

People and Health Scrutiny Committee

17 November 2025

Adults and Housing Deep Dive into Waiting Lists For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr S Robinson, Adult Social Care

Local Councillor(s): All

Senior Leadership Team:

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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public [Choose an item.](#)

Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

Across the UK there are many people waiting for assessment by adult social care teams. The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services has found growing numbers of very long-waits for assessments in its surveys in recent years. Publishing the Autumn survey the joint chief executive Cathie Williams said: "We are in a vicious cycle, trying to treat the symptoms of NHS and adult social care waiting lists, instead of focusing on the cause, which too often results in care and support being provided in the wrong place, at the wrong time."

In Dorset, we are seeing increasing demand and requests for support from adult social care.

Requests for support	
2023/2024	19,848
2024/2025	21,249
2025/2026 (estimate)	22,380

We have been working hard over the last 18 months to bring down the amount of people waiting for statutory assessments

To explore the waiting lists across the Directorate we will look at the following key areas:

- Waiting for Care and Support and Occupational Therapy Assessments
- Waiting for Carer Assessments

- Safeguarding Referrals (after initial risk screening by triage)
- Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLs) applications awaiting allocation

Following agreement with the Committee Chair, the Adults and Housing Directorate will undertake a focussed deep dive into two priority areas identified by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

These are:

- The waiting lists held across our Directorate and the actions we are taking to manage them.
- The Directorate's work with unpaid carers. See Separate paper.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 This report is provided for the awareness and oversight of Committee members and does not include any formal recommendations.

2. The report

2.1 Waiting Lists for Care and Support and Occupational Therapy (OT) Assessments

Section 9 of the Care Act states that:

Where it appears to a local authority that an adult may have needs for care and support, the authority must assess -

- (a) Whether the adult does have needs for care and support, and
- (b) If the adult does, what those needs are.

The duty to carry out a needs assessment applies regardless of the authority's view of -

- (a) The level of the adult's needs for care and support, or
- (b) The level of the adult's financial resources

2.2 Waiting for a Care and Support Assessment

Waiting for a Care and Support Assessment matters because it's the process that defines eligible needs and how those needs can be met. A delay in addressing unmet needs can result in people becoming less able to manage on their own and could mean them waiting for help they may require. A delay may result in people coming to harm for example through an increased risk of falls.

On 5th November (2025) across the Directorate, there were 241 waiting for a Care and Support Assessments, this is where either an assessment has not been allocated to a worker in ASC to complete or it has been started but not yet completed. This is a reduction of 40% of people waiting since April 2024.

Across the directorate as of the 5th November (2025) there were 107 outstanding Occupational Therapy Assessments. This has reduced from over 200 outstanding since April 2024.

‘Waiting Well’ Guidance and Communication Tools

- Recognising the need to ensure safety and wellbeing for those on waiting lists, we have developed a priority and risk rating tool. This helps prioritise cases and ensures individuals are contacted to confirm their current circumstances.
- Where appropriate, individuals are signposted to alternative support and provided with verbal and written information about the assessment process, including how to get in touch with the team they are waiting in if needed. Clear timescales have been established for follow-up contact.

All requests for Assessment are triaged for risk and people at the highest risk both acute and accumulative are prioritised.

2.3 Activity undertaken across the directorate to improve our Care Act and OT waiting list position over the past 18 months:

Transformation Programme Achievements:

We focused on improving the assessment journey and reducing waiting times over the past two years.

The aim is to meet statutory duties by preventing, reducing, and delaying entry into formal care.

Service Changes at the Front Door

Strengthened Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG) through:

- QR code advice in GP practices
- Community Postcards
- Digital cost calculator tools

Immediate support offered at the new Our Future Council “front door” without delays.

Prevention and Early Intervention Team (launched October 2025):

We have introduced a team of Adult Social Care workers who specialise in prevention work into the Customer Hub in Dorset Council. This includes Occupational Therapists who lead on the prevention work we do and links people to a reablement opportunity.

To assist with this we have introduced the Building Independence and Strengths Assessment (BISA):

- Identifies individual challenges and desired outcomes.
- Uses equipment, home adaptations, TEC devices, and reablement to delay long-term care.
- Delivered virtually, in person, or via clinic appointments.

Impact on Care Pathways:

Early help reduces need for ongoing care for some individuals. It means people are optimised before Care Act assessments are undertaken this ensures we don't over prescribe care and create unnecessary dependency. The early Intervention and Prevention team can then complete eligibility assessments and support plans, transferring cases to local teams for review.

Expected Outcomes:

- Projected 35% reduction in non-active ongoing casework in long-term teams.
- Increased capacity for complex assessments and reduced delays.

Data Quality Improvements:

- Data cleansing programme launched to improve accuracy and efficiency.
- Draft Data Management Guide trialled with managers to support data-informed practice.

Overall Impact:

This will improve outcomes for people and maintain their independence for longer as close to the point that they contact us rather than bringing them into a process that risks delays in meeting their needs. Achieved a 40% reduction in open waiting assessments (allocated and unallocated).

3.0 Carer Assessments, including young carers and parent-carers

Section 10 of the Care Act 2014 states:

Assessment of a carer's needs for support

- (1) Where it appears to a local authority that a carer may have needs for support (whether currently or in the future), the authority must assess—
- (a) whether the carer does have needs for support (or is likely to do so in the future), and
 - (b) if the carer does, what those needs are (or are likely to be in the future)."

Timely carer assessments are important to ensure the Carer receives appropriate support for the vital role they play, both for their benefit and for the benefit of the person they are caring for, in the most extreme circumstances caring arrangements can breakdown altogether if the carer is unable to continue. Timely assessment also reinforces the message that the carer's role is important and valued. Our target for carers assessments to be completed is also 28 days.

All carers are triaged at the initial point of contact to ensure a consistent and preventative approach is applied, while also managing expectations.

3.1 Activity undertaken across the Directorate to improve our position:

Centralised Referral Process

A centralised referral process has been established to ensure consistency across the Directorate. All referrals are now managed by Locality Carers Case Workers, rather than being distributed across different teams. This approach has enabled earlier intervention and improved access to information, advice, and guidance. As a result, individuals are only placed on the assessment waiting list when a formal assessment is required.

Joint Assessments

Where appropriate, carers assessments are now being completed jointly using the updated Mosaic Strengths and Needs Assessment form. This integrated approach allows assessments to be carried out alongside those for the cared-for person, increasing the number of completed assessments and reducing waiting times. Joint assessments are only undertaken when suitable for the individual circumstances.

There is a fuller description of our work around carers in a separate report on this agenda.

3.2 Impact:

Targeted work has reduced the number of unallocated carers assessments to 86. Any assessment not yet allocated to a named worker is being reviewed and assigned by a specialist worker, using the established RAG rating system to ensure prioritisation.

4.0 Safeguarding Referrals awaiting initial review

Paragraph 14 of the Care and Support (Care Act) Statutory Guidance states:

14.10 The Care Act requires that each local authority must:

- make enquiries, or cause others to do so, if it believes an adult is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect (see para. 14.16 onwards). An enquiry should establish whether any action needs to be taken to prevent or stop abuse or neglect and if so, by who.

Safeguarding waiting lists are managed by the Safeguarding Practice Manager, with prioritisation based on risk. In February 2025, the Safeguarding Team model was revised: the triage team was streamlined, and additional staff were redeployed to support Locality Safeguarding Hubs. This change has ensured that all concerns are screened immediately and has significantly reduced waiting times.

As of 5th November 2025, there is currently 1 referral awaiting initial review.

In Dorset, all safeguarding concerns are triaged on the same day they are received, meaning there are currently no referrals awaiting initial triage.

5.0 Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) applications awaiting allocation

To understand more about Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 (DoLS 2009) please use this link - [Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards \(DoLS\) - Dorset Council](#)

The purpose of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguarding is to establish the lawfulness of a person's care arrangements; where they lack capacity to consent to their care and treatment and as a result of those arrangements in a position of continuous supervision and control; and not free to leave, these arrangements only apply in hospitals, care/nursing homes and certain other care settings.

In England, there was an 11% rise in Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) applications during 2023–2024. In response to mounting pressures, the Government has initiated a consultation on reforming the system, which the Care Quality Commission has described as being 'at breaking point'. Because of Dorsets demographics in people over 65 there are significantly higher number of people who would be likely to meet the criteria for a DoLS.

We use the ADASS Task Force Screening Tool prioritisation tool to prioritise DoLS assessments. As of the latest reporting period, there are 1,603 DoLS referrals awaiting allocation.

6. Report sign-off

This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)