Dorset Strategic Alliance for Babies, Children and Young People Annual Report 2025/2026

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2. Chair's introduction

"I am delighted to present the Annual Report of the Strategic Alliance for Babies, Children and Young People, highlighting the progress we have made together during 2025/26 to improve outcomes for babies, children, young people and families across Dorset.

This year has seen significant achievements across our partnership, including outstanding inspection outcomes, continued innovation through the Families First Partnership Programme, and tangible improvements in the lives of children and families. These successes reflect the dedication of colleagues across health, education, social care, policing, early years and the voluntary sector, working together towards our shared vision of making Dorset the best place to be a child.

While there is still more to do, I am proud of what we have achieved collectively and grateful to the children, young people, families and partners whose voices, experiences and commitment continue to shape our work. I hope this report demonstrates the positive difference we are making together and our ambition for the future."



Councillor Clare Sutton, Lead Member for Dorset Children Services and Strategic Alliance Chair

3. Introduction



The Strategic Alliance for Babies, Children and Young People is a unique partnership of organisations across Dorset, united by a shared ambition: to make Dorset the best place to be a child. Working together across health, education, social care, policing, early years and the voluntary and community sector, we are committed to improving outcomes for babies, children, young people and families.

During 2025/26, our partnership continued to grow in strength, delivering significant achievements and driving innovation across the children's system. From securing outstanding inspection outcomes and strengthening safeguarding arrangements, to expanding family support and improving opportunities for care-experienced young people, partners have worked collectively to make a positive difference in the lives of children and families.

This report highlights the progress we have made against our seven strategic priorities and demonstrates how partnership working, shared leadership and the voices of children, young people and families are helping to create lasting change across Dorset.

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4. Governance

How the Strategic Alliance for Babies, Children and Young People fits into our wider partnership delivery.

Partners – For example:

- Voluntary Community Secor
- Police
- Dorset Schools and Education Providers
- Dorset Parent Carer Partnership
- Health

DORSET Safeguarding Children Partnership

Strategic Alliance for Babies, Children and Young People

Dorset Council's Children Services

Integrated Care Board

All our partners are linked into our joint, multi-agency approach to design, deliver and oversee the impact of services, with children at the heart of what we do.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Our Children and Young People (CYP)

Dorset has almost 88,000 0–24-year-olds. This makes up just under a quarter of Dorset residents.

The population has decreased by about 6,600 since 2011, and estimate predict this trend will continue.

The percentage of children eligible for free school meals has been increasing.

Some areas of Dorset have high deprivation, and overall, 11% of under 16's live in low-income families

Dorset has some unique environmental features which makes it a special place. However, greenspace access is not equitable.

About 6,500 0-15 year olds live in overcrowded households.

In Dorset, CYP generally achieve well. The percentage of young people not in education, employment or training continues to improve.

Pupil absence remains high post-pandemic.

Generally, the health behaviours of our CYP compare favourably to England.

We do see variation – activity levels are lowest for Years 3-4, and some areas see higher rates of obesity.

Nationally 1 in 6 children are estimated to have a mental health disorder.

We have seen an increase in SEN pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health as their primary need.

Hospital admission rates for CORE20Plus5 conditions have been improving, however some have increased in the last 2 years.

Children in care are identified as a priority group for oral health

Breastfeeding rates and mothers smoking at time of delivery have continued to improve.

There may be some needs around motor skills and fine personal-social skills in young children.

Some areas continue to see increasing demand for services including SEND and CAMHS.

Social Care referrals remain below the England average and children in need decreased in 2022/23.

Health needs for consideration in future planning include; smoking and vaping, digital wellbeing, growing mental health challenges, physical fitness and obesity prevention.

Variation in immunisation uptake rates.

6. Young People's Voice, Choice and Independence

What children and young people in care told us:

- 92% of children said they always feel safe where they live.
- 93% of children aged 4-7 reported feeling happy.
- 76% of young people regularly talk to trusted adults about things that matter to them.
- Every child aged 4-11 and all but one older child said they trust the adults they live with.



These are excellent indicators of belonging, relationships and wellbeing.

What families told us:

- 98% understand why children's services are involved
- 75% report life has improved for their child
- 80% are satisfied with the service they received

High levels of family understanding and satisfaction demonstrate effective communication and partnership working

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Young People's Voice, Choice and Independence

What children and young people in care have told us:

"Since M has been supporting me, things are a lot better for me. M has helped me more than any social worker I have ever had."

"She's the best." (when asked whether their practitioner listened to and acted on their wishes and feelings)

"I don't drink, I am accepting support, I get along really well… I trust she will be doing the right thing for me."

"Support for me has been really good." (Young person rating support 10/10)

Listening to children and young people remains central to improving services. Through quality assurance audits, feedback was gathered from young people during 2026, with 89-90% reporting a positive experience of support from Children's Services. Young people described trusted relationships with practitioners, feeling listened to and supported through challenges in their lives. Their feedback has also highlighted areas for improvement, including communication, keeping promises and ensuring their views directly influence planning and decision-making.

Audit findings continue to drive service improvements, reinforcing our commitment to making children's voices visible, influential and at the heart of practice.

Children & Young People's Voice continued

The following are case studies of young people involved with **The Harbour,** which is an integrated service for children and young people which brings together a range of accommodation options, services and outreach support centred around a residential hub in Weymouth.

Case Study 1 - A young person experiencing multiple placement moves and complex challenges was supported by The Harbour through a trauma-informed, relationship-based approach.

- Improved engagement with trusted adults and support services.
- Greater awareness of risk, exploitation and personal safety.
- Increased emotional insight, resilience and self-awareness.
- Improved understanding of healthy relationships.
- Demonstrated accountability and empathy through restorative work.
- Continued engagement with professionals despite experiencing 13 placement moves.
- One-Sentence Impact Statement

This story demonstrates how consistent, trauma-informed relationships can help vulnerable young people build resilience, strengthen protective factors and maintain hope and engagement through periods of significant instability.

"Having trusted adults who don't give up on you can make all the difference."

Children & Young People's Voice continued

Case Study 2 – A young person with ASD/PDA experienced significant instability, including family breakdown, educational disruption, exploitation concerns and 13 care placement moves. Repeated changes in living arrangements made it difficult to build trusting relationships with professionals and increased their vulnerability to risk.

The Harbour provided consistent support throughout this instability, using a trauma-informed, relationship-based approach to build trust, increase emotional awareness, address risks around exploitation, and strengthen understanding of healthy relationships. Through practical support and restorative work, the young person was supported to reflect on their experiences, take responsibility for their actions and develop positive coping strategies.

As a result, they remained engaged with support despite multiple placement moves, developed stronger relationships with trusted adults, improved their awareness of risk and personal safety, increased emotional resilience, and built protective factors that will support them into adulthood.

"Before Harbour, I would have just got angry and walked away. Now I think more about what's going on for me and how my actions affect other people. It's helped me understand myself better.“ - *Young person supported by Harbour*

Children & Young People's Voice continued

Case Study 3 - A young person facing family breakdown and emotional wellbeing challenges was supported by The Harbour to rebuild family relationships, improve stability and prepare for adulthood.

- Family relationships successfully rebuilt through reunification work.
- Self-harming behaviours significantly reduced through trusted relationships and emotional wellbeing support.
- Missing episodes and exploitation concerns ceased.
- Progression to Weymouth College and positive plans for adulthood.
- Young person's voice, wishes and aspirations remained central to planning and support.

"Having someone who listened, understood and stayed alongside me made a difference."

Young people supported through the **Outreach Service** continue to shape their own futures and make progress towards goals that matter to them.

Examples include young people securing employment, accessing education and training opportunities, developing greater independence, improving wellbeing, and articulating their aspirations for the future. Staff report that young people are increasingly exercising choice, building confidence and taking active steps towards adulthood.

7. Strong Partnerships, Real Impact

The Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People brings together partners from across health, education, social care, policing and the voluntary and community sector with a shared ambition: to help every child and young person in Dorset thrive. By working collaboratively, sharing responsibility and listening closely to children, young people and families, we are creating a more connected system of support that delivers better outcomes for our communities.

This commitment to partnership and co-production is making a tangible difference across Dorset. During 2025/26 we celebrated several significant achievements, including:

- Dorset Council established a Children's Rights Committee, to embed the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- 94% of young people supported by Harbour Outreach remaining safely with their families
- Outstanding Inspection of Local Authority Childrens Services (ILACS) outcome
- Pupil attendance rates remaining above national comparators at 88%
- 71% of children in care living in foster homes
- 99% of care leavers reporting it is easy to contact their worker
- More than 98% of care leavers living in suitable accommodation
- Over 17,000 hours of Short Breaks delivered for children with SEND and disabilities
- The number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system remained at historically low levels in 2025/26, continuing the downward trend from 106 in 2018/19 to 48 in 2025/26.



These outcomes reflect the collective impact of organisations working together through a shared vision and a whole-system approach.

8. Putting Partnership into Practice

One of the strongest examples of this approach is the Families First Partnership Programme. As one of only three original Pathfinder local authorities, Dorset helped test and shape children's social care reforms that are now being rolled out nationally across England.

Through collaboration across early help, family help, health, education, policing and community services, partners are strengthening support for families earlier, reducing duplication and ensuring children receive the right help at the right time. This work directly supports the Alliance priorities of Best Start in Life, Young and Thriving, Local Family Help, and Safe at Home and in the Community.

Local Alliance Groups also play a vital role in turning strategic priorities into local action. Through place-based partnership working, funding has been directed towards community-led projects, local family support initiatives and Dorset Parent-Infant Psychotherapy (DorPIP) programmes, enabling solutions to be designed and delivered by the communities they serve.

The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide

Delivery expectations for statutory safeguarding partners in England: Year 2 (2026 to 2027)

March 2026



9. Keeping Children Safe Together

Strong partnerships are particularly evident in safeguarding. Across Dorset, agencies continue to work together through integrated safeguarding arrangements, sharing information, coordinating responses and improving outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.



Dorset Police have achieved notable successes, with Dorset ranking first nationally for knife crime rate performance and second nationally for knife crime positive outcomes. The proportion of knife crime offences resulting in a positive outcome increased from 23.2% in 2024/25 to 29.5% in 2025/26, with arrest rates remaining stable at around 40%. Effective multi-agency safeguarding arrangements contributed to arrests linked to child abuse investigations more than doubling during the year, while specialist police teams delivered almost one-third of all positive outcomes for rape and serious sexual offences across Dorset.

The Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership continues to strengthen the workforce through high-quality multi-agency learning. Between 2023 and 2026, more than 410 training courses have been delivered to over 5,100 practitioners, with satisfaction rates consistently between 98% and 99%. The impact is clear: over half of participants reported changes to their professional practice, while three-quarters identified a positive impact for children, young people and families.

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10. Delivering Better Outcomes Through Collaboration

The Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service demonstrates the benefits of effective partnership working. National inspection activity highlighted the service as an example of good practice, recognising strengths in joint working with Dorset Police, restorative justice approaches and speech and language support. Collaborative initiatives such as the Re-Engage Project, cross-sector training and integrated health support help children access services earlier, remain engaged in education and avoid escalation into the youth justice system.

These partnerships have contributed to stronger victim-focused outcomes, improved access to support and more positive long-term outcomes for children, young people and families across Dorset.

As a national Families First Pathfinder, Dorset is contributing to sector-wide improvement by sharing learning, evidence and practical experience with other local authorities, helping to shape future approaches to family help, safeguarding and integrated service delivery.

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11. Leading Innovation and Transformation

Dorset continues to demonstrate sector leadership through a range of innovative programmes and nationally significant developments. Alongside the Families First Pathfinder, partners are driving transformation through initiatives including the Best Start Local Plan, Children and Young People's Mental Health Transformation and THRIVE implementation, Valuing Care, Valuing SEND, the Birth to Settled Adulthood model and the Private Law Pathfinder.



Through models such as Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), Operation Encompass and Families First Partnership, partners have strengthened information sharing, reduced duplication and improved early intervention across the system.

Together, these developments reflect a partnership that is not only working well today but is also shaping a stronger, more joined-up children's system for the future. Most importantly, they demonstrate how collective leadership, shared accountability and the voices of children and families are driving real and lasting impact across Dorset.

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12. What external inspections said about Dorset

- Outstanding ILACS inspection (March 2025).
- Ofsted recognition of effective multi-agency decision-making.
- Positive Public Digital review of the Front Door (January 2025).
- All Childrens Homes rated Good or Outstanding.

"Strong collaborative working is evident from operational delivery through to strategic decision-making.“

"Children continue to be placed at the heart of Dorset.“



"Children and families receive the help they need at the earliest point.“

"Children at risk of exploitation receive a well-coordinated multi-agency response.“

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13. Our strategic priorities

The next section will look at a summary of progress and impact over the last 12-months, and next steps for the 7 Priorities in our Babies, Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2023-33.

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

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

Our Babies, Children, Young People and Families Plan can be accessed here:
Children, Young People and Families' Plan 2023 to 2033 - Dorset Council

13.1 Best Start In Life - Progress

Best Start in Life – Ensuring babies, young children and their families receive the early support, care and opportunities they need to have the healthiest possible start in life. Our Best Start in Life priority has been refreshed through Dorset's new Best Start Local Plan, creating a more integrated approach to supporting babies, young children and families.

- Co-produced and published Dorset's Best Start Local Plan, creating a single countywide framework across health, education, family hubs, early years settings and the voluntary and community sector.
- Successfully secured and mobilised government funding to expand the Best Start Family Hub Network, increasing access to integrated support for families.
- Established the subgroup for the School Readiness Partnership and Action Plan, aligning multi-agency activity towards improving children's readiness for school and achievement of the Good Level of Development target.
- Expanded evidence-based parenting and early intervention programmes across Dorset, increasing opportunities for families to access support locally.
- Initiated development of the multi-agency workforce development plan review through delivery of training and practice improvement programmes across Family Hubs, health services, early years settings and community partners.
- Continued implementation of targeted health improvement initiatives, including Healthy Movers, supporting families to develop healthy lifestyles and improve outcomes for young children.
- Maintained strong partnership governance for Best Start in Life through the new 0-25 Early Help Partnership Group, enabling coordinated action to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes from pregnancy to age five



Best Start In Life - Impact



- Enhanced support for care-experienced parents includes:
  - Family Hub support
  - Enhanced health support
  - Peer mentoring
  - Family Network Meetings
- 71% of parents participating in parental conflict programmes reported reduced conflict at home, helping create calmer and more stable environments for children.
- 35 care-experienced young people who were pregnant or parenting received targeted support during the year.
- Family Hubs are expanding from existing provision towards a network of 11 Family Hubs across Dorset, increasing access to integrated support.
- Improved partnership working between health, education, Family Hubs and community services is strengthening earlier identification of need and intervention.
- Good Level of Development (GLD): 74.9%, up 5.2 percentage points from last year and above the national average of 72.3%.
- 55% of children are meeting the activity recommendations, an improvement on pre-pandemic levels.
- An average of 60.9% of infants were breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks during 2025/26 higher than the England average.

Best Start In Life - Impact



The difference being made for children and families:

- More joined-up support: Families can access support more easily through better coordination between health, education, Family Hubs and community services.
- Earlier help: Children are more likely to receive support sooner, preventing needs from escalating and improving outcomes.
- Improved school readiness: A stronger focus on communication, language and early learning is helping children arrive at school ready to learn.
- Reducing inequalities: Targeted support is helping disadvantaged children and families access the services and opportunities they need to thrive.
- Stronger support for care-experienced families: Care-experienced parents and young people are receiving tailored support, while the partnership's developing Corporate Grandparent approach is improving support around babies and infants.

Partners are increasingly working as one system to provide earlier, more accessible and targeted support, helping children get the best start in life and reducing the likelihood of needs escalating.

Best Start In Life – Next Steps

Strategic Priorities

Keeping babies safe

- Earlier identification of concerns.
- Strengthen support for parents and carers.

Healthy growth and development

- Promote infant feeding, healthy lifestyles and vaccinations.

School readiness

- Strengthen language, communication and social development.

Supporting families

- Expand Family Hubs and local support networks.

Key Aim

Increase the percentage of children achieving a Good Level of Development by 2028, particularly for disadvantaged children.



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13.2 Young And Thriving - Progress

Young and Thriving – Supporting children and young people to be healthy, resilient, engaged and prepared for adulthood, employment and independent living. Here is a high-level summary of the progress and impact we've made over the last year. We have also identified our next steps over the next year.



Progress

- Continued development of the Birth to Settled Adulthood Service.
- Expanded support for young people with SEND preparing for adulthood.
- Strengthened employment and training opportunities and support for successful transitions post 16
- Increased focus on young carers and vulnerable young people.
- Continued investment in youth work, participation and youth voice.
- Developing a youth sufficiency needs assessment which will inform a Dorset wide youth strategy
- Improved partnership focus on emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Young And Thriving - Impact



- Expansion of Birth to Settled Adulthood services.
- 17,000+ hours of Short Breaks delivered.
- 150 young people and their families attended Coffee and Careers events facilitated by Dorset Careers Hub, offering advice and guidance around next steps to employment and training
- 103 young carers supported.
- 71% of care leavers aged 18-25 are in education, employment or training, exceeding council targets and outperforming many comparators.
- 24 care leavers are attending university, including one doctoral student and two postgraduates.
- 15 care-experienced young people are employed through Dorset Council apprenticeships, with a further 10 opportunities secured.
- 68 young people engaged with Dorset's Pathway to Employment programme.
- 99% of care leavers say it is easy to contact their Personal Adviser.
- 97% of young people were involved in creating their pathway plan.
- 98.4% of care leavers are living in suitable accommodation.
- 36 young people remain in Staying Put arrangements, enabling gradual transition into adulthood.
- Dorset has expanded accommodation provision and now provides housing for up to 24 care leavers across council-owned properties.
- Partnerships with landlords have secured accommodation for 15 care leavers.

These show genuine progress towards adulthood and independence.

Young And Thriving - Impact

The difference being made for young people:

- **Preparation for adulthood -** More young people are gaining skills for independence and employment.
- **Improved support for SEND -** Better pathways into adulthood and employment.
- **Improved wellbeing -** More coordinated and earlier emotional wellbeing support
- **Greater participation -** Young people increasingly influence services and decision-making.



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Young And Thriving – Next Steps



Strategic Priorities

- Strengthen services that enable young people to achieve their aspirations and realise their potential as they prepare for adulthood, supporting increased participation in education, employment and training opportunities
- Focus on how we can better support young people with their emotional wellbeing and access to early intervention
- Continue to promote meaningful youth voice and participation ensuring children and young people with SEND experience positive transitions and preparation for adulthood.
- Continue to develop the youth work offer in Dorset, ensuring all young people can access safe places, someone safe to talk to who cares, and something to do

Key Aim

Ensure every young person has access to opportunities, support and relationships that help them thrive into adulthood.

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13.3 Good Care Provision - Progress

Good Care Provision – Making sure children who need care or protection receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time, as close to home as possible. Here is a high-level summary of the progress and impact we've made over the last year. We have also identified our next steps over the next year.



Progress

•Expanded Dorset's focus on keeping children close to home.

•Increased support for kinship care arrangements.

•Continued development of local fostering capacity.

•Improved support for care leavers.

•Increased emphasis on stable, loving relationships.

•Enhanced support to prevent children entering care where safe to do so.

Good Care Provision - Impact

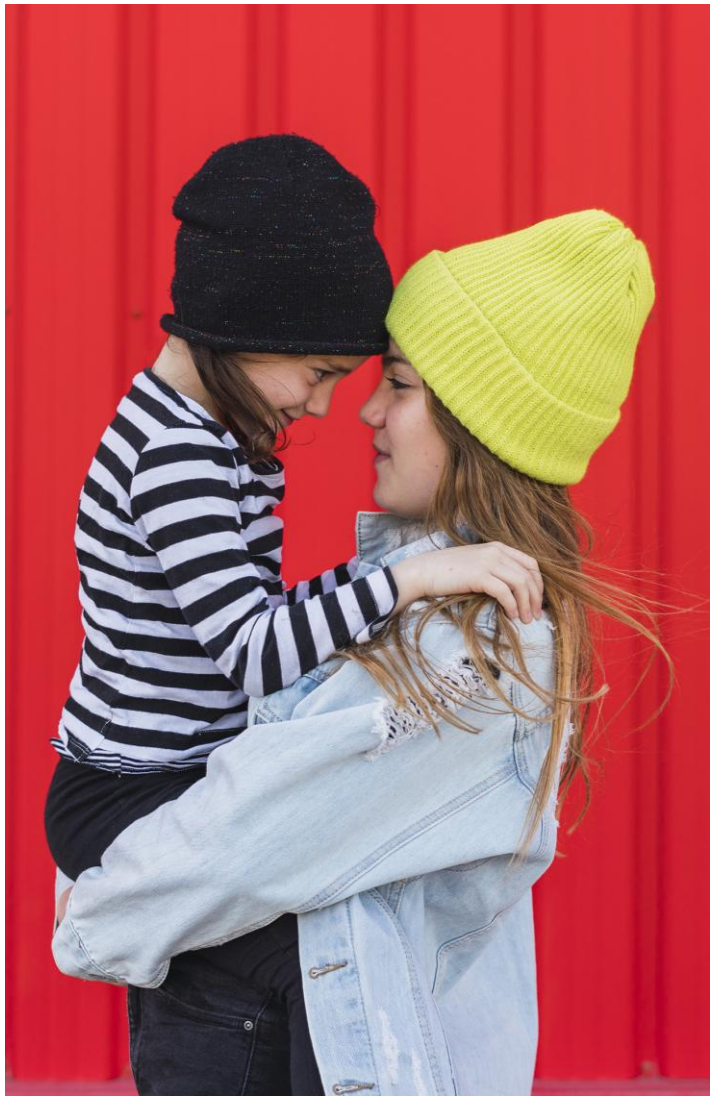
- 94% of Harbour-supported children remained safely with their families, helping prevent entry into care.
- All Dorset children's homes rated Good or Outstanding.
- Increased kinship care and Special Guardianship Orders.
- High placement stability compared with statistical neighbours.
- Valuing CARE delivering improved matching and greater placement stability for children.
- 98% of children in care are in suitable accommodation.
- 71% of children in care now live in foster care, exceeding both national and statistical neighbour averages.
- 71% are in education, employment or training.
- 88% attendance for children in care.
- 13% of children achieved permanence through adoption, an increase from 10% the previous year.
- 24% of children leaving care achieved permanence through reunification with parents or those with parental responsibility, up from 16% the previous year.
- 99% of care leavers in touch with services.
- 36 Staying Put arrangements in place.
- Special Guardianship Orders increased significantly, with 16% of children leaving care achieving permanence through an SGO compared with 5% the previous year.
- 92% of children reported they always feel safe where they live.
- 80% of children aged 11-17 said they always feel settled where they live, up from 71%.

These tell a compelling story about permanence, belonging and safety.

Good Care Provision – Impact

The difference being made for children and families:

- **More children remaining within family networks -** Greater use of kinship arrangements where appropriate.
- **Improved stability -** Children experience fewer disruptions and stronger relationships.
- **Better local provision -** More children remain connected to family, school and community.
- **Stronger preparation for adulthood -** Care experienced young people receive improved support as they transition to independence.



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Good Care Provision – Next Steps



Strategic Focus:

- Keeping children close to home.
- Increasing fostering capacity.
- Growing kinship care support.
- Improving care sufficiency.
- Strengthening support for care leavers.

Key Aim

Provide every child with a stable, loving home and enduring relationships.

13.4 Best Education For All - Progress

Best Education for All – Enabling every child and young person to access high-quality education that helps them achieve their potential, regardless of their circumstances. Here is a high-level summary of the progress and impact we've made over the last year. We have also identified our next steps.



Progress

•Aligned local ambitions with the Government's education reforms.

•Continued focus on inclusion and belonging.

•Strengthened support for children with SEND.

•Expanded collaboration between schools and partners including the Department for Education, Multi-Academy Trust CEOs, Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE), and Headteachers.

•Increased focus on narrowing attainment gaps

Best Education For All – Impact

As at Summer 2026

- Attendance at 88%, above national comparators.
- Virtual School conference attended by 120 professionals with 99% reporting positive impact.
- 9 education settings participating in Inclusion and Belonging action research.
- Suspensions for children in care reduced from 15% to 10% of the cohort.
- No children in care have been permanently excluded.
- 98% of Personal Education Plans were judged good or outstanding.
- 165 children and young people had educational achievements celebrated through the Virtual School.
- Since the introduction of the revised Ofsted inspection framework in Autumn 2025, every inspected school in Dorset (100%) has met Ofsted's safeguarding requirements.



This demonstrates that vulnerable children are not only attending school but achieving and participating.

Best Education for All – Impact



The difference being made for children and young people:

Educational outcomes improved across Dorset during 2025/26, reflecting the commitment of pupils, schools, settings and partner services. While work continues to reduce variation and further improve outcomes, provisional results show encouraging progress:

- **Phonics:** 84.2%, up 5 percentage points from last year and above the national average of 81.8%.
- **Key Stage 2:** Improvement across all measures, with Reading, Writing and Mathematics combined increasing by 3 percentage points to 60%. Although still below the national figure of 63%, Dorset improved at a faster rate than nationally, narrowing the gap. Individual improvements included Mathematics (+3%), Writing (+2%), Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling (+2%), and Reading (+1%).
- **Key Stage 4:** 73% achieved English Grade 4+, 70% achieved Maths Grade 4+, and the combined English and Maths measure increased by 2 percentage points to 63%. National figures are yet to be confirmed.

In June, more than **120 Headteachers and Senior Leaders** from over **70 Dorset settings** attended the Dorset Education Conference, with a strong focus on leading inclusive schools.

Best Education For All – Next Steps



Strategic Focus

- Further improve outcomes at Key Stage 2.
- Fulfil requirements of the SEND reform proposal in Dorset.
- Continue work to ensure the long-term sustainability of education settings across Dorset.

Key Goals

- Submit the School-Based Nursery (SBN3) multi-year proposal by 30 September 2026.
- Improve attainment so that Dorset outcomes are at least in line with national averages, with a particular focus on continued improvement at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.
- Increase inclusion for children and young people with SEND across all settings as part of the wider SEND reform programme.
- Move into the Dorset Local SEND Transformation (formerly Reform) Plan – including the introduction of new frameworks to strengthen Dorset's Universal Offer and establish a Dorset Inclusion Charter.
- Implementation of the new RISE funding - this will be used to strengthen partnership working with schools, trusts and other stakeholders to secure improved educational outcomes for all children and young people.
- Monitor and evaluate progress through the use of performance data, school engagement and targeted support.

Best Education for All – Since March 2026

Dorset Local SEND Transformation Plan Developed to Implement National SEND Reform

During 2025/26, Dorset developed and secured approval from the Department for Education for its Local SEND Transformation Plan. Shaped through extensive engagement with children and young people, families, education settings, health partners and support services, the plan sets out a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND through a more inclusive and responsive education system.

At the heart of the plan is Dorset's vision that children and young people are healthy, happy and safe, feel valued and understood, and achieve meaningful outcomes that enable them to lead fulfilling and independent lives. Through inclusive education, high-quality support and strong partnership working, we aim to ensure that all children and young people are empowered to reach their full potential.

This vision will be delivered through a more inclusive, preventative and locally responsive system, underpinned by Dorset's Expertise Offer (our local Experts at Hand model), which will build confidence and capability across settings to identify and meet needs earlier.

Implementation is now underway, focused on delivering four key outcomes:

- Identify needs earlier and deliver timely support in the right setting
- Strengthen inclusive, local provision
- Improve outcomes and experiences for children, young people and families
- Ensure long-term sustainability and effective use of resources

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13.5 Best Place To Live - Progress

Best Place to Live – Creating safe, inclusive and sustainable communities where children, young people and families can flourish and feel connected. Here is a high-level summary of the progress and impact we've made over the last year. We have also identified our next steps.



Progress

- Increased opportunities for youth participation.
- Expanded work with Youth Parliament and youth voice groups.
- Greater focus on inclusion and belonging.
- Increased involvement of young people in environmental priorities and climate action.
- Increased involvement of young people in SEND reform and service development.
- Became a Children's Rights Respecting Authority and recognised care experience as a local protected characteristic, strengthening support for care-experienced children and young people.
- Young people involved in reviewing education resources to ensure they remain relevant and accessible.
- Youth Parliament and Dorset Youth Council leading campaigns on wellbeing, education, transport and rurality.
- Young people helping to make funding decisions through the Youth Grant Fund.
- Expanded focus on the Safe & Settled and Identity priorities through Dorset Unstoppables Network.
- Delivered holiday activities, food and enrichment opportunities through 73 providers operating across 80 venues throughout Dorset, helping children and young people access positive experiences close to home.
- Expanded provision into 17 villages, improving access for children and families living in rural communities.
- Supported providers through SEND training and additional funding for 1:1 support, increasing opportunities for children with additional needs to participate.

Best Place To Live - Impact

- Young people reviewed Virtual School education resources, ensuring support materials reflect their needs and lived experiences.
- Two Members of Youth Parliament (MYP) and two Deputy MYPs were appointed, championing young people's priorities around education, transport and rurality.
- Dorset Youth Council launched the "Wellbeing Matters Just as Much as Grades" campaign, promoting emotional wellbeing alongside academic achievement.
- Young people played a central role in allocating Youth Grant Fund funding, ensuring investment reflected the priorities of their peers and providing young people with somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to
- Following the Children's Rights Education Conference, 21 schools and education settings registered interest in becoming Rights Respecting Schools, supported through Dorset Council-funded accreditation.
- 86% of care leavers participated in the Bright Spots survey, up from 38% previously, giving more children influence over service design.
- More than 100 professionals attended "In My Shoes" training, helping services better understand care experience.
- Care experienced young people co-designed improvements through themed workshops covering identity, belonging, education, health and relationships.
- Children's feedback directly informs Corporate Parenting Partnership Delivery Group actions through a "You Said, We Did" approach.
- The Holiday Activity and Food programme delivered almost 6,000 places for children and young people with SEND during Summer 2025, helping ensure holiday activities are accessible and inclusive.

Best Place To Live - Impact



The difference being made for children and families:

Young people are increasingly influencing decisions that affect their lives, from shaping education resources and SEND reforms to leading campaigns, allocating funding and promoting children's rights across Dorset.

- **Children's voices shaping decisions -** Young people have influenced education resources, SEND reforms and service development.
- **Greater sense of belonging -** Work on identity and children's rights has helped young people feel heard, valued and represented.
- **More inclusive communities -** Increased awareness of emotional wellbeing, SEND needs and children's rights across schools and services.
- **Improved participation -** Young people are now helping to shape policy, allocate funding and lead campaigns on issues that matter to them.
- **Health** - Served more than 20,000 nutritious meals and worked with Friendly Food Club to provide cooking sessions for over 1,400 children, promoting healthy eating and food confidence.
- **Wellbeing** - Provided opportunities for children to be active, build confidence, develop new skills and create friendships through sports, outdoor learning, creative and cultural activities.

Best Place To Live - Next Steps



Strategic Focus

- Continuing to build safe and inclusive communities
- Strengthening youth participation
- Improving accessibility for children and young people
- Helping young people feel connected to their communities
- Supporting youth-led climate and environmental action
- Expanding inclusive holiday provision to reach more children and young people
- Increasing awareness and accessibility of the Holiday Activity and Food programme to ensure eligible families can benefit from available opportunities.

Key Aim

Ensure Dorset is a place where every child feels safe, welcome and able to participate.

13.6 Local Family Help - Progress

Transforming Family Support Across Dorset

During 2025/26 we continued to reshape support for children, young people and families through Dorset's Local Family Help approach, bringing partners together to provide earlier, more joined-up support.



Key achievements

- Published Dorset's Early Help Strategy 2026-2029
- Continued delivery of Families First reforms
- Established the 0-25 Early Help Partnership Group
- Expanded Family Hub and community-based support
- Strengthened Local Alliance Group partnerships
- Embedded the "tell your story once" approach

Local Family Help - Impact

Easier Access
Family Hubs and locality networks are making it easier for families to identify and access support earlier.

More Joined-Up Support
Children, young people and families experience better coordination between agencies, reducing duplication and improving family experience.

Earlier Intervention
Local Family Help partners are identifying needs sooner and providing support before issues escalate.

Stronger Communities
Investment through Family Hubs and Local Alliance Groups is increasing local capacity and community-led support.

Reduced Inequalities
The partnership continues to target support towards communities and families experiencing disadvantage.



Local Family Help - Impact

Evidence of Progress

- **8,869 contacts** received through Dorset's Front Door
- Referral and re-referral rates remain below statistical neighbour averages
- Children and families increasingly benefit from a Single Assessment process
- Consistency of worker relationships recognised through inspection activity
- Dorset continues to support national Families First implementation
- **£600k invested through Local Alliance Groups** to strengthen prevention and early intervention across Dorset localities
- Family Hubs continue to extend community access to support



Local Family Help - Next Steps



- **Embed Families First** - Continue implementation of Dorset's Local Family Help model
- **Strengthen Family Hubs and Early Support -** Expand access and improve pathways into support
- **Deliver a Stronger Best Start -** Improve school readiness and outcomes in the earliest years
- **Build a Connected 0-25 System -** Join up support from pregnancy through young adulthood
- **Strengthen Community Partnerships -** Grow the role of Local Alliance Groups and community organisations
- **Embed Family Voice -** Ensure children, young people and families shape services and decisions

13.7 Safe At Home And In The Community - Progress

Keeping Children Safe at Home and in the Community – Working together to prevent harm and ensure children and young people are protected, supported and safe wherever they live and spend their time. Here is a high-level summary of the progress and impact we've made over the last year. We have also identified our next steps.



Progress

- Adapted our Thrive model to comply with updated Families First Partnership guidance, with integrated family help and a multi-agency child protection team.
- Strengthened multi-agency safeguarding arrangements across Dorset.
- Expanded contextual safeguarding and Extra Familial Harm approaches with positive feedback from research led by the Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding.
- Increased focus on domestic abuse, violence against women and girls, and child exploitation.
- Enhanced partnership work with Dorset Police and community safety partners to reduce violence and knife crime.
- Strengthened use of learning, audit and quality assurance to improve outcomes for vulnerable children.
- Whole family approach through Safeguarding Families Together, which now includes a new family court pathway for high-risk harm relating to parental substance use.

Safe At Home And In The Community - Impact

- Missing episodes continue to reduce.
- 113 young people supported through Extra Familial Harm arrangements.
- Increasing use of Family Networks and Family Group Conferences supporting more children to be supported safely within their family networks.
- Multi-agency audits identified strong partnership responses to children experiencing extra-familial harm, leading to better engagement, improved attendance and increased safety.
- Child abuse investigation arrests more than doubled, reflecting improved identification of vulnerability and earlier safeguarding intervention.
- Operation Encompass expanded into Early Years settings, enabling vulnerable children exposed to domestic abuse to receive support sooner.
- The Family Support and Advice Line provides an increasingly integrated approach to children, families and partners to access a range of signposting, support, assessment and intervention.
- Targeted interventions with young people identified as habitual knife carriers are contributing to low levels of reoffending.
- Dorset ranks 1st nationally for performance dealing with knife crime and 2nd nationally for positive outcomes.
- Multi-agency learning continues to strengthen practice, with over 5,100 practitioners participating in safeguarding training between 2023 and 2026.



Safe At Home And In The Community - Impact

The difference being made for children and families:

- **Safer at home** – Earlier identification of domestic abuse, neglect and safeguarding concerns enables families to receive support before risks escalate.

- **Safer in communities** – Children at risk of exploitation, violence and extra-familial harm benefit from coordinated multi-agency intervention.

- **Earlier help and prevention** – Families receive support sooner through improved information sharing and partnership working.

- **Confident safeguarding workforce** – Ongoing multi-agency learning helps practitioners identify risk early and respond effectively.

- **Stronger protective relationships** – Children are increasingly supported by trusted adults and family networks, helping them build resilience and reduce vulnerability.



Safe At Home And In The Community – Next Steps

Strategic Focus

- **Strengthening safeguarding practice -** Ensure children and families receive timely, coordinated support through effective multi-agency working and continuous learning.

- **Reducing exploitation and extra-familial harm -** Build on contextual safeguarding approaches to reduce risks associated with criminal exploitation, violence and missing episodes.

- **Improving online safety -** Work with children, families, schools and partners to increase awareness of online risks and promote safe digital environments.

- **Building safer communities -** Strengthen partnerships with police, community safety and voluntary sector organisations to prevent harm and support vulnerable children.

- **Delivering Families First reforms -** Continue embedding integrated family help and safeguarding arrangements that provide the right support at the right time.

Key Aim

Ensure every child in Dorset feels safe, protected and supported at home, online and within their community.

14. Epilogue: Together, Making Dorset the Best Place to Be a Child



This year has shown what we can achieve when we work together.

Across Dorset, partners, communities, children, young people and families have helped us make progress towards our shared vision: '**making Dorset the best place to be a child, where communities thrive and families are supported to be the best they can be.'**

Together, we have worked to give children the best start in life, help young people be healthy, happy and thriving, support families earlier through local family help, and ensure children are safe at home and in their communities.

We are proud of what we have achieved together, but we know there is more to do.
Over the coming year, we will continue to listen to children, young people and families, work together across organisations, and focus on improving outcomes for everyone.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this work. Together, we are building a brighter future for Dorset's babies, children, young people and families

Dorset Council · Dorset Police · Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue · 0-25 VCS Forum · NHS Dorset · NHS Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust · Dorset Parent-Carer Council