

Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership

Annual Report 2025/2026



DORSET
Safeguarding
Children Partnership



Dorset
Council

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Independent Scrutineer Commentary

“I was delighted to join the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP) as its Independent Scrutineer midway through the reporting year, in December 2025. My first involvement was supporting the partnership with a recently commissioned Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review. This provided an excellent opportunity to observe how agencies worked together and how they responded when things went wrong. I was particularly encouraged to observe a culture of openness, transparency and honesty throughout the process. There was a clear commitment from all partners to learn from mistakes and to use that learning to improve future service delivery. This was both positive and reassuring to see.

In the New Year, I undertook a review of the partnership's governance arrangements. I was impressed by the partnership's genuine focus on improving outcomes for children and the willingness of partners to work collaboratively in pursuit of this shared objective. Working Together 2026 is clear that the police, health services and local authority share equal responsibility and accountability for the effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements. My review identified a risk that this balance could, at times, become weighted towards one partner. It also highlighted opportunities to streamline aspects of the governance structure, with the aim of reducing duplication and ensuring that professionals can spend more time on activity that directly improves outcomes for children and families, rather than attending meetings. My report was welcomed and I know that steps are now being taken to implement the recommendations that I made.

Working Together 2026 also makes clear that the Independent Scrutineer should review and comment on the partnership's annual report. I was therefore given access to an early draft of this report and I am pleased to say that I believe it provides a balanced and informative overview of the partnership's work, its achievements and the challenges it continues to face. I have also encouraged the partnership to consider how this report can be made more accessible and engaging for the children and young people of Dorset, as well as their families, so that they can better understand the work being undertaken on their behalf.

I am particularly encouraged by the partnership's commitment to embed national reforms, including the Families First programme, and by the thoughtful way in which partners are preparing for wider system changes. This includes considering the implications of ongoing reform within health services as the Integrated Care Board embeds its own transformation programme. These developments will present both opportunities and challenges, and I am confident that the partnership is well placed to respond to them through its commitment to collaboration, learning and continuous improvement.”

Section 1

Outlining the requirements set out in statutory guidance

The Safeguarding Children Partnership has a statutory responsibility, as set out in [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2026\)](#) for leadership and multi-agency co-ordination of “arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.” In other words, the Partnership is a strategic arrangement between the statutory safeguarding partners (Dorset Council Children’s Services, Dorset Police, NHS Dorset, and Education to ensure that there are effective child safeguarding arrangements in place in the local area.

Each Safeguarding Children Partnership has a statutory responsibility as set out in the Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance (2026) for leadership and multi-agency co-ordination of “arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children “The structure of the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership is set out in its multi-agency safeguarding arrangements document.

The Safeguarding Children Partnership [Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) website has continued to operate as a joint platform for both the DSCP and BCP SCP. Over the past 12 months, the site has been further developed and clearly structured to provide distinct sections for each Partnership, alongside a shared Pan-Dorset area which hosts jointly delivered functions. This has supported improved accessibility and clarity for users. BCP have recently developed their own partnership website, so their section will be now coming down, and we will have two separate websites.

Over the same period, the DSCP has strengthened its focus on ensuring that children and families receive coordinated, targeted support that meets their needs. There is a shared and equal commitment across agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, with safeguarding partners continuing to take collective responsibility for joining up services and working collaboratively to improve outcomes for children across Dorset.

1. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners

Working Together 2026 defined the head of each statutory safeguarding partner agency (Dorset Council, NHS Dorset and Dorset Police) as the Lead Safeguarding Partner (LSP) who are as follows for the Dorset

area:

- Catherine Howe, Chief Executive Officer, Dorset Council
- Amanda Pearson, Chief Constable, Dorset Police
- Jonathan Higman, Chief Executive Officer, NHS Dorset

As set out in Working Together 2026, the delivery of the multi-agency safeguarding functions and processes should be delegated to the Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs) to allow the LSPs to focus on their joint functions and maintain strategic oversight.

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

- Paul Dempsey, Executive Director for People – Children, Dorset Council
- Mark Callaghan, Assistant Chief Constable, Dorset Police
- Shelagh Meldrum, Chief Nursing Officer, NHS Dorset

These representatives or delegates:

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

2. Pan-Dorset Lead Safeguarding Partner Meeting

In the new structures for each Safeguarding Children Partnership, there is a Pan-Dorset Lead Safeguarding Partner meeting which sits across both. During the 2025-2026 reporting period this group met 3 times a year, there has been a recent decision that going forward they will only meet twice a year. This is to ensure the Lead Safeguarding Partners have strategic oversight of the multi-agency safeguarding functions. This meeting is structured into three sections: a Pan-Dorset section, a Dorset SCP section and a BCP SCP section. Some of the key Safeguarding Children Partnership items are presented to these meetings, including reviewing progress against the strategic priorities and agreeing the budget for each financial year. The Pan-Dorset section of the meeting allows for discussion and highlighting of any joint strategic issues across both Local Authority areas.

3. Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership Board

The Dorset Safeguarding Children Board (previously called the Strengthening Services Board up to the 1 April 2025) is where the Delegated Safeguarding Partners deliver their joint functions, as set out in Working Together (2026). This is chaired by the Chief Executive of Dorset Council with representatives at executive level across the Partnership. The Board meets quarterly, and key updates are shared with the Lead Safeguarding Partner meeting.

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

4. Partnership Training and Development

The Safeguarding Children training offer continues to be offered as a Pan-Dorset function. This includes a core safeguarding training provision with this being open to attendance from a wide range of agencies, to ensure that there is a multi-agency attendance at the courses. The administration and co-ordination of the training is paid by income generation. The Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Training is a trusted and dependable provider, ensuring that organisations meet their safeguarding training requirements. Courses are commissioned through the Learning and Development Framework and meet the specific quality control and contract compliance measures. The offer is regularly updated with both local and national changes in policy and procedure, as well as in relation to any specific learning that emerges from the completion of local rapid reviews, Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPRs) and any other quality assurance or scrutiny activity delivered by both the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership and the BCP Safeguarding Children Partnership.

5. Child Death Overview Panel

Statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 defines child death review partners as “local authorities and any Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) for the local area as set out in the Children Act 2004 (the Act), and as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017”.

When a child dies, in any circumstances, it is important for parents and families to understand what has happened and whether there are any lessons to be learned. The responsibility for ensuring child death reviews is carried out is held by ‘child death review partners,’ as defined within Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, and set out in current legislation. Child death review partners must make arrangements to review all deaths of children normally resident in the local area and, if they consider it appropriate, for any non-resident child who has died in their area. Child death review partners, for two or more local authority areas, may combine and agree that their areas be treated as a single area for the purpose of undertaking child death reviews. Child death review partners in Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole, Dorset, and Somerset have agreed to treat Pan

Dorset and Somerset as a single area, resulting in a joint Pan Dorset and Somerset Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) undertaking child death reviews for Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole, Dorset, and Somerset children.

The CDOP panel met 7 times in 2025/26 and reviewed 49 deaths, some of which occurred prior to this annual reporting period of April 2025-March 2026: 24 Pan-Dorset deaths (8 Dorset and 16 BCP) and 25 Somerset deaths. There is a delay in child deaths being reviewed at a full CDOP, due to the information gathering process that needs to take place with involved agencies, including the deaths first being reviewed at local child death review meetings, before a review takes place at CDOP.

In addition, CDOP has been notified of a total of 22 deaths of Pan Dorset residents and 20 deaths of Somerset residents which have occurred during this annual reporting period of April 2025-March 2026. These deaths will be reviewed by CDOP within the next annual reporting period. In addition, there was 1 notification of an Out of County child, resident elsewhere who died within our areas (0 Dorset Out of County / 1 Somerset Out of County) –these deaths will be reviewed and recorded by their home Local Authority. The annual CDOP report April 2025-March 2026 is due to be published in November 2026.

Section 2: Dorset Area Profile

The population of the Dorset Council area is approximately 389,950 (2024 estimate), with projected growth of around 5.1% between 2025 and 2035. There are approximately 67,150 children and young people aged 0–17, representing around 17% of the total population, which is lower than the national average of 21%. In contrast, 31% of the population are aged 65 and over, the highest proportion of any unitary authority in England and the working-age population aged 16 to 64 has remained relatively static, with 44% aged 50 and over.



Birth rates in Dorset are projected to fall from 6.6 per 1,000 population in 2025 to 6.1 over the next ten years. In 2024/25 there were 2,660 births compared to 4,877 deaths, meaning population growth is driven primarily by migration rather than natural change. Net migration into Dorset was estimated at 5,100 in 2023–2024, predominantly from within the UK.

English is the main language spoken in Dorset, and although over 80 languages are represented across the area, residents for whom English is not their main language make up a small proportion of the population. The top 5 languages spoken in Dorset are English with Polish, Romanian, Nepalese and Bulgarian spoken by 0.7% of the population. Dorset remains predominantly White British, with relatively low ethnic diversity compared to national figures, although diversity is gradually increasing, particularly among younger age groups. According to the 2021 Census 93.9% of the population are white British, a decrease of 1.7% from the 2011 Census with the remaining 6.1% of residents from Black and Minority Ethnic groups (national 25.6%), this rises to 7.8% for children and young people (aged 24 years and under). Just over half of our residents, who are from an ethnic minority, report as being 'White Other.' This is mainly made up of White European residents.

The natural environment, coastal setting and rural landscapes of Dorset contribute to high levels of wellbeing, with an above-average proportion of residents reporting high life satisfaction and feeling that their lives are worthwhile. However, these strengths can mask hidden challenges. There are significant areas of deprivation, primarily in urban areas such as Weymouth and Portland, alongside rural deprivation linked to isolation, limited transport, and difficulty accessing housing and essential services. A significant proportion of Dorset residents also experience geographic barriers to accessing services. There are nine areas in Dorset within the top 20% most deprived nationally for multiple deprivation, seven of these are within Weymouth and Portland, one is in Bridport and one in Ferndown. The Children's Society estimates that approximately 23% of Dorset Children are living in poverty, with up to 45% in some wards (2021).

There are just over 46,300 pupils attending schools in Dorset across 158 education settings, including maintained, academy and free schools. Dorset operates a mix of two-tier and three-tier education systems, with a wide variation in school size. Around 63% of pupils with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan are educated in mainstream schools. The proportion of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) has continued to increase, rising from 17.8% in 2021 to 21.3% in 2025. The percentage of children with either a statement or an EHC Plan has more than doubled over the past ten years, from 2.4% to 6.0%.

Overall, Ofsted findings indicate that safeguarding arrangements in Dorset schools continue to be effective, providing strong assurance regarding the quality of leadership, management and safeguarding practice across education settings. In relation to Ofsted

under the new framework, early inspection outcomes were largely focused on schools previously judged as requiring improvement and therefore reflect ongoing improvement journeys; however, more recent inspections are beginning to show an increase in expected and stronger standard outcomes.

Educational outcomes remain an area of focus. While early years attainment is broadly in line with national averages, with 67% of children achieving a Good Level of Development in 2024, challenges remain across later key stages, particularly in narrowing the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils. Attendance and persistent absence continue to impact outcomes. Dorset is within the bottom 20% of local authorities for combined attainment at KS2, with performance in writing and mathematics continuing to present challenge.

Crime levels in Dorset remain relatively low compared to national averages, with the area consistently regarded as one of the safest places to live in England. However, overall recorded crime has slightly increased by 2 %, alongside a rise in domestic abuse and hate crime incidents. In 2024/25 there were 4,771 recorded incidents of anti-social behaviour, with Weymouth experiencing the highest rates. First-time entrants of young people into the criminal justice system remain comparatively low. Total recorded crime has risen by 2% this year.

Section 3: Progress against statutory guidance

Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership

1. Activities achieved and impact

Voice of children and young people

The Safeguarding in Education Board enlisted the Dorset Youth Voice team to undertake a county-wide engagement activity to gather the views of children and young people on the use of mobile phones in schools, reaching approximately 254 young people over a two-month period through assemblies, workshops and youth council discussions across a range of Dorset schools and settings. This activity ensured a broad and representative voice, with young people contributing balanced insights into the impact of mobile phone use on safety, wellbeing, learning and social interaction. The findings demonstrated that while most young people did not support a full ban, they were highly aware of both the risks such as distraction, bullying and reduced social interaction, and the benefits, particularly in supporting feelings of safety, emotional wellbeing and contact with trusted adults. The engagement has had a positive impact in amplifying the voice of the child within safeguarding and education discussions, directly informing the Education Safeguarding Board and supporting schools to consider proportionate approaches, such

as clear and consistent expectations around mobile phone use. Overall, this work has strengthened partnership understanding of young people lived experiences, contributing to more informed, balanced decision-making that promotes both safety and wellbeing in school environments.



Multi-agency audits

The partnership's quality assurance activity during 2025/26 builds directly on priorities and actions identified in the 2024/25 annual report. This includes strengthening multi-agency practice, improving consistency in safeguarding responses, and testing the effectiveness of strategic approaches such as extra-familial risk and harm. The following audits demonstrate both ongoing delivery and emerging impact against these areas.

Two multi-agency quality assurance activities took place with partners across the partnership.

- **Quality Assurance Activity – Children Under Two**

As identified in the 2024/25 annual report, the partnership committed to undertaking targeted quality assurance activity in relation to pre-birth to two-year-olds, in response to

learning from rapid reviews and emerging safeguarding concerns. This commitment has been progressed through the following multi-agency audit, which reviewed safeguarding practice for children under two. This audit involved the detailed review of 25 cases, incorporating multi-agency input and feedback from over 30 practitioners through structured focus groups. The activity identified strong collaboration between agencies, evidenced by coordinated planning, timely information sharing in many cases, and effective use of joint decision-making to reduce risk and improve oversight.

Practice was characterised by increasingly trauma-aware and child-centred approaches, particularly within Children's Services and health. This was complemented by consistent and trusted engagement from health visitors and maternity services, supporting both early identification of vulnerability and continuity of care for infants and their families. Police and housing partners also contributed to effective safeguarding through timely interventions, particularly in response to domestic abuse. In addition, relationship-based practice with parents and wider family networks was evident, strengthening engagement, trust, and resilience.

Overall, the audit demonstrates that where agencies work cohesively and maintain a strong focus on the lived experience of infants and their families, this leads to earlier intervention, reduced risk, and improved outcomes at a critical stage of development. The findings also highlight clear priorities for further development, particularly in strengthening consistency in trauma-informed practice, inclusion, and multi-agency coordination.

These findings demonstrate progress against areas for development identified in 2024/25, particularly in strengthening multi-agency collaboration, embedding trauma-informed practice, and improving early identification and intervention.

- **Quality Assurance Activity – Extra-Familial Risk and Harm (EFRH)**

Building on the partnership's 2024/25 priority to strengthen its response to extra-familial harm, and to test the effectiveness of the emerging strategy and toolkit, this activity was undertaken to assess current multi-agency practice. The second quality assurance activity was a multi-agency audit of extra-familial risk and harm (EFRH). This involved a review of nine children identified as being at moderate to high risk, drawing on contributions from a wide range of partners, including Children's Services, education, police, health, adult services, and the voluntary sector. The audit was supported by multi-agency audit discussions and practitioner focus groups, providing both quantitative and qualitative insight into current practice.

The audit identified strong examples of effective multi-agency collaboration. Partners were working together to share information, implement timely disruption activity, and reduce

risk for vulnerable children. Practice was also characterised by positive trauma-informed and relational approaches, which contributed to improvements in engagement, school attendance, and emotional stability for children.

Education settings, health practitioners, and police played a key role in providing protective support, developing trusted relationships, and supporting the early identification of harm. These contributions enabled a more coordinated and responsive safeguarding approach across agencies.

Overall, the audit demonstrates that services are working effectively together and placing the child at the centre of planning, leading to improved safety and outcomes. The findings also highlight areas for further focus, which are being progressed through a multi-agency action plan.

This reflects progress in embedding the extra-familial harm framework introduced in 2024/25, while also identifying where further work is required to ensure consistent application across all agencies.

Annual Conference

The Dorset Safeguarding Children's Partnership held their annual conference - *Wellbeing First: Building Resilience in Young Lives* on the 10th of December 2025. The conference was widely regarded as a successful and well-attended event, bringing together 167 delegates from across the partnership, including education, local authority, NHS, police, and other agencies. Feedback indicates that the conference was positively received overall, with the majority of respondents rating both the event and its speakers as “excellent” or “good.” Attendees particularly valued contributions from Dr Helen Thomas and the involvement of young people, whose lived experiences were highlighted as a meaningful and impactful element. Overall, the conference was seen as a strong collaborative effort, with appreciation expressed for the significant planning and coordination behind its delivery and valuable insights provided for future events.

Areas of Focus

- Enhancing the visibility and influence of the voice of children and families,
- Developing a more integrated approach to performance data and further
- Evolving the MACPT Board.

2. Partnership Training and Development

Actions taken

Over the past three years, the PDSCP Training Team has delivered a comprehensive, responsive and high-quality multi-agency training programme, supporting practitioners across education, health, police, local authority, voluntary and private sectors.

Following the separation of Pan-Dorset arrangements in July 2024, the team successfully transitioned to new governance structures, ensuring continuity of delivery across both DSCP and BCPSCP without disruption.

The training offer has been continuously developed and aligned to local and national safeguarding priorities, with significant curriculum expansion to address emerging risks, including contextual safeguarding, trauma-informed practice, digital harm, domestic abuse, exploitation and complex neglect.

Delivery has remained strong, with:

- Over 1,800 delegates trained annually in Dorset alone
- Consistent satisfaction rates of 98–100%
- Strong multi-agency engagement across all sectors

Operational improvements have significantly strengthened the service, including:

- An 85% reduction in course cancellations over three years (from 20 to 3 courses annually)
- Improved demand management through enhanced use of the Nexus system and targeted marketing
- Expansion of digital systems and user experience improvements
- Provision of infrastructure support to partnership conferences and workforce development

The service continues to operate as a self-sustaining, income-led model, reinvesting surplus into safeguarding priorities and workforce development.

Impact

This work has had a significant and measurable impact on workforce capability, safeguarding practice and outcomes for children.

- High levels of engagement and attendance demonstrate a strong and committed multi-agency workforce, with attendance consistently tracking bookings across sectors
- Exceptionally high satisfaction rates (98–100%) reflect a trusted and valued training offer, contributing to consistent workforce development across the partnership
- Impact evaluation demonstrates clear translation of learning into practice:
 - 90%+ of practitioners report increased confidence in applying learning
 - 92–95% report improved knowledge
 - 57% report changes in practice, with 75% identifying a positive impact on children and families
- Training has strengthened practitioners' ability to recognise and respond to complex safeguarding concerns, including exploitation, trauma and domestic abuse
- Improved workforce capability has contributed to earlier identification of risk, more appropriate interventions and better safeguarding decision-making
- The reduction in course cancellations has improved access to training and system efficiency, ensuring more practitioners are equipped to safeguard children effectively
- Strong alignment between training content and partnership priorities has supported more consistent multi-agency practice across the system

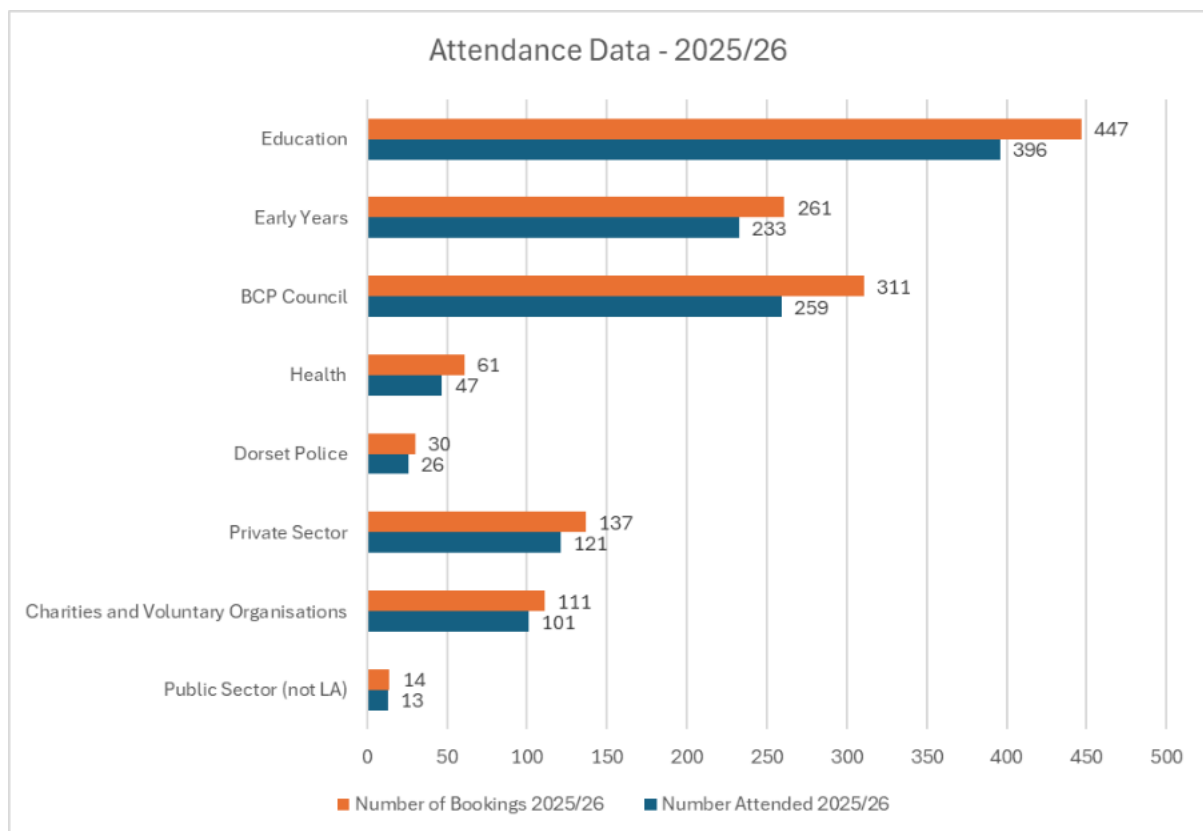
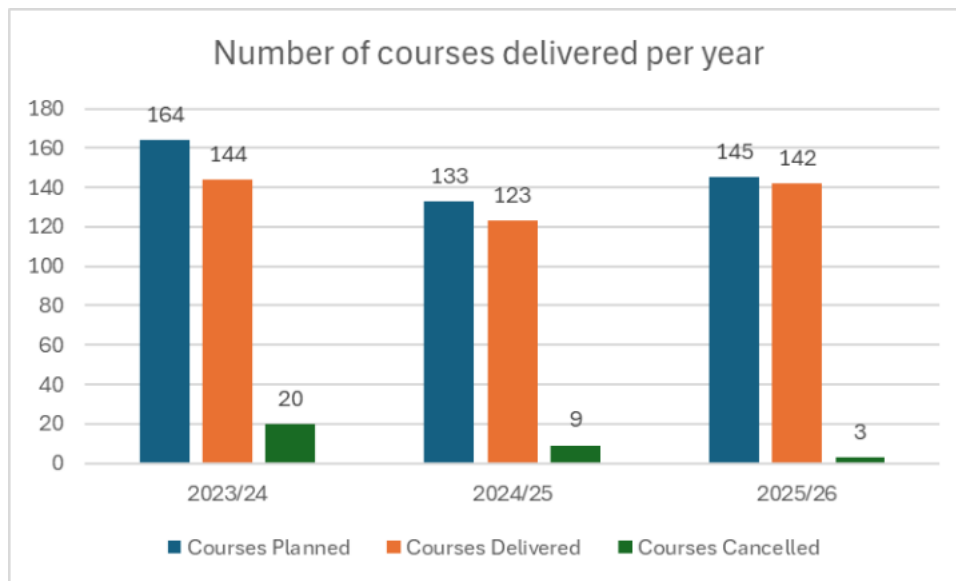
Overall, the training programme has strengthened the confidence, consistency and effectiveness of safeguarding practice, contributing to improved outcomes for children and young people.

Areas for focus

Whilst the training programme is performing strongly, continued development is required to maximise long-term impact:

- Strengthening evaluation frameworks to better understand long-term impact on practice and outcomes, beyond immediate and short-term feedback
- Ensuring consistent engagement across all partners, particularly where attendance levels vary between sectors
- Continuing to adapt the curriculum to respond to emerging risks and increasing complexity of need
- Further developing the use of data to enable better linkage between training, practice improvement and outcomes for children
- Expanding digital and multi-agency learning opportunities to increase accessibility and reach across the workforce

The Training Team will continue to build on this strong foundation, ensuring the workforce remains skilled, confident and equipped to safeguard children effectively.



Section 4:

Evidence of the impact – Contributions of each safeguarding partner

1. Dorset Council Children's Services

During 2025–26, the Families First model that was developed and tested continued to run in Dorset children services, while we worked with partners to develop the revamped model to be aligned with the national guidance. The programme board that oversaw this work concluded in April 2026 and will now be overseen by the existing partnership governance.

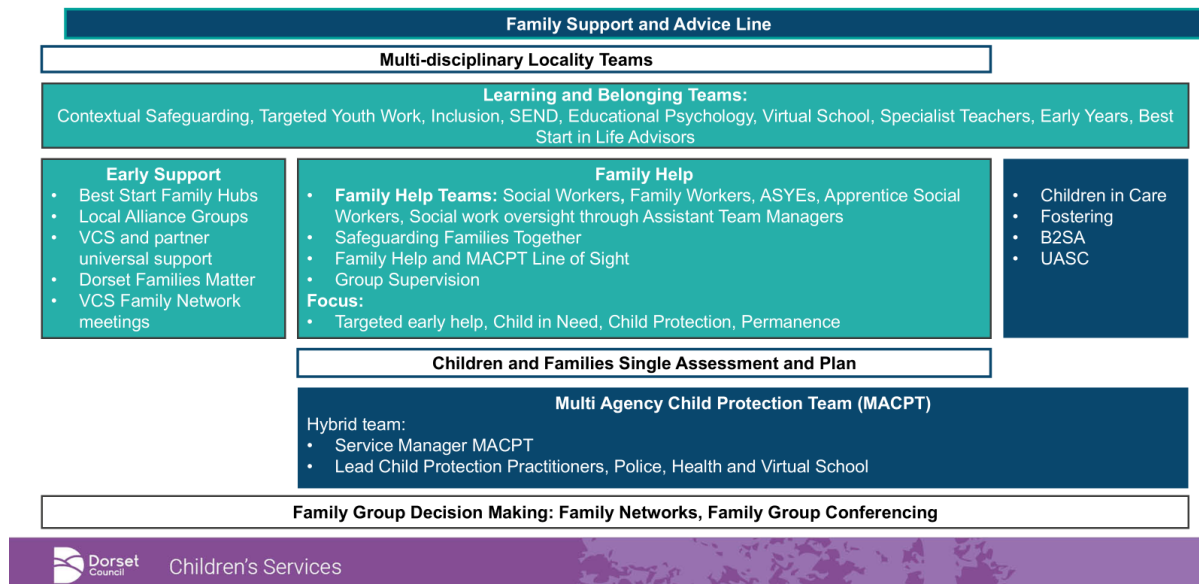
The programme has driven significant whole-system transformation, resulting in timelier coordinated and family-focused responses across services. Families are now receiving a high-quality response at the point of referral, with enhanced advice and guidance for those subject to section 47 enquiries, and increased involvement in decision-making through Family Network Meetings and Family Group Conferences. Multi-agency collaboration has strengthened, particularly through MACPT line of sight and an active Education Safeguarding Board, enabling more informed, timely decisions and reducing drift and delay.

The expansion of youth work and contextual safeguarding within localities has improved engagement with adolescents, contributing to reduced exclusions and earlier identification of risk. There is clear evidence of improved family experience, with more inclusive and respectful child protection conferences, strengthened kinship care arrangements, and increased opportunities for children to remain within their family networks.

Key system improvements include the successful implementation of the Integrated Front Door, the establishment of Family Help teams, a single assessment and plan, and strengthened workforce development pathways, alongside positive external validation, including an Outstanding ILACS judgement. Collectively, these developments have strengthened early help, improved safeguarding responses, and delivered more consistent, relationship-based support for children and families across the partnership.

From the first of June 2026 we will be moving into our reviewed model which will be compliant with the families first program guide.

Families First Partnership (FFP): Overview of our model



Birth to Settled Adulthood/Transitions

The Birth to Settled Adulthood (B2SA) programme continues to provide strong oversight and strategic coordination through its Delivery Board, with a clear focus on improving outcomes for children and young people through multi-agency collaboration. The delivery board and governance arrangements remained robust, with continued scrutiny of programme activity, financial pressures, service performance, and key delivery priorities, alongside consideration of future arrangements for Phase 2 development.

Activity across the programme demonstrates a sustained emphasis on service evaluation, data and performance reporting, and the development of key workstreams, including SEND provision and the Keyworker Service. The programme continues to embed a whole-system approach, bringing together education, health and social care partners to strengthen consistency, accountability and shared outcomes for children and young people.

Evidence of impact highlights the effectiveness of relationship-based, child-centred practice across services. In health provision, families report significantly improved experiences, with children more actively engaged in care and parents describing services as calm, accessible and clearly communicated. This reflects a shift towards more inclusive, family-focused approaches that reduce stress and improve overall engagement with services.

Preparation for adulthood remains a key area of impact, with strong examples of coordinated multi-agency support enabling smoother transitions from children to adult

services. Personalised approaches have supported increased independence, improved emotional wellbeing, and greater stability for young people, including those with complex needs or high levels of anxiety. In several cases, proactive planning and flexible support have prevented escalation, reduced crisis responses, and avoided the need for more intensive interventions, while enabling young people to access education, community opportunities and independent living pathways.

Innovative practice has also been evident, including the use of gradual, confidence-building approaches and creative tools to reduce anxiety and increase engagement. Strong transition planning, supported by regular multi-agency meetings and improved information sharing, has resulted in more coordinated and seamless experiences for young people moving into adulthood, with increased confidence, stability and continuity of support.

The Keyworker Service continues to play a pivotal role in improving the experiences of children and families, particularly those navigating complex systems. By acting as a consistent point of contact, key workers support communication across agencies, advocate for young people, and help families to better understand and access services. This has led to improved engagement, increased confidence, and greater participation for young people, particularly those who may otherwise struggle to have their voices heard.

Overall, the B2SA programme demonstrates a strong partnership approach, with clear evidence of positive impact on outcomes for children, young people and their families. The continued focus on relationship-based practice, early intervention and coordinated multi-agency working is supporting more effective transitions into adulthood and contributing to improved stability, independence and wellbeing.

2. NHS Dorset (Integrated Care Board)

The Integrated Care Board (ICB) remains a statutory safeguarding partner within the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP) and continues to work collaboratively with partners to fulfil its statutory duties in line with *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026*.

Actions taken

Over the past 12 months, NHS Dorset has continued to fulfil its statutory safeguarding responsibilities, working collaboratively with partners to strengthen multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in line with *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026*. Safeguarding governance has been maintained through established structures, including the Safeguarding Assurance Group, with continued oversight of NHS provider arrangements and system performance.

During 2025/26, NHS Dorset transitioned into a wider Integrated Care Board cluster alongside neighbouring systems, with new executive leadership arrangements established. Throughout this period of change, safeguarding leadership and professional capacity have remained stable, ensuring continuity of delivery against safeguarding priorities. The cluster governance arrangements became operational from April 2026, with further organisational development continuing ahead of a planned full merger in April 2027.

NHS Dorset has also continued to lead and contribute to key safeguarding activities, including chairing the Child Safeguarding Practice Review sub-group, supporting Rapid Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, and progressing system-wide work in relation to violence, domestic abuse and mental health. This has included the development of new data tools, targeted health interventions for vulnerable children, and leading the transformation of children and young people's mental health services.

Impact

This work has contributed to strengthened safeguarding practice and improved system-wide responses for children and young people.

- Continued strong multi-agency governance has ensured safeguarding remains well-embedded across the health system, with clear oversight and accountability during a period of organisational change
- Learning from child safeguarding practice reviews is being consistently shared and embedded across NHS services, supporting improved practice and safer decision-making
- Development of new data tools has strengthened the system's ability to identify and understand patterns of serious violence, supporting more informed partnership responses
- The specialist nursing pilot for children in care has demonstrated positive outcomes, enabling more targeted intervention for those at increased risk of exploitation, missing episodes and serious harm
- Work with primary care has improved awareness and understanding of domestic abuse, strengthening the ability of GPs to identify and respond to safeguarding concerns within families
- Progress in transforming children and young people's mental health services has improved access to support, with a focus on early help, crisis response and removing barriers to care, supporting children to receive the right help at the right time

- Additional initiatives, including trauma-informed training, improved safer sleeping guidance and enhanced access to dental care for children in care, have contributed to a more holistic and preventative safeguarding approach

Overall, NHS Dorset has maintained a strong focus on partnership working, contributing to more coordinated and effective safeguarding responses across the system.

Areas for focus

Whilst progress has been made, significant challenges remain across the system.

- Continued implementation of children and young people's mental health transformation is required to ensure sustained improvement in access, responsiveness and outcomes
- Demand relating to mental health and domestic abuse remains high, with increasing complexity of need across services
- Further work is needed to improve joined-up data and insight, particularly in understanding repeat presentations, vulnerability patterns and long-term outcomes for children
- Embedding learning from reviews consistently across all parts of the system remains a priority to ensure practice improvements translate into improved outcomes

NHS Dorset will continue to work with partners to strengthen early intervention, improve data insight and ensure that safeguarding responses remain coordinated, responsive and centred on the needs of children and young people.

3. Dorset Police

Actions taken

Over the last 12 months, Dorset Police have continued to strengthen their multi-agency safeguarding response, with a clear focus on the partnership priorities of violence experienced by children and young people, domestic abuse, and the impact of mental health. The latest knife crime awareness (Operation Sceptre) week was held from the 19th to the 25th May 2025. Locally, extensive communications aimed at raising awareness of knife crimes were issued. During this week, a youth consultation was launched and the data collected will be instrumental in shaping the Serious Violence Needs Assessment for the Dorset Community Safety Partnership. A consultation was also issued to school

Headteachers to understand their educational needs and challenges related to prevention work. This will help tailor support and resources to better address these challenges.

Targeted activity has included:

- Strengthening responses to knife crime and serious violence, including the introduction of additional focused deterrence workers and a virtual reality prevention pilot.
- Delivery of targeted interventions such as Operation Guardian (Skills 4 Safer Streets) and preparation for Operation Sceptre, focusing on both young people and parents
- Continued implementation of Operation Soteria to improve responses to sexual offences and violence against women and girls
- Enhancing safeguarding practice through improved quality assurance and Voice of the Child processes, including mandatory capture within Public Protection Notices (PPNs)
- Ongoing development of multi-agency arrangements, including the Extra Familial Risk and Harm Panel (EFRP) and new cross-force child-centred tactical meetings

In addition, Dorset Police have continued to strengthen governance and performance oversight through regular monitoring, thematic reviews and “reality testing” of safeguarding practice.

Impact

This work has contributed to measurable and meaningful improvements in safeguarding outcomes for children and young people in Dorset.

- Dorset has achieved a positive outcome rate of 68.7% for weapons possession offences, placing it first nationally, demonstrating effective enforcement alongside targeted prevention
- A focused approach to children identified as habitual knife carriers (21 children) has resulted in very low reoffending rates, indicating successful early intervention and risk reduction
- Prevention programmes such as Operation Guardian have led to improved understanding of risk among young people and increased trust in emergency services, as evidenced through programme evaluation
- Strengthened partnership work and improved investigative approaches have enhanced responses to serious sexual offences, supporting better outcomes for victims
- The embedding of Voice of the Child processes has improved the quality and consistency of safeguarding decision-making, ensuring children’s experiences and perspectives are better reflected in assessments and interventions

- Increased use of data and quality assurance has strengthened organisational learning and practice improvement, supporting more consistent safeguarding responses across the Force

In relation to domestic abuse, improved identification and reporting have contributed to a significant increase in applications under the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (57%) and rising MARAC referrals, indicating greater recognition of risk and improved multi-agency response to high-risk cases.

Joint work with partners to support children presenting in crisis has led to the introduction of youth workers in emergency departments, providing targeted intervention, particularly for children experiencing mental health difficulties, and improving access to support at the point of need.

Areas for focus

Despite these positive developments, demand across safeguarding services remains high, with increasing complexity of need. Key areas for continued focus include:

- Rising demand in domestic abuse, including high-risk cases and increasing reliance on specialist services
- The ongoing impact of mental health needs on children and families, particularly those presenting in crisis
- Ensuring that early intervention and prevention activity continues to reduce escalation to high-risk harm
- Strengthening the ability to track repeat vulnerability and long-term outcomes, to better understand whether interventions are reducing risk over time

Dorset Police will continue to work closely with partners to develop data, strengthen early intervention and ensure that safeguarding responses remain effective, timely and centred on the needs of children and young people.

4. Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service

Actions taken

Over the past 12 months, the Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service (YJS) has continued to strengthen its safeguarding approach through the implementation of the nationally recognised Child First model, ensuring that children's needs, strengths and voices are central to all interventions. This has been supported by a strong multi-agency approach and continued investment in specialist provision, including health, speech and language therapy, and psychological support.

The YJS has enhanced its response to violence experienced by children and young people, including extra-familial harm, through the expansion of its Speech and Language Therapy provision via the *Bridges Project*. This targeted intervention supports children at risk of exploitation or involvement in offending, with practitioners adapting delivery methods to better meet identified communication needs.

A more consistent and coordinated approach to knife crime has been established, including the introduction of first aid and restorative interventions, alongside joint work with Dorset Police to prepare for the implementation of updated national guidance.

In response to violence against women and girls (VAWG), the YJS introduced a Girls Group to provide a safe, structured environment to build confidence, explore healthy relationships and strengthen peer support. This will be further developed with the introduction of a Boys Group in 2026.

The service has continued to embed a trauma-informed approach through the Trauma Recovery Model, supported by multi-agency formulations and a dedicated health team, including CAMHS nurses. Quality assurance activity has also been strengthened, including a multi-agency audit focused on children in care involved in the youth justice system.

Impact

This work has contributed to improved engagement, understanding of need and more effective safeguarding responses for children and young people in contact with the youth justice system.

- Investment in speech and language therapy has significantly improved practitioners' ability to understand and respond to previously unidentified communication needs, ensuring that children's voices are more effectively heard and inform decision-making
- Targeted interventions for children at risk of extra-familial harm have strengthened early intervention and prevention, reducing the likelihood of escalation into offending
- A consistent approach to knife crime has supported risk reduction and improved understanding of consequences, with restorative approaches helping to address harm and promote behavioural change
- The Girls Group has provided a safe and supportive environment, with feedback demonstrating increased confidence, improved peer relationships and greater awareness of healthy relationships
- Multi-agency working continues to be a key strength, with strong collaboration between health, social care, education and police supporting coordinated and holistic responses to risk

- Trauma-informed practice has improved the ability of practitioners to respond to complex emotional and mental health needs, supporting better engagement and outcomes

Overall, the YJS is contributing to reduced risk of reoffending, improved engagement with services and more positive outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

Areas for focus

Whilst progress has been made, several areas require continued focus:

- A high proportion of children continue to present with complex and multiple vulnerabilities, including communication needs, trauma and mental health challenges
- Continued development of targeted interventions, including the planned Boys Group, is required to address harmful behaviours and promote positive relationships
- Further work is needed to strengthen understanding of repeat patterns of risk and long-term outcomes, including reoffending and sustained engagement
- Ensuring that learning from quality assurance activity is consistently embedded across practice remains a priority

The YJS will continue to strengthen early intervention, partnership working and trauma-informed practice to improve outcomes for children and young people across Dorset.

5. Dorset Council Education & Learning

Actions taken

Over the past 12 months, Dorset Council has continued to strengthen the role of education within safeguarding arrangements, in line with *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026*. Through the Families First for Children Pathfinder, partners have further developed approaches to ensure education is fully embedded within both strategic and operational safeguarding activity.

The Dorset Education Safeguarding Board has become an established mechanism for this work, providing oversight, challenge and coordination across all phases of education, from early years through to post-16 provision. The Board has continued to drive improvement through quality assurance activity, including analysis of Section 175/157 safeguarding audits, practitioner feedback and data review, alongside supporting the dissemination of learning from inspections and safeguarding reviews.

Education partners have been supported through the development of guidance, training and communication mechanisms, including Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

networks and safeguarding bulletins. Focus has also been placed on emerging risks, including online safety, with the introduction of guidance for schools on mobile phone use and wider digital safeguarding. This has been complemented by engagement activity with parents and carers, including a well-attended digital safeguarding event delivered in partnership with multi-agency colleagues.

In addition, the annual safeguarding conference, *“Wellbeing First: Building Resilience in Young Lives”*, brought together practitioners, partners and young people to share learning and strengthen multi-agency approaches to safeguarding and wellbeing.



Impact

This work has strengthened the visibility, influence and effectiveness of education within multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, leading to improved practice and outcomes for children and young people.

- Education is now more fully embedded within safeguarding governance, with stronger representation and influence in partnership decision-making
- Quality assurance activity has supported improved consistency of safeguarding practice across education settings, with learning effectively shared and acted upon

- Inspection outcomes continue to provide assurance that safeguarding arrangements in schools are effective, reflecting strong leadership and robust practice across the sector
- Increased focus on online safety and digital wellbeing has supported schools, parents and carers to better understand and manage emerging risks, contributing to safer environments for children
- Engagement activity, including conferences and events, has strengthened multi-agency understanding and collaboration, whilst ensuring that the voices of children and young people inform practice
- Ongoing communication through DSL networks and safeguarding updates has improved the sector's ability to recognise, respond to and escalate concerns in a timely and effective way

Overall, this work has contributed to a more connected, informed and responsive education safeguarding system, supporting improved identification of risk and more effective protection of children.

Areas for focus

Whilst progress has been made, further work is required to continue strengthening the role of education within safeguarding arrangements.

- Ensuring that the voice of education is consistently represented across all partnership activity and decision-making
- Continuing to respond to emerging safeguarding risks, particularly in relation to online safety and the evolving digital environment
- Strengthening the use of data and quality assurance to further understand patterns of risk, including persistent absence, vulnerability and safeguarding trends
- Supporting education settings to respond to the increasing complexity of need, particularly in relation to children with SEND and mental health needs
- Ensuring that learning from audits, reviews and inspections is consistently embedded across all settings

Dorset Council will continue to work in partnership with education providers to strengthen safeguarding arrangements and ensure that all children are supported to learn and thrive in safe environments.

6. Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People

Actions taken

Over the past 12 months, the Dorset Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People has continued to provide strong multi-agency leadership, aligning partners across health, education, social care, police and the voluntary and community sector to deliver the priorities set out in the Children, Young People and Families Plan.

Particular focus has been placed on strengthening co-production, ensuring that the voices of children, young people and families actively shape service design and delivery. This has been supported through ongoing engagement activity and collaboration across partner agencies.

The Alliance has continued to drive system-wide transformation, including delivery of the Families First for Children Pathfinder, development of early help and family support models, and improvements across early years, education and care provision. Strong governance arrangements have supported oversight of delivery across the seven strategic priority areas, ensuring a coordinated and joined-up approach across the partnership.

Impact

The work of the Strategic Alliance is delivering tangible and sustained improvements in outcomes for children and families across Dorset.

- A stronger focus on co-production has resulted in services that are more responsive to the needs and experiences of children, young people and families, improving engagement and accessibility
- Families are experiencing a healthier start to life, with improved support for parents and carers leading to stronger parent-child relationships and increased confidence in caring for babies
- Earlier identification of need across early years and education settings has contributed to improved school readiness and early development outcomes, supporting children to achieve their potential
- A continued focus on early help and coordinated family support has supported a reduction in the number of children entering care, enabling more children to remain safely within their families
- Positive external scrutiny outcomes, including the Outstanding judgement for Dorset Council Children's Services and positive findings from the Area SEND inspection, provide assurance that partnership working is effective and delivering improved outcomes

Overall, the Strategic Alliance is demonstrating strong system leadership, with collective action across partners leading to improved experiences and outcomes for children and young people.

Areas for focus

Whilst significant progress has been made, the Alliance recognises that continued focus is required to sustain and build on these improvements. Key areas include:

- Ensuring that co-production is consistently embedded across all services and extends to all groups of children and families, particularly those who are most vulnerable
- Continuing to strengthen early help and prevention, particularly in response to increasing complexity of need and demand across services
- Improving the use of data and intelligence to better understand patterns of need, including repeat vulnerability and long-term outcomes
- Maintaining momentum in delivering the Families First for Children Pathfinder reforms, ensuring that changes are embedded and deliver sustained impact
- Addressing inequalities to ensure that all children and young people have equitable access to support and positive outcomes

The Strategic Alliance will continue to provide strong leadership and oversight to ensure that services remain joined-up, effective and focused on improving outcomes for children and families across Dorset.

7. Adult Safeguarding Board Partnerships

Actions taken

Over the past 12 months, the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership has strengthened its partnership working with the Adult Safeguarding Board, recognising the importance of a whole-family and life-course approach to safeguarding.

Key developments have included improving transition pathways for young people moving into adult services, ensuring safeguarding arrangements remain effective as needs change. Adult Safeguarding colleagues have also been actively engaged in multi-agency safeguarding forums, including the Extra Familial Risk and Harm Panels, supporting joint oversight of complex cases.

Governance links between children's and adult safeguarding have been further strengthened, with representation at respective boards supporting improved alignment of priorities, shared learning and coordinated system leadership.

Impact

This strengthened collaboration has contributed to more joined-up safeguarding responses and improved support for children and young people as they transition into adulthood.

- Improved pathways have supported smoother transitions between children's and adult services, reducing the risk of gaps in safeguarding oversight
- Multi-agency involvement across both partnerships has enhanced the system's ability to identify and respond to complex and overlapping risks, particularly for older adolescents and young adults
- Stronger governance links have supported greater alignment of priorities and shared learning, improving consistency of safeguarding practice across services
- Increased collaboration has strengthened the system's understanding of risk across the life course, particularly where vulnerabilities extend beyond childhood

Overall, this partnership approach is supporting a more integrated and effective safeguarding system for individuals with complex and evolving needs.

Areas for focus

Whilst progress has been made, further work is required to strengthen this partnership approach.

- Continuing to develop and embed transition pathways, ensuring consistent support for all young people moving into adult services
- Strengthening the use of shared data and intelligence to better understand patterns of vulnerability across children's and adult services
- Ensuring that joint working arrangements are consistently applied across all relevant multi-agency settings
- Further embedding a whole-family safeguarding approach, particularly where risks span both children's and adult services

The partnership will continue to build on this progress, ensuring that safeguarding arrangements are fully aligned across services and responsive to the needs of children, young people and adults.

8. Voice of children and families

The voice of our children and families has continued to be a priority for the partnership in 2025-2026. This has been demonstrated in the following activities:

- During multi-agency audits we seek to gain feedback from families and young people about the services that they receive.
- We are continuing to embed the use of the mind of my own app in children services to seek feedback from young people.
- We co-designed our annual partnership conference in December 2025 with young people. This included a young person attended the steering group to support the development of the conference. We had a young person MC the conference, we had a presentation from young people and a Q&A panel at the end made up of lived experienced young people.
- We ensure that our practice across the multiagency partners is trauma informed and all direct work 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 Child in Care review and Child protection conferences.
- When we complete rapid reviews, we start with an update about the child and family to capture their voice/lived experience.
- When we complete LSCPR's we aim to involved the family, to make sure their voice and views is captured in the report.

We are continuing to develop our parent participation forum to support us in our on-going development of services. This group will be made of parents with lived experiences of services.

9. Aggregated Scrutiny

During the 2025/2026 reporting period, the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership commissioned an independent scrutiny review of its governance arrangements following its transition to a standalone partnership in 2024, with the aim of strengthening leadership, accountability and multi-agency effectiveness. The review drew on attendance at partnership meetings, analysis of documentation and engagement with safeguarding partners, and found a strong and well-functioning partnership with clear leadership, committed stakeholders and no systemic safeguarding concerns identified. Governance arrangements were found to be well established, supported by a dedicated business unit,

effective multi-agency audit processes and a strong learning culture where insights from reviews and audits are translated into practitioner briefings and training.

The partnership demonstrated positive impact through robust quality assurance activity, clear local ownership of safeguarding issues and the ability to respond flexibly to emerging need, alongside evidence of strong multi-agency collaboration and continuous improvement. The review also highlighted opportunities to further strengthen practice, including enhancing the visibility and influence of the voice of children and families, developing a more integrated approach to performance data through a shared dashboard, streamlining governance structures to improve efficiency, and ensuring clarity of roles across partnership boards.

Overall, the scrutiny confirms that the partnership is effective in its safeguarding role and provides a clear framework for further development to ensure increasingly strong oversight, impact and outcomes for children and families across Dorset.

Effective scrutiny within safeguarding partnerships extends beyond independent scrutiny and includes partners constructively challenging one another, testing evidence of impact and holding each other to account for improving outcomes for children and families.

Areas for focus

- Further strengthening the links between the Safeguarding Adults Board and Community Safety Partnership where we are working on shared priorities.
- Enhancing the visibility and influence of the voice of children and families,
- Developing a more integrated approach to performance data and further
- Evolving the MACPT Board.

Across audits, reviews, scrutiny activity and quality assurance undertaken during 2025/26, several recurring themes emerged. These included the importance of effective multi-agency information sharing, relationship-based practice with children and families, trauma-informed approaches, early identification of risk, and ensuring that children's lived experiences remain central to assessment, planning and decision making. These themes continue to inform partnership priorities and workforce development activity.

Section 5: Additional Information

Priority areas

Priority 1: Violence experienced by children and young people

- a) **Extra-familial harm** (including physical violence, knife crime, sexual violence and abuse including on-line abuse).

Why is this a priority?

In the previous set of the Partnership's strategic priorities 2023-2025, physical violence and knife crime and sexual violence and abuse, including on-line abuse featured as separate sub-categories of priority area number one (violence experienced by children and young people). The Partnership agreed to retain these sub-priority areas for 2025-2027 but bring them under the umbrella term of extra-familial harm, which includes various different types of harm that children and young people can experience outside of the family environment. This also reflects the Partnership's recently published extra-familial harm strategy.

Despite the numbers of under 18-year-olds as victims of knife crime having remained consistently low across the reporting period 2024-2025, the overall numbers of under 18-year-olds as victims of public place violent crimes remains high. Although noting that the number of repeat victims of public place violent crime has also remained stable since this was originally set as a priority area in 2023. In recognition of the fact that overall numbers of public place violent crimes where under 18-year-olds are victims remains high, the Partnership have agreed to retain this as a priority area given there is more work to do to try and reduce these numbers.

In relation to sexual violence and abuse, the Partnership have identified further learning in this area from recent local learning reviews which indicate that not all previous learning has been embedded across practice. In addition, the latest quarterly data shows that the number of children experiencing sexual exploitation has risen in the last year. There is a concern that the number of children experiencing sexual exploitation are underrepresented at the extra-familial harm panels, and so the Partnership is working to address this.

- b) **Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)**

Why is this a priority?

The Partnership recognises that violence against women and girls (VAWG) is increasing nationally and locally and so wanted to establish this as a sub-priority area in its own right.

Violence against women and girls makes up just under 20% per cent of all recorded crime in England and Wales. In the year ending March 2023, police recorded 103,135 rape and serious sexual offences. The Violence against Women and Girls research update (November 2023) contains several different data sources in relation to VAWG from across a number of different agencies and sectors.

There has already been a significant amount of multi-agency activity in relation to raising awareness and utilising preventative measures in relation to VAWG including:

- The Pineapple Project led by Dorset Council in conjunction with partners and local businesses has a strong focus on promoting and intervening around VAWG
- The Partnership's annual conference held in November 2024 was focused on VAWG

Priority 2: Domestic violence and abuse

Why is this a priority?

Domestic abuse continues to feature as one of the highest proportion of reasons for referral to Children's Social Care nationally and locally. The number of children identified as living in households where there has been reported domestic abuse has remained stable since Q3 2023/2024, with a slight increase in numbers in Q2 2024/2025. The number of referrals to Children's Social Care where domestic abuse was a factor increased by forty from 191 to 231, the highest level seen for seven quarters.

We also know that from the domestic abuse quality assurance activity completed by the Partnership in 2023-2024, that coercive control continues to be an area where professionals require additional support, recognising and effectively responding to.

In addition, a recent local child safeguarding practice review, and individual multi-agency reviews, have highlighted learning around how professionals recognise and respond to domestic abuse.

Priority 3: The impact of children's and parental mental health and wellbeing on children

Why is this a priority?

The Partnership decided to rename this priority, from the previous priority set of 'children's mental health and wellbeing', to refine its area of focus to acknowledge that children's mental health and emotional well-being is a broad area, not all of which is not overseen by the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership. The Partnership have refined the focus down to the impact children's and parental mental health and wellbeing on children.

Despite the slight reduction in quarter two data 2024/2025 in the number of children receiving a service from CAMHS, the numbers remain high overall. Mental health continues to be a predominant concern in referrals from the Police, and within social care and health, including child attendances at A+E departments. In total, there were 765

referrals to Children's Services family support and advice line related to child mental health from April 2024-March 2025. In addition, we have also had a recent child safeguarding practice review where there was a strong theme in the review of support required for the young person's mental health and emotional well-being. Between March 2024-2025, parental mental health overtook domestic abuse as the primary reason for referrals to Children's Social Care.

This mirrors the national trend which is set out in the ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Report (on page 9) as follows "And, for the first time, poor parental mental health has overtaken domestic abuse as the most common factor in children's social care assessments" There are some questions to be unpicked in terms of whether the higher number of referrals relating to parental mental health are due to increased mental health issues for parents/carers and/or whether partner agencies and Dorset Children's Services are identifying these concerns.

There has been some progress in relation to this priority area, in relation to the implementation locally of the national initiative 'right care, right person', for example. However, the Partnership decided that this would be retained as a priority area until we are satisfied that such initiatives have been embedded in practice and are making a difference to the overall numbers of children seeking mental health support and that we are satisfied that this is appropriately recognised and responded to across the Partnership.

Section 6: Funding

The Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership is committed to the principles of equitable and proportionate funding with shared and equal responsibilities as set out in Working Together (2026). There is a dedicated Business Team to support the work of the partnership across the Dorset area. The budget will also fund the Partnership's statutory functions, such as completion of Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Independent Scrutiny activity.

In 25/26, the contributions from NHS Dorset and PCC were split by 50% to Dorset SCP and 50% to BCP SCP. The Dorset SCP also received £1000 funding from probation.

The Partnership have been able to secure an independent reviewer, who will continue to work with the partnership in 26/27.

As at 31/03/26 the funding balance was £76,520. The 2026/27 contributions = £151,570 in total.

Section 7: Future Planning – Next Steps

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

- To implement the agreed recommendations from the independent scrutiny of the partnership's governance.
- To further develop and improve the voice of the child within the work of the partnership.
- To further develop our partnership data collection and how we present this data within the partnership for optimal impact on how we use the data to improve services and inform what our children and families need from partnering agencies in Dorset.
- To embed quarterly multi-agency audits with a forward plan to support the audit program.
- For the independent scrutineer to review how our partnership responds to child sexual abuse.
- Embed a forward plan of scrutiny work for the independent scrutineer to complete.

The partnership will further develop its use of data to better understand whether particular groups of children and families are disproportionately represented within safeguarding systems and to ensure services are responsive to need.



Section 8: Conclusion

As we conclude the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report for 2025–2026, we recognise the continued strength and impact of our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, underpinned by strong collaboration, shared responsibility and a clear commitment to improving outcomes for children and families across Dorset.

This year's quality assurance activity, including multi-agency audits, has demonstrated the strengths of our multiagency trauma-informed and child-centred approach, and how this leads to earlier identification of risk, stronger engagement with families, and more effective safeguarding interventions.

As we look into the future, we remain focused on further capturing and embedding the voice of our children, young people and families in the way that we work and improve services across the system.

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