

Corporate Parenting Board

29 May 2025

Corporate Parenting Board- Annual Report For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr C Sutton, Children, Families & Education

Local Councillor(s):

Senior Leadership Team:

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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public Choose an item.

1. Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

- 1.1 The Corporate Parenting Board includes Members of the Council who come together with officers, young people and relevant partner agencies to offer challenge and support to services for children in our care and for our care leavers. There is arguably no greater responsibility for Members than as corporate parents: to ensure that the care and support given to children and young people in the care of the authority and to those leaving our care, is as we would expect to be given to our own children.

I would like to recognise the progress that has been made over the second year of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027 and the contribution of Corporate Parenting Board in achieving this. As we move to a new financial year, I look forward to continuing the ambition to do ever better for our children in care and care experienced young people.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Members of Corporate Parenting Board are requested to note the content of this report which captures the work of the Board over the last financial year

and progress made against our priorities in the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024- 2027.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

- 3.1 As Corporate Parents, all members of the board seek to stay informed about children in care of Dorset Council and care experienced young people, to offer challenge and support. As a maturing board, the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report provides members with an opportunity to review the work of the previous year, to consider what has worked well and where there is still more to do, and to plan next steps to be ever better

4. The report

- 4.1 This has been a very busy year, and we can see a number of positive developments:

- Continued to embed Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Group action plan against priorities identified by children and young people through the 'Bright Spots' programme and Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 -2027
- Strengthened both the recruitment and retention of foster carers
- Strengthened the kinship care offer
- Expanded and registered Supported Lodgings
- Increased housing options for our care leavers
- Strengthened our offer for care leavers who are parents
- Registered The Rowans children's home in the east of Dorset and developed plans for a further short break home for children who are disabled in the west of Dorset
- All our children's homes inspected and graded 'Good' or 'Outstanding'
- Continued to work with children and young people through Dorset Youth Voice and The Network and created better and safer spaces to engage in
- Alongside our health colleagues worked together to improve health outcomes for our children
- Dorset Virtual School are working with schools to introduce Virtual Reality training which has evidenced short term impact reducing suspensions. Training is being adapted to focus on three whole school teams so that all staff have access to training and impact is felt more widely
- Worked with colleagues from Aspire to strengthen the recruitment of adopters

Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Having launched Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024- 2027 in June 2024, we have continued to publish Annual Reports in November and May and met at least 6 times in the financial year to ensure we're making the best impact against our priorities.

Our informal corporate parenting boards have been improved and authenticated by working alongside young people in a workshop environment centred around the pillars of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

We have tracked progress against key indicators, a summary of which is presented in Fig 1. This includes benchmarking against good+ statistical neighbours and national average, and direction of travel for the year 2024/25.

Indicator	Mar-25	Mar-26	Good +Stat Neighbours	National Average	Direction of travel 25/26
No. children in care	435	475			↑
No. unaccompanied children	41	43			↓
Rate of children in care per 10,000 children	66	71	71	70	↑
% children seen in 6 weeks	78%	75%			↓
% children living in foster care	70%	71%	67%	67%	↑
% children living with Dorset carers	47%	45%	41%	43%	↑
% children living outside Dorset	43%	43%	33%	45%	↔
% children settled for 2.5yrs	78%	71%	68%	68%	↓
% permanence achieved through adoption	10%		13%	9%	↑
Dental	81%	68%	77%	79%	↓
Immunisations	91%	85%	86%	82%	↓
Annual health assessment	90%	84%	89%	84%	↓
Initial health assessments*	33%	38%			↑
% children who have completed a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)*	53%	50%	68%	77%	↓
Average SDQ score*	15	15	15	15	↔
% children with a missing episode	15%	12%	10%	11%	↓
No.children entering criminal justice system for the first time	3	4			↑
% children who have been permanently excluded from school*	0	0			↔
% children missing education*	3%	2%			↓
No. young people eligible to receive leaving care services	558	557			↓
In touch with young people	99%	99%	95%	92%	↔
% young people in suitable accommodation (19-21yrs)	96%	96%	91%	88%	↓
Number of young people in bed & breakfast	3	0			↔
% young people in education employment and training (19-21 yrs)	68%	69%%	57%	54%	↑

We have worked collaboratively to:

- Develop a strong Corporate Parenting Board

- Create safe spaces for children and young people with youth voice to come together with Corporate Parenting Board members to hear, listen to and act upon feedback from children and young people.
- Embedded a Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Group (CPPDG) to operationalise the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Dorset Promise and co-ordinate the delivery of The Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Plan (CPPDP).
- Increase the number of homes for our children and young people by developing new children's homes across Dorset, increase the number of fostering households and homes for care leavers.
- Embed a dedicated Kinship Service, for special guardians and connected carers that recognises the unique needs of Kinship Carers
- Through our Corporate Partnerships we have supported 13 young people to secure employment.
- Ensure all Dorset children's homes are 'Good or 'Outstanding'.
- Partner with 'Coram' to participate in their 'Bright Spots' programme, increasing the reach and depth of hearing feedback from children and young people.
- Embed Mind of My Own to hear young people's voices

Throughout 2025-2026, the Corporate Parenting Board has considered progress against the priorities of The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027. The following provides an update on some of the key areas of discussion by the board in this reporting period and highlights positive areas of development.

Our children and young people.

Between end of March 2025 – end of March 2026 our total child in care population has increased from 435 to 475. Our local child in care population has also increased from 394 to 432. As of end of March 2026, we were actively working with 319 care leavers compared to 300 last year. We have a total of 557 care leavers, a decrease of 1 from March 2025.

The Network and Youth Participation - supporting children and young people to be themselves, to listen to them, include them, and work with them

The involvement of children and families in learning from their experiences through consultation and commissioning, complaints and serious incidents is fully embedded in the development of services.

Our children in care have taken part in a second 'Your Life Beyond Care' Coram Voice survey which closed in April 2025. 47% young people took part in the survey this year compared to 38% in the 2022 – 23. Results were presented to young people, carers and the wider partnership at an event at Carey Camp on 30th October 2025.

We continue to work with young people through The Network and partners to ensure that the CPPDG Plan is agile and informed by views which are captured through these surveys. The delivery of the CPPDG plan and actions from workshops has the scrutiny of young people and board members at our informal Corporate Parenting Board meetings.

These comprehensive surveys have given us insights across several areas:

- Use of evidenced based 'Bright Spots' – Partnership between Coram Voice and the University of Oxford supported by The Hadley Trust
- Perceptions of social workers, IRO's, advocates and other professionals
- Perceptions of plans, including care, education and pathway
- Perceptions of processes such as reviews and complaints
- Feelings of wellbeing and support

Dorset Council have committed to run the Bright Spots Programme every 2 years. The next survey will be a third 'Your Life Beyond Care' survey in 2026.

Dorset Youth's Voice support a program of Fostering Family Fun Days which members are actively encouraged to attend to be alongside our children and their families while joining in with different activities. These have been a great way for us to hear the voice of children in our care, children who foster and foster carers.

The governance arrangements of Corporate Parenting Board having 4 informal Boards and 2 formal Boards continues to enable increased participation from young people. Feedback from young people attending informal boards which are arranged thematically in relation to The Dorset Promise and Corporate Parenting Strategy are increasingly positive and evidence impact of our children's voices.

This year we have held workshops which have focused on the following:

- Identity – Ask me what matters – 20th March 2025
- Safe and Settled – Language that carers and friendships – 11th September 2025
- Education and Employment – Belonging in school and education - 29th January 2026
- Physical and Mental Health – Appearance – 12th March 2026

- Physical and Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing – supporting our children and young people’s physical and mental health

Corporate Parenting Board receives an annual report in addition to regular input to its meetings from designated professionals who work to provide services to children in care.

There are good working relationships between children’s social care managers, the Children in Care Health Service and NHS Dorset, with all partners committed to improving health outcomes for children in care.

When comparing data in March 2025 to that in March 2026 we have seen a decrease this month compared to this time last year in Dental, Immunisations and Annual Health Assessments, but continue to remain better than national average for in all other than Dental.

Performance regarding initial health assessments continues to be variable throughout the year with the most significant impact on completion timeliness being associated with children placed outside of Dorset. NHS England is aware of this and has commissioned a dataset to address some of the variations in areas.

The % of children who have completed a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire continues to be an area of challenge. While this performance indicator is a requirement for the DFE, children continue to have a low opinion of the questionnaire and question how the data is used and where the information goes. Over the last year Dorset Council have been working with Valuing Care, developing profiles of children to ensure better matching to the people and homes that care for them. This is experienced by children and young people and professionals as a much more accurate and effective way to describe children’s needs and therefore further thought is being given as to what next steps are to be taken to present this to the DFE as an alternative to SDQ questionnaires.

At the thematic workshop on Physical and Mental Health on 12th March 2026 members of the Corporate Parenting Board worked together in small working groups and held discussions on the following areas:

- Does the service respect the privacy of those in care the way it should do & how can we give children more privacy?
- What can be done to make NHS settings safer spaces for those with care experience?

- What can we change in the way we do things to prevent children in care becoming lonely when they are older & what can be done to help care leavers who are lonely now?
- How are we making sure our young people are ready to live on their own & is our expectation right?

From the discussions, actions have been identified and added to the Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Group Action Plan to take forward with a clearly identified feedback loop of 'You said, We did together' for children and young people.

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. The children and young people Mental Health strategy is being revised as part of the children and young people mental health transformation.

We continue to identify better ways of working together and value the opportunities to embed clinical colleagues within integrated services such as Harbour, to ensure emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of our children are better understood and services are better organised to respond to their needs.

Education and Employment - supporting children and young people to have goals for the future and celebrating with them

The purpose of the Virtual School is to raise the educational achievement of children in care, promote their emotional wellbeing and improve their life chances as a more vulnerable group. The Corporate Parenting Board receives an annual report from the Head of The Virtual School each year.

Dorset Virtual School is a proud advocate of our children. The vision is that they are thriving in the right educational setting, attending, feel included and listened to so that our children become independent and resilient young people. There is a mutual commitment between educational settings and Dorset Virtual School to support our children and young people to fulfil their potential and live their best lives.

- Some of the key strengths this year have been:
- Reduction in suspensions for children in care (10% of cohort vs 15% in 2023/24 37 vs 50 children)
- Ensured that there has been no increase in suspensions for children with a social worker: 8% (23 children) child protection and 15% (178 children) child in need compared to 24 children (child protection) and 178 children (child in need)

- Reduction in the number of permanent exclusions for children in care (1 child), children on child protection plans (5 children) and children in need (20 children)
- Proactive approach to alternative to suspensions launched
- Relaunch of the 4th Knowledge Exchange Programme in collaboration with University College London - working in partnership with a cross-phase group of specialist and mainstream providers to develop practice
- Proactive staff training offer implemented
- Increase in attendance 88% (children in care), 77% (children on child protection plans) and 80% for children in need
- Maintained low use of Reduced Timetables in 24/25 with 7 children currently on the register (Children in Care)
- Increase in the number of Post 16 who are in Education, Employment or Training (72.10% monthly average) (children in care)
- Outstanding PEP Quality Assurance (95% good or outstanding)
- Weekly celebrations of 165 children and young people who have excelled in education or overcome significant barriers
- Organisation of one residential opportunity for children from year 7-11, working in partnership with Jamie's Farm 6
- Development of our support for children in kinship care arrangements
- Organisation and delivery of a range of extra-curricular activities in response to our children's voices
- Good outcomes for phonics, year 4 multiplication check, Key Stage 2 SATs, GCSE and Post 16

From the Virtual School Annual Report 2025, Board members noted that Dorset Virtual School continues to develop creative approaches to supporting children both educationally and in wider enrichment opportunities to raise aspiration and ambition. The Virtual School extends its reach beyond education settings to support the wider development of children and young people through arts participation, sport, cultural and leisure activities that enable children and young people to develop skills and interests beyond formal education.

Strong links have been maintained between the Virtual School and wider services such as the Youth Justice Service, Aspire Adoption and local further and higher education providers as well as the Care Leavers and Early Year's Team to focus on embedding robust and consistent processes and expectations to ensure children and young people are successful.

The Virtual School has a strong focus on celebrating child successes and sharing these widely to ensure that our children's lived experience is in

everyone's minds in a positive, strengths-based way and also to celebrate good practice from teams working with our children.

The areas of focus for the Virtual School going forward include:

- Improving attendance for those children with severe absence (50% attendance or less)
- Enhancing our offer for our children living in Kinship Care arrangements
- Embedding our children's voice within our work
- Working with locality practitioners and partners to develop good practice to reduce suspensions, particularly for children with Special Educational Needs
- Develop a robust monitoring report for children with a Social Worker who are Electively Home Educated in preparation for Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.
- Develop targeted programmes for young people in Key Stage 2, 4 and 5 to support education, employment and training.
- Develop the work of the wider extended role in supporting children with a Social Worker.

We continue to support our young people to be in education, employment, and training, with 76% 16-18yr olds and 59% of 19-21yr olds being in Education, Employment or Training at the end of March 2026. This is an improvement from 69% of 16-18yr olds being in Education, Employment or Training at the end of March 2025 and sustained performance of 59% for 19-21yr olds.

Safeguarding and Permanence - supporting children and young people to be and feel safe and for us all to be people they can trust

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 children's homes have been inspected and are graded as Good or Outstanding.

This year saw the registration of The Rowans and Sunnyside and the plan to de-register The Cherries has now been achieved.

Plans are being progressed to complete the development of a 3 bedroom short break home on Portland for children who are disabled and an additional short-term home in the east of Dorset. We would like to see these homes registered and operational before the end of 2026.

The % of children living outside Dorset, has remained the same compared between March 2025 and March 2026 and is lower than national average, although above good+ stat neighbours. The % of children, excluding unaccompanied children, living more than 20 miles away from home has increased from 41% in March 2024 to 44% in March 2025. We know there are still too many children who live too far away from their home and continue to work with determination to increase the number of local foster carers so that our children are able to maintain their links with friends, education and their local community more easily.

It is positive to note the increase in the % of children living in foster care. This is reflected in an increase in both the number of children living in mainstream and kinship foster care which has increased respectively from 126 to 133 and 66 to 73. The % of children who have been in care over 2.5 years and are settled being with the same carer for 2 years or more remains above national average and good +stat neighbours.

We have made significant progress in strengthening our kinship care offer, recognising the importance of children being supported to live safely within their family networks wherever possible. This has resulted in:

- Clearer identification and promotion of kinship care as a positive permanence option, ensuring family and friends carers are recognised as key partners in caring for children.
- Improved access to advice, assessment and support, enabling kinship carers to better understand their role and responsibilities and feel confident in meeting children's needs.
- A more consistent and equitable offer of support, including practical, emotional and professional guidance aligned with fostering and corporate parenting principles.
- Increased focus on stability and belonging, supporting children to maintain family connections and reduce unnecessary disruption or escalation in care arrangements.
- This strengthened kinship offer supports better outcomes for children while embedding a family first, trauma informed approach across fostering.

We have also strengthened both the recruitment and retention of foster carers, recognising that a stable, skilled fostering workforce is critical to achieving positive outcomes for children. This has been achieved by:

- Enhancing recruitment activity, with clearer, values led messaging that promotes fostering as a supported and rewarding role within Dorset's wider corporate parenting commitment.

- Improving support and engagement with existing carers, helping to retain experienced foster carers and sustain placement capacity over time.
- Having greater emphasis on relationship-based practice, ensuring carers feel listened to, valued and professionally supported through supervision, training and peer support.
- Focusing on supporting more children to remain closer to their communities, schools and support networks.

These developments have contributed to a more resilient fostering service, where we are confident in the skills and abilities of foster carers to meet the changing and complex needs of our children and young people.

Mockingbird continues to support the resilience and retention of our existing carers, and we continue to see the impact for the foster carers and the children they are caring for.

Achieving a settled home ensures children have a secure, stable, and loving family to support through childhood and beyond, to create a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity, and belonging.

Settled homes can be achieved in several ways:

Return Home to Parents – We have seen an increase in the % of children achieving a settled home by returning to the care of their parents or relative with parental responsibility. At the end of March 2026, 24% children achieved permanence by returning to live with their parents' following reunification compared to 16% in March 2025. This is higher than Good+ statistical neighbours and national average.

Adoption – The % of children who have been adopted has slightly reduced this year. This is as a direct result of local and national shortages of adopters, particularly for older children and sibling groups. Aspire has given renewed focus to the recruitment of adopters including early permanency, timeliness in matching and achieving final order for adoption and access to post-adoption support. Collectively, these achievements demonstrate Aspire Adoption Agency's commitment to improve permanence experiences and outcomes for children, ensuring adoption is achieved and sustained.

SGO – Since the development of an in house dedicated Kinship Service, we have seen more children living with friends or family subject to a Special Guardianship Order. 5% of children who left care in the six months prior to March 2025 were placed subject to Special Guardianship Order compared to 16% in March 2026.

Through the Coram Voice survey 'Your Life Your Care' undertaken in 2025, members of the board heard that:

92% of children reported that they always felt safe in the home they live in now

The proportion of children who had felt happy the previous day increased from 72% to 93% for children age 4-7 yrs and from 52% to 62% for children age 11-17yrs.

All children age 4-11yrs and all but one of children age 11-17 yrs trusted the adults they lived with.

The area's we need to strengthen include:

- Increasing family time
- Ensuring that all children felt an adult had fully explained why they were in care.
- Support all our children to stay in touch with the people who are important to them and help them to build their support networks.
- Work with our schools so that children have a greater sense of belonging and describe liking school or college more.

Next steps towards adult life – supporting our young people to be safe and happy as adults

All young people are allocated a personal adviser at the age of 16 to provide a smooth transition and support young people with the skills they need as they move into adulthood. We have continued our focus to ensure that all young people have a current Pathway Plan which is ambitious and supports our young people to move towards increased independence. At the end of March 2026 97% of young people had a current Pathway Plan compared to 93% in March 2025.

More young people are remaining in Staying Put arrangements with 36 young people remaining with their foster carer after turning 18 yrs. 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 continue to actively recruit supported lodging hosts for our care experienced young people.

Young people are encouraged to develop their own networks and keep in touch with significant people in their lives. This is supported through our staying close and mentoring programmes. We continue to employ 2 care experienced young people as co-ordinators which has been impactful in increasing the number of young people engaging with both programmes.

We have expanded our number and range of Dorset Council properties to provide affordable and local accommodation for our young people.

Relationships have been strengthened with private landlords which has yielded local and affordable accommodation for young people. We continue to provide rent deposit, rent in advance, act as a guarantor and in some situations “top up” rent so young people can maintain employment or further education.

We are now registered with Ofsted as a supported accommodation provider with 12 supported lodgings carers and 2 being assessed.

Dorset Council continues to underline its commitment to our young people through the offer of apprenticeships.

Our vision for the next 12 months is to:

- Formally launch and embed Lifelong offer beyond 25 years.
- Ensure at least 65% of our care leavers (18-25 active) are engaged with meaningful education, employment or training
- Continue to strengthen our offer to care leavers who are parents
- Continue to increase the provision of high-quality accommodation that feels safe and is affordable in Dorset.
- To continue to work with colleagues and partners to support our care leavers with their mental health and emotional wellbeing, to develop the “Ask me What Matters” programme through our care and pathway planning and develop services that extend up to 25 years through CAMHS Transformation programme.

Membership and Governance

Effective governance and planning arrangements are in place that mean the Corporate Parent can be the best they can be.

Corporate Parenting Board membership includes elected members, officers of the Council and all employees and young people, with support from stakeholders and our partners.

The membership of the Board during this reporting period was as follows:

- Cllr Bridget Bolwell (Chair)
- Cllr Duncan Sowry-House (Vice Chair)
- Cllr Cathy Lugg
- Cllr Stella Jones
- Cllr Matt Bell
- Cllr Byron Quayle
- Cllr Julie Robinson

Corporate Parenting Board met 6 times this year and going forward it is planned that the Board will meet 6 times on alternating months.

There have been 2 formal meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board held in public on 28th May 2025 and 11th December 2025 that:

- Received annual statutory reports regarding children in care and care leavers including annual reports from IRO, Fostering, Adoption, Youth Justice, Fostering Panel Chair, Corporate Parenting, Leaving Care, Virtual School, Advocacy and Independent Visitors, Health and Wellbeing.
- There were also updates with regards to performance and other areas of interest in relation to children in care and care leavers.
- Agreed an annual report summarising the Board's activities.

All other Corporate Parenting Board meetings were held informally, engaging stakeholders and children and young people to ensure that the Board is accessible and able to encourage the very best input from everyone taking part in the meetings.

With these arrangements established, Corporate Parenting Board Members are better able to understand the issues, challenges and concerns and celebrate successes as they are experienced by young people and enables greater challenge of the Board Members in respect of the Council's Corporate Parenting role.

The data set has been presented to each Board meeting. In addition to the anticipated performance indicators, the data set provides commentary on some of the softer information such as extra-curricular activities which is equally impactful on children's outcomes.

Priorities for the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024- 2027.

The following priorities are linked to our Children, Young People and Families Plan 2023 – 33 and are as follows:

- Children and young people are best cared for wherever possible with their birth family or extended family.
- We will prioritise loving relationships for all children and young people, recognising the important foundation that stability and consistency of relationships with care providers gives.
- We will reduce inequalities for children and young people ensuring we improve their health and wellbeing.
- We are ambitious for children and young people to reach their potential through education, opportunities and activities and we will celebrate their achievements.

- We will ensure that our children are safe at home and in their community and live locally and close to the people who are important to them.
- We recognise our parenting responsibility extends beyond when a young person leaves care.
- All partner agency planning, service delivery and evaluation will start with the needs of children and young people.
- The views, opinions, needs and priorities of children in care, care experienced young people and carers inform everything we do.
- We deliver high quality, innovative services and will work in a transformational way to ensure they become even better.

5. **Alternative options considered**

5.1 N/A

6. **Legal considerations**

6.1 Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 (Section 1), local authorities must have regard to the corporate parenting principles when exercising functions in relation to looked-after children and care leavers.

Sufficiency and Quality Duties (Children Act 1989) set out key statutory duties include: Section 22 – General duty to safeguard and promote welfare.

Ensuring placements are suitable and meet needs

Section 22G – Sufficiency duty- Duty to ensure sufficient accommodation within the local area

For care leavers (Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 & subsequent regs): Provision of Personal Advisers, Pathway Plans, and support up to age 25

Care Leaver Local Offer (Children and Social Work Act 2017): Local authorities must publish their Local Offer for Care Leavers.

Equality and Non-Discrimination (Equality Act 2010)

Data Protection and Confidentiality; GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018:

Safeguarding and Statutory Partnerships- Children Act 2004 & Working Together to Safeguard Children

7. **Financial implications**

- 7.1 Dorset Council continue to adopt a policy of committing to reduce the number of children in care, taking a rights-based approach, and developing services which support children to be able to grow up in a family setting.

However, an increase in our child in care population in terms of numbers has seen an increase in spend on homes for our children.

The National Transfer Scheme continues to impact on Dorset Council with a rise in the number of unaccompanied children in our care and supported by us as care leavers.

The challenges for fostering recruitment have been noted nationally within both local authority and IFA services. The Board recognises that it is all the more important for Dorset to be the fostering agency of choice for foster carers and supported lodgings carers and are committed to being ambassadors for the recruitment of Dorset carers.

The Board has supported investment in the residential estate for Dorset children in care and care leavers and members have maintained oversight by visiting throughout the year.

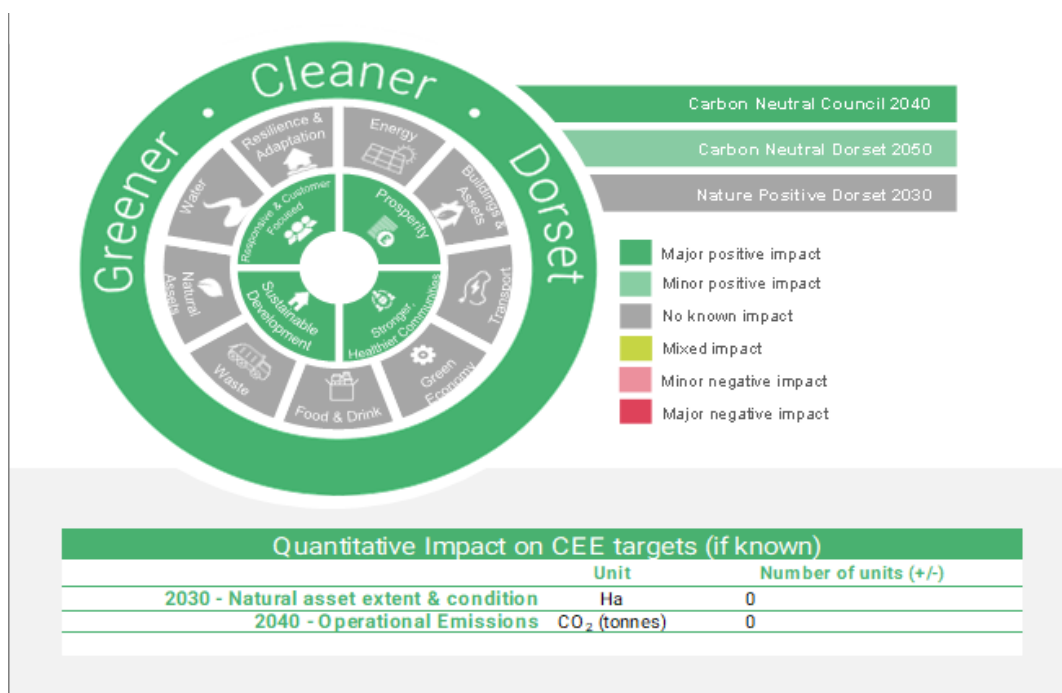
In all that we do today we aim to equip children and young people 'for life', and wherever possible reduce the likelihood of needing to support care leavers in vulnerable adult populations. Investment in the care leavers service has ensured we are in a strong position to deliver ever better services.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

- 8.1 As Corporate Parents we strive to ensure that our children are settled and experience love and care with carers, close to the people and places that are important to them, recognising the link to improved mental health and educational attainment.

Having sufficient homes for our children in Dorset also reduces the amount of travel undertaken by families, social workers, and other children's services employees. There are currently 207 children living in care outside Dorset an increase from 189 children in March 2025. While the majority of children live in neighbouring authorities, there are some children living as far afield as Birmingham, Newcastle, Leeds and Manchester.

Reducing the number of children living outside of Dorset would reduce travel and should result in a reduction in the associated emissions from travel which is in line with the council's priority of protecting the natural environment, climate and ecology.



9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 It is reported that children in care are four times more likely to have a mental health difficulty than children in the general population. children in care have double the rates of urgent dental treatment and are half as likely to attend dental services as the general population. This is significant as poor oral health is also associated with other chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. We also recognise the importance of extra-curricular activities such as sports, creative arts and music lessons which contribute to a child's wellbeing and sense of belonging.

The number of unaccompanied children in care and leaving care has increased. Unaccompanied children and young people are more likely to live outside Dorset which can impact on the timeliness of services such as initial health assessments. There is also a need to raise awareness of the specific trauma experienced by unaccompanied children and young people due to their experiences in their home countries, their journey to the UK and anxiety caused by Right to Remain claims.

Supported by South London Refugee Association (SLRA) , Dorset Council have pledged to:

- identify all children in care and care leavers with immigration and nationality issues.
- connect children in care and care leavers with good quality legal support as soon as possible.
- take a proactive and informed role in supporting children in care and care leavers through any immigration applications and appeals.

- enable those who are eligible to apply for permanent status and British citizenship.

One of the roles of corporate parents is to ensure that with partners we are working to reduce health inequalities and support the needs of children in care and care leavers.

10. Other implications

- 10.1 These are considered in the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report.

11. Risk implications

- 11.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

12. Equalities

- 12.1 Equality considerations are fully embedded throughout the report, strategy, and delivery arrangements.

This report impacts Children in care (ages 0–18), Care experienced young people (up to and beyond age 25), Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, Children living in foster care, kinship care, residential care, and supported accommodation Care leavers who are parents, Kinship carers, foster carers and supported lodging hosts. These groups are recognised as particularly vulnerable and at higher risk of inequality.

Services are age-appropriate and promote continuity of care. Children with disabilities are supported through specialist provision, including plans for additional short-break homes. Education support, health planning, and placement matching consider individual needs. Targeted support reduces disadvantage and promotes inclusion.

Inequality is reduced through prioritised access and integrated services. The report highlights the Understanding cultural identity, language, and belonging is embedded in participation work as a result targeted actions reduce risk of discrimination and exclusion.

Support services apply equitably to all genders. Attention is given to Care leavers who are parents (predominantly young women) and Identity and self-expression discussions through youth workshops. no negative gender impacts have been identified. Identity, belonging and feeling safe to be yourself are priorities in youth participation work. Safe spaces and inclusive

practice are promoted across services. Services support inclusion and reduce marginalisation.

The report actively addresses known inequalities affecting care experienced children and young people. Equality, inclusion and participation are central to our strategy and delivery.

13. Appendices

13.1 None

14. Background papers

14.1 None

15. Report sign-off

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