarding Partnership Priorities 2022-2025

Violence experienced by children and young people

- Sexual violence and abuse - the partnership has completed a multiagency quality assurance activity, on intrafamilial sexual abuse. The task and action group are taking forward the recommendations from this report.
- Domestic Violence and abuse - the partnership completed a multiagency assurance activity in relation to domestic abuse. This resulted in us updating the multiagency domestic abuse tool kit.
- Physical violence and knife crime – the partnership have updated their extra familial harm strategy and tool kit which includes a focus on physical violence and knife crime.

Children's mental health and wellbeing

- Child mental health remains a disproportionately high factor within referrals from the police, as does referrals to the family support and advice line about the impact of parent's mental health on children. There is significant CAMHS transformational work that is underway, and they will become part of our family support and advice line. We are focusing our 2025 partnership conference on the impact of mental health on children.

Neglect

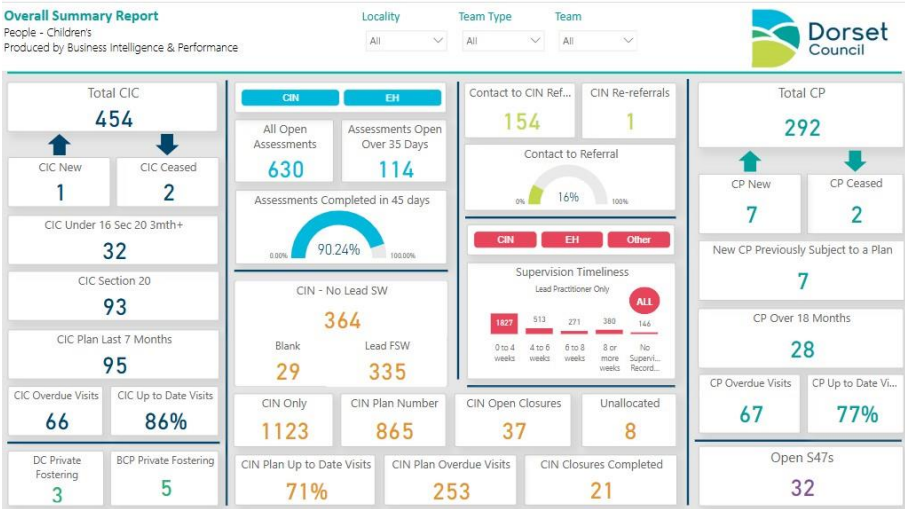
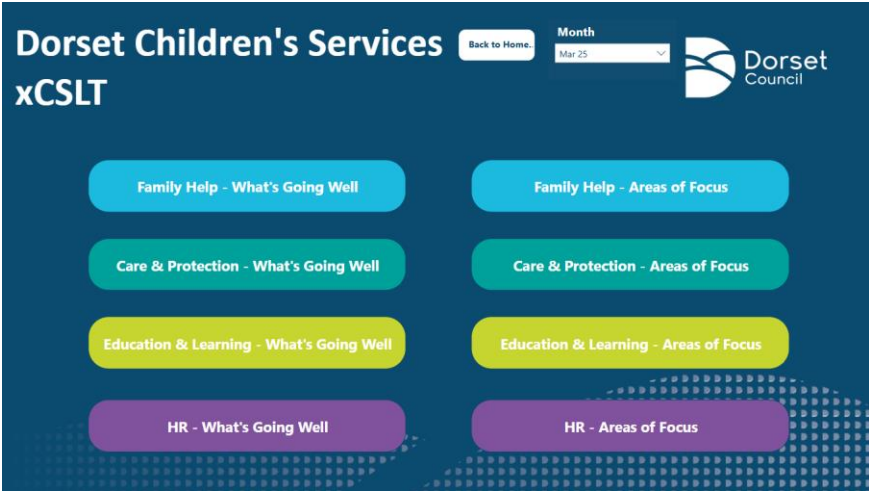
- Neglect continues to be a feature in both national and local reviews, neglect has featured in some of our recent rapid reviews. We completed independent scrutiny regarding neglect and as a result have updated our Neglect strategy and are in the process of updating out neglect multiagency toolkit.

The partnership are currently reviewing the priorities for 2025-2028

Performance Management

Our Performance Management Framework is embedded including using ‘Daily Dashboards’, identifying operational and strategic strengths and areas to improve. We have an excellent suite of performance data and dashboards available and accessible to managers and all staff through our intranet pages and through MOSAIC, our electronic social care record. Our Children’s Services Monthly Performance Report is published and shared with all managers to inform performance conversations and pulls together many performance indicators across a wide range of services, including Family Help, Care and Protection, Education and Inclusion. This report is interactive and available to all staff and provides one version of the truth. This report is used extensively to review performance monthly and support our refreshed Performance Management Framework, providing good visibility of performance across the service.

We have several thematic dashboards that are co-designed with managers and work scheduled to continue with development. Dashboards are in place for a range of areas including Front Door, SEND, Missing and Child Exploitation, Children In Care, Care Leavers, Fostering, Early Help, Inclusions, Transitions and Child Protection. We also publish a Corporate Parenting Dataset and use a Quality Assurance Report to enable our Safeguarding Children Partnership Board to monitor progress of our priorities and actions. We also have a locality summary dashboard enabling Dorset Council and partner colleagues to access information including Social Care, School and population data, Household, disability and demographic data Ethnicity, health, religion, Exclusions and attainment at locality level.



Performance Management

We continuously improve and refine how we use our data and intelligence through our Performance Management Framework (PMF) that sits alongside our Quality Assurance Framework. Managers systematically review performance of their respective services through monthly service level Performance and Practice meetings. These are supported by our Quality Assurance Service and Business Intelligence and Performance Service. Performance exceptions are then reported to the monthly Performance Board attended by the Extended Children's Services Leadership Team and Business Partners and chaired by the Executive Director. The Performance Board focuses on three critical questions across all our service areas: What's going well? What needs focus? and importantly, what are we are doing about it?

Our Performance Board is restorative in its approach, offering high support and high challenge, and solution focused. Managers across the service are feeding back the impact of the meetings in developing a deep and shared understanding of our performance and how it can be used to drive continuous improvement. There is strong corporate line of sight, supported by a dashboard pulling together key indicators and financial, risk and HR reported monthly to the Corporate Senior Leadership Team and the Elected Members Performance Board.



Children's Services

Performance Management Framework

Original document approved by CSLT 22nd July 2020

Update: V2 17/06/2021

Update: V3 15/10/2024

Impact and Learning

Best Practice

We regularly record and share the impact of our practice with children, young people and families, sharing examples of impact, best practice and learning with colleagues, partners and members at our Quality Assurance and Practice Management (QAPM) – ‘Thriving and Striving for our Families’ events.

The QAPM Conference is held at the end of each quarter and provides an opportunity for managers to take stock and review our performance, impact and feedback from families, over the previous quarter. Most importantly, at the centre of the conferences, is the impact that we are having on improving the lives of our children and families.

By having these regular reflective sessions, all managers across the service will have a shared understanding of our performance and how we are using our data and quality assurance to continuously improve so our children and their families experience the very best services. Our aim is that the learning from the conferences, and how the whole team can play their part in helping our services to be the best, is shared by managers with their teams.



Impact and Learning

Compliments and complaints

Our Compliments and Complaints team continues to ensure a consistent approach to complaints management and challenge Children's Services for learnings and actions so the complaint has as much value as possible and organisational lessons can be learned. The Compliments and Complaints team report into our Performance Management arrangements to ensure staff across children's services understand the process and importance of transparency and timeliness.

As in previous years, we resolve most complaints informally. Dorset Council has found that this approach builds the best possible relationships between the Council and families with concerns without obstructing statutory process.

We have a low volume of complaints progress through statutory process and clear evidence that the Ombudsman is not troubled by Social Care complaints, further indicating that Dorset Council's proactive approach to outcomes-based resolutions to complaints is proving beneficial for families. It also demonstrates that we are genuinely listening rather than processing.

We continue to embed learning from complaints, feeding into our wider governance process where appropriate and communicating to staff and partners through our established communications channels. Importantly, information on volume and learning from complaints and compliments are shared each quarter at our Performance and 'Thriving and Striving for our Families' events.

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs)



We continue to learn from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, with recommendations from the CSPRs being monitored and tracked through the Multi-Agency CSPR Sub-Group (Sub-Group of the Multi-Agency Quality Assurance and Practice Action Group (MAQPAG)). MAQPAG reports progress against the recommendations into the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership.

We have made four SIN (serious incident notification) in the last 12 months. The first notification was of the sad death of a 6-month-old baby from hypoxic brain injury secondary to drowning. The baby was not open to children's services at the time of the incident, however had previously been open. The second one was of a 3-month-old baby who presented to hospital with symptoms of shaken baby syndrome, both parents and the baby were not known to us before this incident. The baby is under an interim care order living with family friends, both parents are under police investigation. The third one was of non-accidental injuries to a four-week-old baby, the family were known to us, both the baby and the two-year-old sibling are in mainstream foster care under an interim care order, both parents are under police investigation. The fourth SIN was due to severe neglect of a two-year-old child, the family were known to us, the two-year-old is under an interim care order in mainstream foster care, her fifteen-year-old brother is under an interim supervision order. All four serious incident notifications had rapid reviews which identified learnings, and these are being taken forward by the CSPR subgroup. The third serious incident notification resulted in an LSCPR being recommended, which is also being progressed by the CSPR subgroup.

Additional Quality Assurance Activities to understand practice for under 2-year-olds.

We have completed a quality assurance activity dip sampling all children two and under open to children services to understand what our strengths in practice are and what areas we need to further strengthen. This involved a dip audit of 256 children. The recommendations from the report have been accepted and an action plan has been agreed in our Quality Practice and Action Group (QPAG).

We are completing a multi-agency audit on 10% of children under two, which will be scrutinised by our independent scrutineer.

Skilled and stable workforce

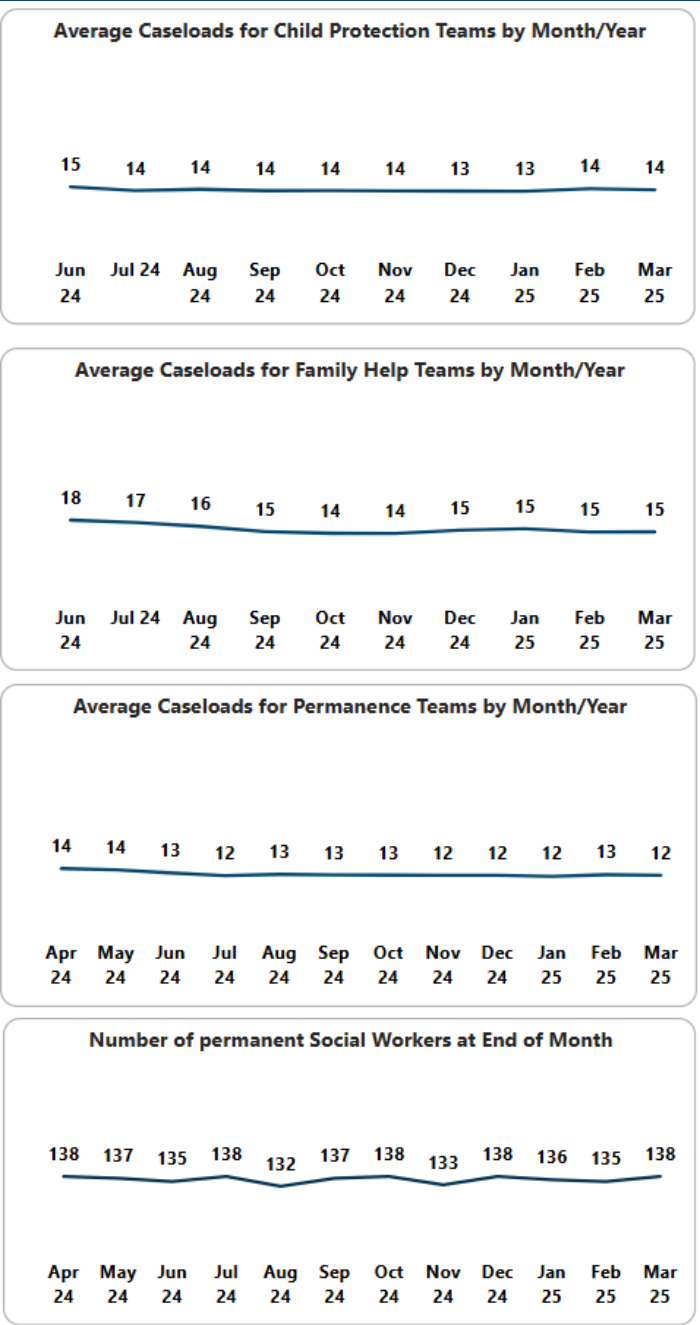
The number of permanent social workers in our workforce has remained steady, with consistently manageable caseloads allowing our workers to build strong relationships with the families they serve. Exceptions to higher caseloads have been rare and typically due to specific reasons. Our recruitment efforts, 'grow our own' initiatives, and retention plans are yielding positive results. As of March 2025, each Child Protection social worker supports an average 14 children, Family Help teams 15 children and Permanence teams 12 children, enabling them to foster meaningful relationships with the children under their care.

With the cost-of-living crisis we have seen increased need in our families, we have expanded capacity across our teams as part of our Early Help strategy. Recruitment has proved more challenging this year due to ongoing national shortages, the allure of agency work driven by the cost-of-living crisis, and neighbouring authorities offering incentives. To address this, we have reassessed our recruitment and retention strategy, intensifying our social media presence, exploring staff development opportunities, and optimizing our 'grow our own' initiatives.

We have grown our Assistant Team Manager capacity which has provided opportunities for internal promotion for our more experienced social workers.

In our efforts for recruitment and retention, we have successfully converted some agency staff into permanent roles, recruited an additional 10 international social workers, increased the cohort of practice educators, expanded the intake of Student Social Workers until 2026, taken on 5 Step Up to Social Work students for 2023-2024 and collaborated with the head of locality to identify opportunities to increase the uptake of ASYEs. We have successfully recruited 5 Social Worker Apprenticeship posts for 2024-2025 and have a post graduate apprentice that started in January 2025. We are currently recruiting for further Social Work Apprentices for 2025/2026 We have also mapped leadership and management training pathways for social workers.

We regularly review exit interview data for feedback to support our ongoing retention plans.



Skilled and stable workforce

Our **social workers are integrated into multi-disciplinary localities**, collaborating with family workers, family help workers, education professionals, police, and health colleagues. We also include adult practitioners as part of the Safeguarding Families Together model and this model has now been rolled out across all localities,,

Although our **absence and turnover rates for Social Workers remains manageable** and lower than the England and South-West averages, sickness continues to pose challenges to our workforce, aligned with national trends, we monitor this data routinely through our monthly Performance Board.

We have an **established health and wellbeing focus within our employee voice group** and have rolled out our 2-year wellbeing strategy and action plan for 2024-2026, following the success of initiatives such as 'Take Care Time' and mindfulness sessions under the 'Thinking Thursday' programme. Regular wellbeing messages and resources are also communicated through our Workforce Wordout and Team Brief.

Collaborating with Human Resources and Occupational Health providers, we've **strengthened support for staff facing health challenges**. We offer a robust corporate wellbeing support system, providing evidence-based therapies like cognitive behaviour therapy, mindfulness, and counselling, which is actively promoted to managers and teams through regular communication.

We regularly hold **staff engagement events to bring colleagues from across children's services together to hear key messages**. Workforce Development uses these insights in our regular communications, including team briefings and weekly 'Workforce Wordout'.

Additionally, we have our **Employee Voice Group and frontline managers' meetings to ensure continuous engagement and feedback**.



Workforce Development – The Learning Hub

All practitioners, new and experienced, have access to a broad and comprehensive learning and development offer including access to research tools such as Research in Practice and Community Care Inform. We have developed resources available on the Children's Hub and The Academy (our virtual learning and development platform) to support employees.

This includes practitioner toolkits; we are continuing to develop these practice resources and have introduced two new toolkits the Parents and Carers Mental Health toolkit and the Parent and Carers Substance Misuse toolkit recently. Practice Launch events are held to introduce new and updated practice resources, and we continue with our programme of reflective sessions within teams which have a set resource on a particular theme identified through our quality assurance processes.

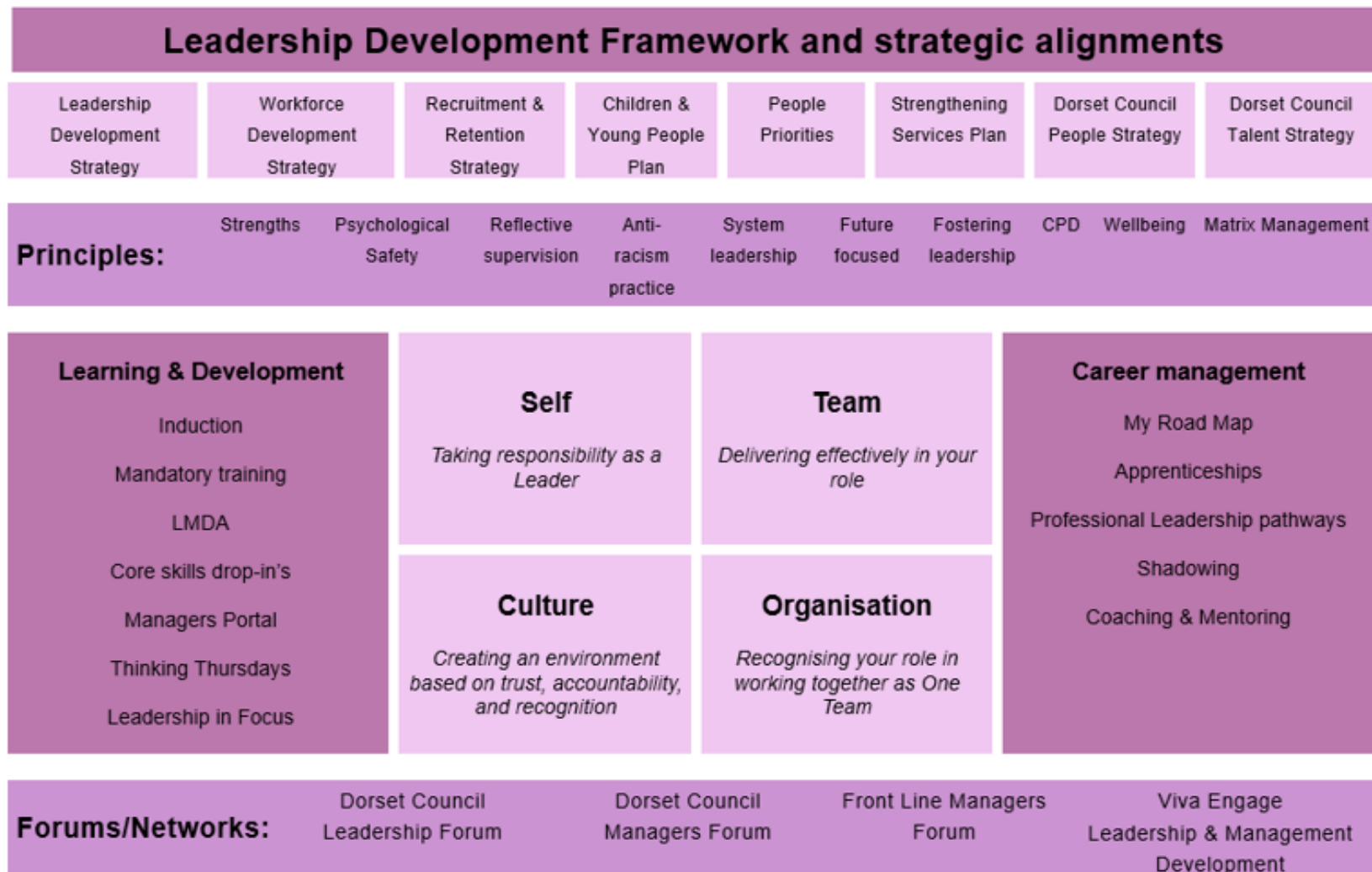
We have introduced service specific inductions and career pathways to support our Social Workers and practitioners in Family Help, SEND and Youth Worker roles.



Workforce Development

We have a Workforce Development, Recruitment and Retention Strategy that is overseen by our Workforce Development Board and is Chaired by the Corporate Director for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding. As part of this work, we now have a new Leadership Development Strategy which sets out our 10 principles of Leadership and our commitment to provide all leaders and managers regardless of level or experience a consistent, uniform approach to develop the necessary leadership behaviours and skills to embed our leadership culture.

The Group also reviews learning needs identified from the wider QA system and responds to the evolving needs of the service, such as the changes in Families First Pathfinder. One significant area of progress to support the changes in Family Help is the new level 4 Family Help Apprenticeship (Higher Certificate) and are working with Bournemouth university to add additional modules to a level 6 which would be the equivalent of a degree.



Children's Workforce Development Strategy 2024-2026

People – Children Workforce Recruitment & Development Strategy: 2024 – 2026



We want Dorset to be the best place to be a child; where communities thrive, and families are supported to be the best they can be'

The ambitious Thrive operating model which delivers our services provides a fantastic platform for a shared learning culture and approach:

- putting children and family's first
- getting it right first time
- making services easy to access
- developing a skilled and confident workforce
- providing good quality, efficient services
- measuring our success



How will we know we've made a difference

We'll monitor our progress and the difference we are making in a variety of ways, including:

Outcomes and findings from Quality Assurance work

Annual Social Work Health check and reports to CSLT

Recruitment progress, improvement in vacancy rate and retention

We have feedback loops to evaluate engagement and experience through learners completing training evaluations, our Employee Voice Group, Frontline Managers Forum, Partnership Workforce Events

We will keep you updated on our progress through our newsletters, service events and the Children's Hub



Why work for us?

Our values act as guiding principles, defining what we believe is important in how we work together

Respect

We value our differences, we treat everyone with fairness, dignity, and understanding

Together

We combine our strengths with others to achieve a shared purpose and common goals.

Accountability

We take ownership for our work, our actions and our decisions.

Openness

We welcome new ideas; we are honest, positive and inclusive

Curiosity

We aspire to learn, explore, and adapt to new opportunities and experiences

Dorset Children's Services Self-Evaluation

Section Four: What are our plans for the next 12-months to maintain and improve practice?



In response to the recommendation, identified by Ofsted, we have progressed our action plan as follows:

Following our 2025 ILACS, Ofsted identified a recommendation for an area to improve:

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

Our action plan was approved by Cabinet on 24th June 2025, and we have committed to co-produce our revised offer with care experienced young people.

Progress

Care Leaver app:

- Now available for anyone in Childrens Services. Social workers have been provided with the app. It contains all the information on Dorset Local offer as well as being able to compare to other Local Authorities in the Southwest.

Local Offer summary:

- A summary of our local offer has been updated, and communications have been cascaded through existing governance and communication channels. This also includes colleagues in locality and people supporting young people through family help and for partner agencies. Posters are being printed to go in community spaces including police stations, hospitals, local GP surgeries, as well as all our buildings.
- Personal Advisors are discussing the offer with young people, raising at reviews and within pathway planning.
- We regularly update the local offer following feedback from our young people at key points- such as the outcome of the Bright Spots survey, and it is reviewed annually in consultation with the Network. Key examples of this over the last 12-months have been regarding driving lessons, making the offer clear and explicit, and rent deposit support for access to housing.

Support for care leavers who are parents:

- Updated on the local offer website and shared with the Personal Advisors.



In response to the recommendation, identified by Ofsted, we are also developing...

Further training and workforce development:

'In my shoes' training for all family help workers, enhanced early support local offer for care leavers who are parents which will include direct parenting advice and support for parents and parents to be.

Council tax:

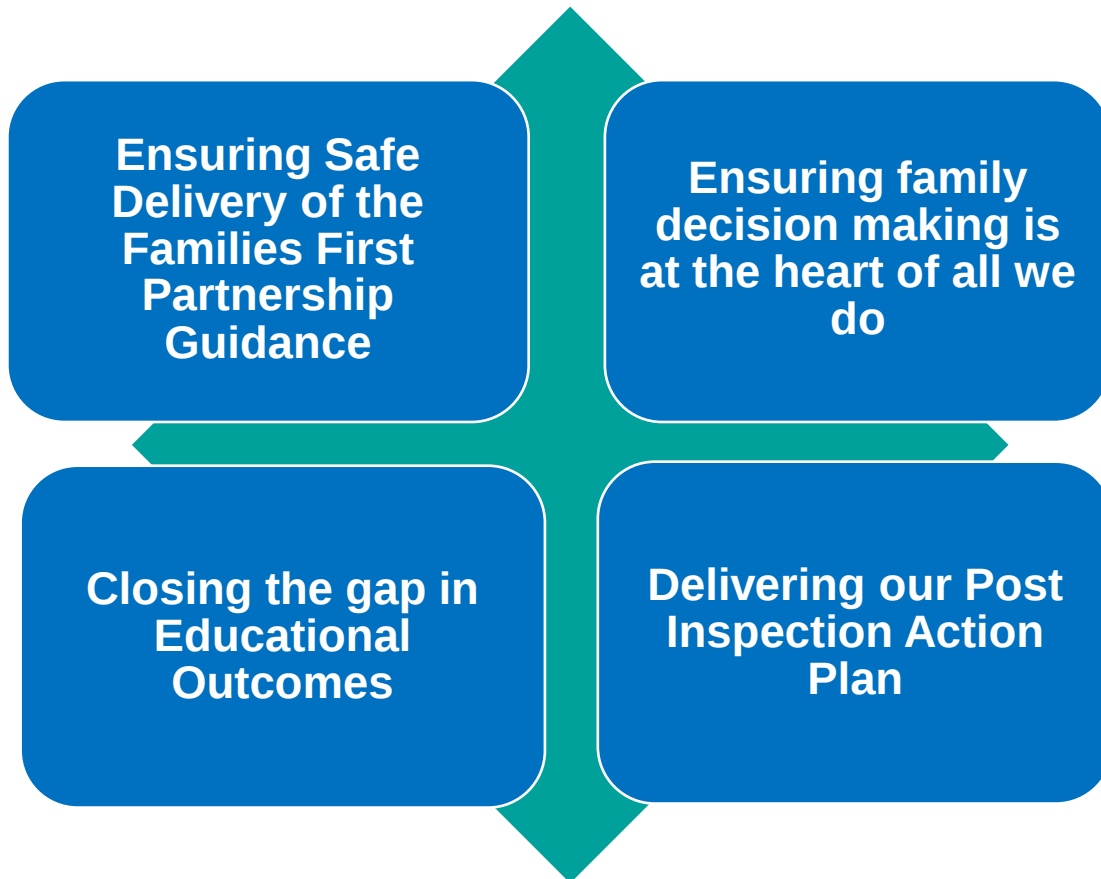
We are taking action to ensure that our financial support to care experienced young people in relation to council tax is equitable for all care experienced young people living inside and outside of Dorset.

In the meantime, we continue to pay and financially support those care leavers, up to 25-years of age, who are struggling to manage their finances and pay council tax or have arrears, living outside of Dorset. We are confident that although not part of the local offer that our young people are not at a financial disadvantage but accept it is on a case-by-case basis.



Our priorities over the next 12 months

We continue to have an unwavering commitment to champion the **rights** of children and young people across our partnership by putting children, young people and families at the heart of practice. We continue to deliver our strategic ten-year Children, Young People and Families' Plan, reporting to our partnership and communities on the impact its delivery is making. We will continue to uphold and improve services but in 2025/26 we will have a particular focus on:



Building on success:

We are very pleased with our recent ILACs outstanding rating. However, we continue to remain ambitious to get it right for every child and every family, every time.

We **strive** to ensure every child has every chance to **thrive** in Dorset and be the best they can be.



Progressing our priorities through our partnerships

Our Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People will continue to deliver the priorities in our Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2023-33.

Our partnership works on a thematic each year, to provide focus and explore progress linked to our priorities. For 2025, the theme of 'disadvantage' is agreed. Our annual conference which takes place on 26th June 2025 will explore how we identify disadvantage and remove barriers through a rights respecting lens to enable **'Every Child, Every Chance'**.

Our strong partnership working and governance facilitates learning and development across the partnership to progress these activities and report the progress and impact into our strategic partnerships. Steering groups for each of the priority areas within the plan have been re-established for 2025 to further strengthen partnership collaboration, innovation, delivery and progress.

Summer Conference, June 2025 - Identifying and overcoming 'disadvantage' - Every Child, Every Chance

Schools and educational settings workshop on maximising pupil premium

Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People workshop on 'Removing Barriers and Building Stepping Stones'

7-Priority areas in our Children, Young People and Families' Plan – Developing and progressing delivery plans from the conference workshop sessions

Partnership review of progress on priority area steering group delivery plans at partnership events



Specifically, we will be focusing on...

Providing conspicuous care to our children and young people who are Electively Home Educated to understand and address the reasons behind the increase of EHE

Completing our roll out of Family Hubs, enabling partnership services to support families in their communities.

Fully embed our Birth to Settled Adulthood Service, pursuing timely integration with health partners into the model

Following roll out across Dorset, ensure our Safeguarding Families Together model embeds enhancing our approach to also focus on care leavers and as part of our multi-agency child protection enhancements through Pathfinder

Responding to the findings of the Family Rights Group project and feedback from our Kinship Carers Reference Group to improve the experiences of families in pre-proceedings.

Improving multi-agency delivery of services to care leavers to address poor mental health and to continue to deliver improved education, employment and training engagement and outcomes

Commissioning new supported housing to welcome the increased number of children and young people who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum

Delivering improved local care placement sufficiency, stability and permanence for children in care to support improved mental health and education outcomes

Continuing to progress our plans to build on Integrated Commissioning to improve outcomes for all children in Dorset including those with complex needs.

Specifically, we will be focusing on...

Coram Voice: Implementing emotional wellbeing indicators into our business as usual. This will improve our understanding of what our care experienced population need, driving change informed by them.

Following commitment from the CEO group to be responsive to changing patterns in education outcomes, embed our Dorset Education Board Task and Finish approach.

Publish our revised Early Help Strategy in line with Children, Young People and Families' Plan and Families First reforms

Expanding and further integrating the role of the Virtual School

Implement the Youth Sufficiency Strategy with our partners, in line with requirements of the revised statutory guidance to Local Authorities on services and activities to improve young people's well-being

Continue to develop and deliver our partnership lead delivery plan addressing the recommendations and areas to further improve our partnership support and services for children, young people and families with SEND.

Continue to build, develop and maintain a skilled and stable workforce

Partnership and system leadership across the ICB to understand impact of changes to their system and ensure continued focus of delivery of high quality services for children and families

Planning and implementation of family advisory boards to be launched in the autumn 2025

Continually ambitious for our children!

Our children and young people provide us with wonderful leadership, and they inspire us every day to continue with our relentless ambition to make Dorset the best place to grow up. Our fantastic workforce make us continually proud as they work to support our families warmly and alongside each other and our partners.

We have strong foundations in place. We will maintain our focus over the next 12-months. We will strive to go even further to champion the **rights** of our children, young people and families.

We are taking great care with how we implement Pathfinder reforms and will continue to monitor and evaluate closely as we test and learn together with our partners.

We know this year will be a challenging year but are resolute in our determination and with strong leadership across the whole of our system to deliver our plans. We continue to build and improve, something special to last. We strive, that in Dorset, all our Children Thrive.

