

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP)

Children's Services Self-Assessment

May 2026



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1. Introduction

We present this 2026 self-assessment for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Children’s Services, building on the ‘Good’ judgement from the Ofsted ILACS inspection (December 2024). It reflects the continued commitment of our workforce, partners and corporate leadership to improving outcomes for children, young people and families across BCP.

Children’s Services continues a significant transformation. Practice is increasingly stable and consistent, with more children benefiting from lasting relationships with social workers who know them well. Stronger standards, embedded quality assurance and effective oversight support a culture of high support and high challenge, driving continuous improvement across the system.

We remain ambitious for our children and young people. The ILACS inspection identified 3 development areas that shape our 2026 priorities:

- consistent responses for children at risk of exploitation;
- stronger support for older care leavers; and
- improved safety planning where safeguarding concerns are present.

These priorities, alongside wider learning from this self-assessment, underpin our ongoing development plans.

Following the SEND CQC/Ofsted inspection (November 2025), Children’s Services has received the Secretary of State’s decision to lift the statutory direction for SEND, reflecting improvements made since February 2024. We are improving at pace; while further work is needed, there is clear momentum, shared partnership ownership and strong corporate engagement to sustain progress. Our SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan will continue to be delivered, and impact monitored by the DfE.

In May 2025 we launched our Children and Young People’s Partnership Plan 2025–2030, co-produced with children, young people and partners. In 2026 we are turning it into delivery through refreshed governance and a

clearer line of sight from priorities to service development and measurable impact.

Children and young people told us what matters most. Our vision is that:

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole are great places to live, where all children and young people have the best possible opportunities in life and are supported by the community to flourish and grow in order to succeed.

The five shared priorities are:



Building on this progress, we are implementing a refreshed service delivery model (One Team One Approach) and the Families First programme to strengthen early help, community-based support and whole-system working.

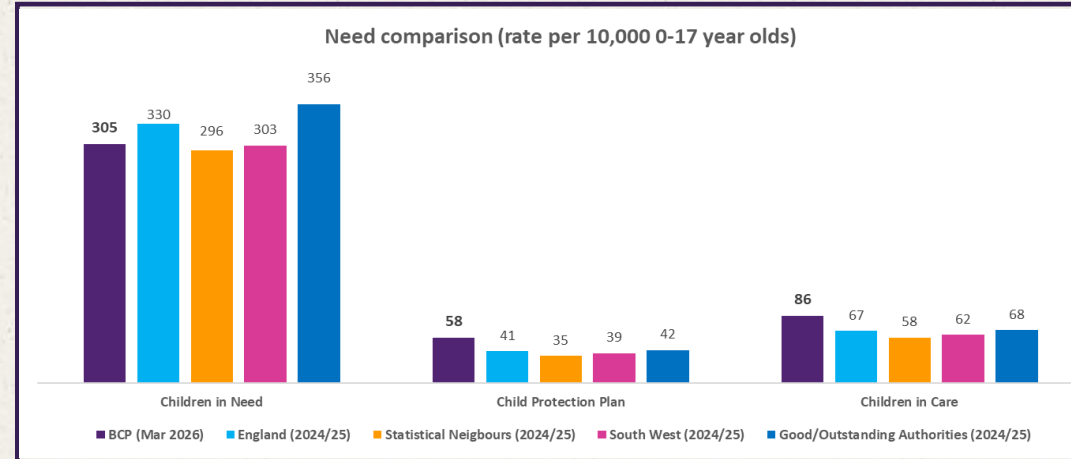
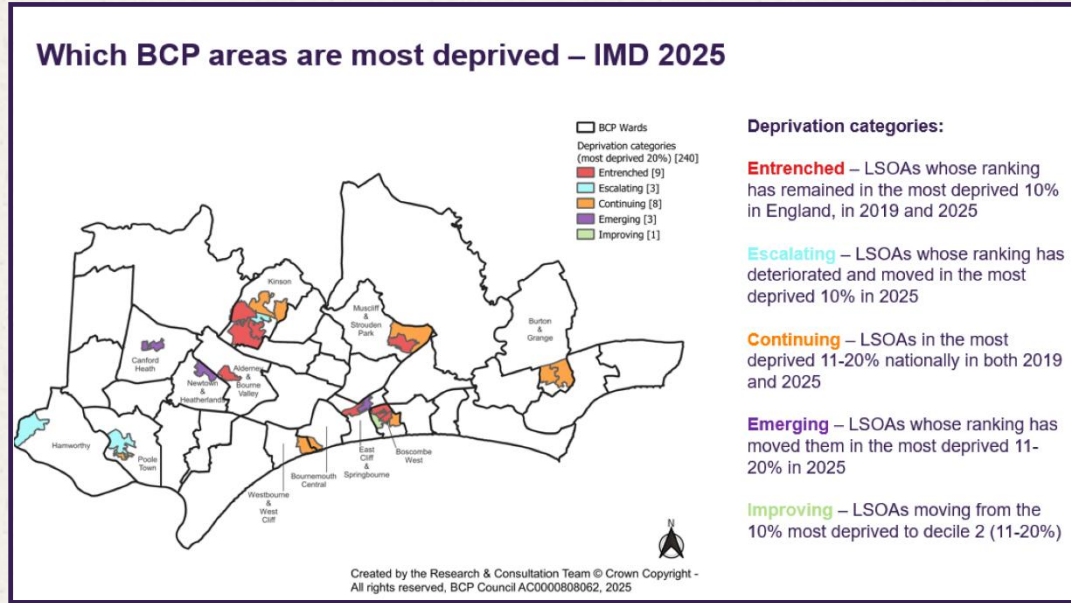
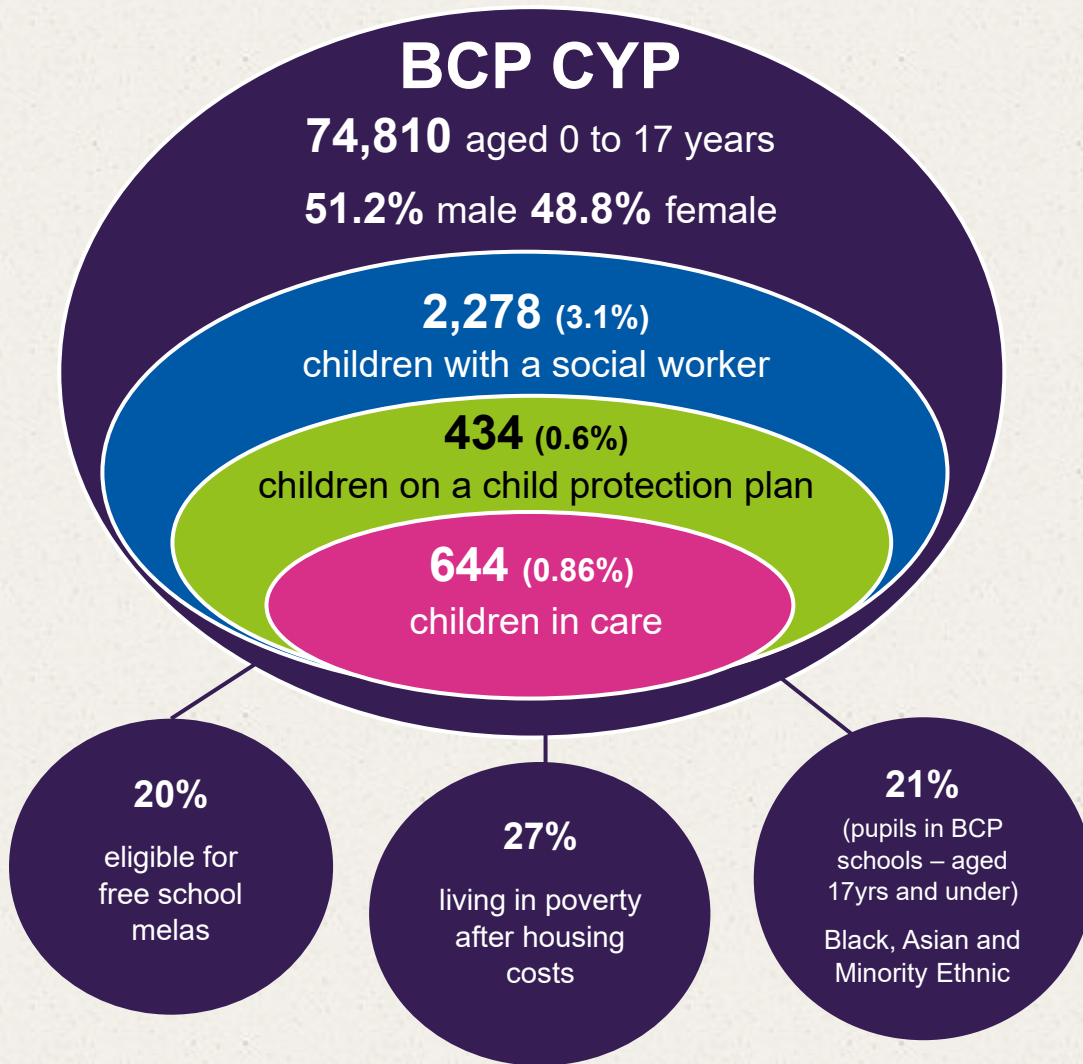
This self-assessment highlights progress gives an honest view of what must improve and sets out our shared ambition so every child in BCP can thrive.

This self-assessment sets out:

- what we know about practice quality and impact
- how we know it
- our priorities for the next 12 months.

It supports constructive challenge and shared partnership ownership and demonstrates our commitment to helping every child in BCP thrive.

2. Context - Population and Safeguarding Statistics



3. Our Challenges over the last 12 months

Over the past year, we have responded proactively to a diverse array of challenges, each of which has provided opportunities to strengthen and enhance the quality of our services for children and young people.

- We have adapted to rising demand and increasingly complex needs, ensuring our support remains accessible and effective for all.
- Our workforce has demonstrated resilience and commitment, navigating recruitment and pay challenges while maintaining a high standard of care.
- We have managed financial constraints with resourcefulness, ensuring children and young people receive the support they need.
- Through innovative approaches, we continue to address sufficiency challenges, especially in fostering, residential care, expanding options for families and through reunification.
- We have responded to increased SEND demand and inclusion needs with targeted strategies to promote equitable access and support.
- Children's Social Care and SEND reforms, along with evolving government expectations, have prompted us to review and improve our practices for the benefit of all.
- We have strengthened multi-agency partnerships, fostering collaboration across health, education, and policing to provide holistic support for children and families.
- We have embraced ICB structural changes, ensuring that service delivery remains responsive amid transitions.
- Our balanced approach to performance, assurance, and improvement has strengthened our culture of accountability and ongoing progress.
- We remain committed to sustaining high-quality, child-centered practice, even under financial and system pressures, ensuring the needs of children and young people are always at the heart of what we do.

4. 4. What we are proud of

We are proud of the progress we have made in strengthening the quality, consistency and impact of our work with children and families, despite the challenges faced. This includes stronger partnership ownership of shared priorities, a more stable and confident workforce supported by effective oversight, and tangible improvement in our approach to early help, safeguarding and permanence. The strengths set out below reflect what we see in practice, what our performance and quality assurance tell us, and what children, young people and families have shared with us about their experiences.

- **Clear strategic leadership** - launch of the Children and Young People's Plan and successful removal of the Statutory Direction for Children's Social Care and SEND, demonstrating strengthened governance and system confidence with a genuine shared commitment to improved outcomes for children and young people.
- **Stronger partnership working** - re-established local safeguarding arrangements through the BCP Children's Services Safeguarding Board and sustained partnerships through significant system and ICB change.
- **Service and practice redesign** – we are currently working on the implementation of One Team, One Approach and development of Families First / Best Start in Life to improve outcomes and service delivery.
- **Improved permanence and stability** - strengthened fostering through Mockingbird and It Takes a Family, alongside the work of our reunification team and improvements in commissioning.
- **Reviewed governance, and strong quality and learning culture** - clearer accountability, further improved quality assurance and a confident learning culture focused on impact and continuous improvement.
- **Children being safe and needs being met** - Practice Standards have imbedded consistent practice, and our performance has gone from strength to strength with timely, quality assessments, resulting in timely services meeting children's needs earlier.

- **Invested in sustainable transformation** - £4 m Children's Services Transformation Programme, strengthening prevention, leadership and long-term sustainability. Specifically: Early Help /Best Start in Life /Families First Programme / One Team One Approach –New Service Delivery Model, Commissioning, Fostering –Mockingbird/It Takes a Family and Reunification.

- **Families receive timely, proportionate help**, reducing repeat referrals and enabling more children to remain safely within their family and community networks
- **Children and young people's voices influence strategy, commissioning and service design**, to ensure services can reflect what matters most to them and addressing inequalities across the conurbation
- **BCP has a confident, skilled and stable workforce**, supported by clear practice standards, strong supervision and leadership that prioritises professional judgement and reflective practice
- **Practice quality is consistently strong across Children's Social Care**, with a shared practice framework and effective escalation and assurance arrangements. Writing to the child /Language That Cares
- **Leadership at all levels use learning from audits, inspections and lived experiences to drive improvement**, embedding a culture of continuous learning rather than compliance
- **The local children's care market is becoming more resilient and diverse**, offering high-quality, local provision that better meets children's needs and reduces dependency on high-cost external placements. There is closer alignment with health through renewed Joint Commissioning Partnership.
- **Safeguarding** continues to evidence timeliness, clear robust processes, protocols and practice that help ensure our children and young people remain safe.
- **BCP Safeguarding Children Partnership** is a more effective, mature partnership and there is collective ownership of safeguarding, including any learning that arises.
- **Corporate Parenting** is further developing; we continue to seek the views of our young people to help shape our service and have strengthened the Corporate Parenting Board enabling tangible improvements for our children and young people.

5. The impact on our Children and Young People

Our 2026 self-assessment shows that improvement activity is translating into a more coordinated system and better day-to-day experiences for children, young people and families. Children are increasingly supported by a stable workforce and a shared practice approach, underpinned by stronger partnership governance, clearer accountability and better use of performance, quality assurance and lived-experience insight. The impact statements below summarise the difference this is making, while recognising that we must continue to strengthen consistency and reduce inequality of experience across the BCP area.

- **Children, young people and families in BCP experience a coordinated, place-based system**, with early help, social care, youth justice, health, education, housing and community safety partners aligned through the Children and Young People's Partnership and safeguarding arrangements
- **Strategic decisions are informed by robust performance, quality assurance and lived-experience insight**, enabling senior leaders and members to understand impact, risk and improvement at pace
- **Children are safer and experience greater stability**, with improved permanence planning, fewer unplanned placement moves and reduced reliance on out-of-area provision
- **Children in care and care-experienced young people are supported to thrive**, through a stronger sufficiency offer, better joint working with housing and education, and a more responsive local market



Chapter 6

**The experiences and
progress of children
who need help and
protection**

6.1 Early Help & Targeted Intervention Service

Service delivery and impact - Strong delivery against preventative and early intervention objectives, with demonstrable impact on demand avoidance

- Early Help & Targeted Intervention Service operates a well-resourced, tiered early help offer supporting children and families from pre-birth to 19 (and up to 25 for SEND), with timely and proportionate responses across levels of need
- Locality-based multi-disciplinary teams now work across Levels 2–4 (including family help pilot) enabling earlier engagement and clearer ownership of intervention.
- High volumes of families access Early Help supported annually, with strong step-down and prevention outcomes, preventing escalation of need
- We are very proud of our reunification work which is fully imbedded and has demonstrated positive family outcomes, with children remaining safely at home following structured intervention, supporting both the child and their family to build their own resilience and gain their right to a private family life

Partnership contribution - Effective system enablers with clear strategic and operational impact.

- The Partnership Team delivery plan provides stronger system leadership, coordination and infrastructure for Early Help delivery across BCP, including pathways, data oversight and partner engagement.
- Development of single shared approaches to assessment, planning and step-up/step-down has reduced duplication and improved family experience, and will be further reviewed as part of the FFP Children's Services transformation
- Community grant schemes have enabled local voluntary and community sector capacity-building, supporting sustainable, community-led early help provision

- Successful Family Hub transformation works to align partners to national expectations and local need.

Locality teams and frontline practice - Consistent, responsive locality delivery with growing strengths in early engagement.

- Locality teams deliver relationship-based, trauma-informed interventions close to communities, improving engagement and sustainability of outcomes
- Clear role clarity between locality and partnership functions supports efficient triage, intervention and step-down.
- Children's voices are increasingly embedded early in assessment and intervention through structured timescales and practice expectations.
- Families benefit from place-based access to services through Family Hubs, outreach and virtual delivery models

Quality assurance, performance and learning - Clear progress in performance maturity, with further opportunity for system-wide quality benchmarking.

- Performance information demonstrates strong prevention outcomes and low escalation rates from Targeted Intervention to statutory services
- A developing joint outcomes framework supports shared accountability across the Early Help system.
- Governance structures increasingly focus on learning, quality and system improvement rather than compliance.
- Digital systems (e.g. virtual hubs, booking systems) support accessibility, data capture and performance oversight.

Workforce stability, retention and development - Stable and developing workforce with improving resilience through change.

- Workforce development plans underpin the Early Help Partnership Strategy, supporting recruitment, retention and skills sustainability across agencies.
- Peer-to-peer support, leadership visibility and shared training offers strengthen staff morale and resilience within a complex practice context.
- Clear service identity and role clarity support professional confidence and retention through transformation.

Diversification of services and innovation - Innovative, mixed-model delivery responsive to community need.

- Expansion of virtual services, outreach and community led provision has improved equity of access, particularly for seldom heard families.
- Investment in evidence-based programmes (e.g. parenting, infant feeding, early relational health) diversifies the offer beyond statutory intervention.
- Digital and place-based innovation through Family Hubs enhances accessibility and self-directed support.

Delivery against grants, transformation and associated priorities - Strong delivery against grant expectations with a clear line of sight to outcomes.

- Family Hub Transformation funding has been effectively utilised to expand provision, integrate services and pilot new partnership models.
- Delivery aligns strongly with Best Start in Life and wider public health priorities, including perinatal mental health, infant feeding, oral health and early communication.
- Transformation programmes demonstrate clear benefit realisation, including improved outcomes, system efficiency and sustainability.

- Multi agency workforce development activity continues to strengthen shared practice standards and model confidence in holding complexity and risk within Early Help contexts.

Next steps:

- Ensuring EH+TIS is embedded as a system-wide responsibility, not a single service, with shared ownership across health, education, social care and the voluntary and community sector.
- Continued blending of the targeted intervention work with the family help pilot, so as to create a seamless service that follows the child
- The Early Help Partnership Strategy and Pathway to provide a shared framework for thresholds, decision-making and collaboration in line with the Family First Partnership (FFP) approach
- The Early Help Partnership to agree the data which they will scrutinise and use to ensure services are needs-led at an early help level, and all partners own their role in delivering services within our communities
- Partnership forums, including the Early Help Partnership Board, to provide governance, challenge and shared oversight of outcomes, quality and transformation delivery.

6.2 MASH and OOHS

The quality and impact of social work practice in BCP Council

The local authority has a safe, effective and proportionate front door, with social work practice demonstrating strong safeguarding performance, timely responses, and confident threshold decision-making. Performance data over the last 12 months remains consistently within tolerance or on target across key indicators, providing assurance that children are protected from harm and families receive the right level of support at the right time.

Calls to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) are answered promptly, ensuring referrers and families do not experience avoidable delay at the first point of contact. This timeliness supports effective information-sharing, early risk identification and responsive decision-making.

Early Help performance has strengthened year-on-year, with re-referral rates remaining stable and low and partner-generated demand patterns consistent. This demonstrates effective early identification of need and the positive impact of timely, proportionate support preventing escalation.

The MASH conversion data provides strong evidence of high-quality professional judgement. Consistently low conversion to statutory social work indicates confident and informed threshold decisions, ensuring children and families only enter statutory services where this is deemed necessary. At the same time, strong conversion to Early Help reflects effective triage, purposeful information-sharing with partners and a clear focus on early intervention and prevention.

Re-referral rates and referral volumes per 10,000 children remain broadly in line with local and national benchmarks, providing further assurance that decisions to step down or close cases are appropriate. Although No Further Action (NFA) rates occasionally exceed benchmark, these remain within local tolerance and are understood in the context of low statutory conversion rates.

Audit activity shows an overall upward trajectory in practice quality, particularly in the quality of contacts, analysis and decision-making at the front door. Where variation in performance exists, it is clearly linked to known internal operational factors, rather than demand pressure or threshold instability.

The local authority provides a child-focused, risk-aware and outcomes-driven front door, with strong impact on safeguarding children and supporting families effectively. Where it is necessary to implement safety planning this is now shared with parents in writing so that they understand expectations and what the contingencies are.

How do we know this?

The authority has a robust and triangulated quality assurance framework that provides both quantitative and qualitative assurance on front door social work practice. This includes:

- **Performance and Assurance Group (PAG) data**, reviewed routinely to monitor safeguarding performance, timeliness and demand patterns.
- **Power BI dashboards and the MASH Board**, enabling real-time oversight of contacts, decision-making, conversion rates, re-referrals and timeliness.
- **MASH conversion data**, used as a key indicator of threshold appropriateness and the impact of professional judgement.
- **Regular thematic and dip-sample audits**, which evaluate the quality of contacts, analysis, management oversight, decision-making, safety planning thereby identifying strengths and areas for learning.
- **Practice Learning Reviews**, which provide in-depth reflection on practice and system learning to continuously improve safeguarding responses.

- **Feedback from children, families, partner agencies and internal colleagues**, offering qualitative insight into the experience and effectiveness of front door services.

This triangulation ensures a clear, evidence-based understanding of practice quality and impact, and supports a culture of transparency, learning and continuous improvement.

Plans for the next 12 months to maintain and improve practice

Over the next 12 months there is a need to develop the front door to deliver the Families First Partnership Programme, building on the strong front door, but widening the remit to be more multi-agency.

- **Keep contacts, referrals, re-referrals and decision making under review.** This will be particularly important as the function, structure and delivery at the front door alters. We have a robust data and audit system that will help us do this.
- **Further strengthen decision-making quality** whilst ensuring consistency in the larger, multi-agency front door through audits, Practice Learning Reviews and reflective supervision.
- **Review the threshold application** as part of the growing multi-agency front door to ensure a collaborative approach and consistency in application.
- **Enhancing the knowledge and expertise at the front door**, through the multi-agency approach and sharing learning across colleagues



6.3 Children in Need

Children subject to Child in Need plans receive consistent, strength-based social work that identifies risk and supports sustained change.

Performance data evidences over 12 months compliance for CIN visits and CIN meetings, demonstrating children are regularly seen and that support is coordinated with partner agencies.

Management oversight and supervision have consistently been achieved, in line with expectations in our Practice Standards and practice framework and are very much a strength. Management oversight supports timely progress of plans, appropriate step-downs and escalations, and clear rationale when statutory intervention is no longer required. Team Managers and ATMs demonstrate an excellent understanding and awareness of data management tools within their day-to-day work which has positively impacted performance across the service and supported the team to review themes and trends regarding areas of improvement for the service. PLRs (audits) are consistently completed across the service and demonstrate good standards of provision for children and young people under child in need.

The stability of the Team Managers and Assistant Team Manager group remains a strength and there have been continued efforts on a targeted recruitment campaign for experienced social workers. The service has continued to invest in AYSEs and there is high retention from this programme.

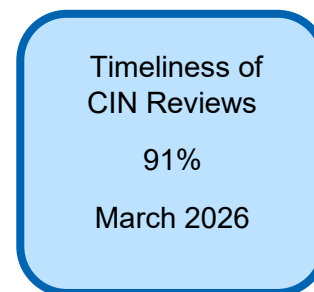
In addition to the AYSE cohort, in line with the new proposed Family Help model and FFP, we have appointed a cohort of Alternatively Qualified Family Help Practitioners. They have had a robust induction and where appropriate, have started to case hold some child in need families. Whilst this remains in its early stages, this has allowed for a more intensive service to be provided with capacity being increased. It is expected that this will improve relationships with children and families and prevent potential escalation to Child Protection Plans.

Writing to the child and family is fully embedded within the service and continues to have a positive impact upon quality of recording, as indicated within our performance data.

Relationships with partners is strong and there is good attendance at multi agency Child in Need meetings. Reflective supervision enables practice to continue to develop and evolve as the needs of our children and families evolve.

Next steps

- Implementing Families First programme and the restructure
- Implementing a single assessment and plan as part of Families First programme
- Amalgamating our level 3 and 4 work, to create a blended and more seamless delivery for early help/ children in need
- Imbedding family decision making within practice



6.4 Child Protection

Key Performance Indicators

	BCP 2025/26	National 2024/25	Statistical Neighbours 2024/25	Good+ LAs 2024/25
CPP Rate (Mar 26)	58	41	35	42
Repeat CPPs (2025/26)	30%	25%	23%	23%
Timeliness of CPP reviews (2025/26)	95%	91%	92%	92%

As with Children in Need, we are confident that our practice for children subject to Child Protection plans is strong, however recognised that we are an outlier in child protection plans. A thematic audit has been undertaken jointly with the Independent Reviewing Service in response to our numbers of child protection plans compared to the national average. The review identified no concerns regarding thresholds of Section 47s and ICPC decision making, however, it identified further work is required with IROs to improve confidence in ending child protection planning when thresholds are no longer met and risks are manageable under child in need plans. Further work is also required in terms of imbedding Families First, and with additional capacity it is hoped that more intensive work earlier will help prevent escalation.

Children are seen regularly and plans are regularly reviewed, with consistent compliance for our CP visits and core groups meetings for over 12 months.

As with Children in Need, supervision and management oversight remains strong and learning is undertaken via PLRs (audits) to support continuous development within the teams.

Safety planning and working agreements with families have been reviewed within the service and a new standardised form is being launched, along with practice guidance to ensure consistency in recording, clearer agreements and contingency planning.

Next steps

- Embedding the Family help model and restructure
- Ongoing work with partner agencies regarding ending child protection
- Standardised safety plan launch

Timeliness of
CP Visits

84%

March 2026

Timeliness of
CP Reviews

95%

March 2026

Timeliness of
Core Groups

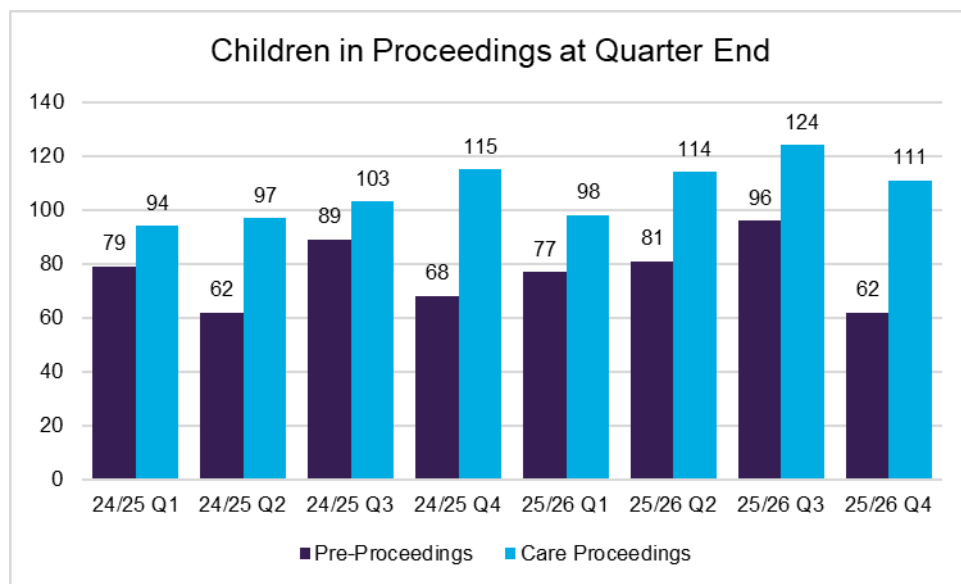
91%

March 2026

6.5 PLO and Care Proceedings

No. of Care Proceedings open	
111	115
March 2026	March 2025

No. of New Care Applications	
24	64
Q4 25/26	Q4 24/25



The ILACS found children are escalated to pre-proceedings Public Law Outline quickly and successful diversion is used. Most PLO letters are *clear and sufficiently detailed about social workers' concerns*. Our parenting assessments were found to *enable parents to demonstrate their abilities to care for their children, while receiving multifaceted support in parallel*.

Despite an increase in numbers of PLO and court applications, compliance with court timescales remains strong, with ongoing work with the judiciary and CAFCASS, focusing on positive working relationships and improving culture with the courts.

Our new PLO/Proceedings dataset has improved our oversight of cases within PLO and proceedings, and work is being undertaken to use this as an active management tool for Team Managers.

As part of the new Family Help model, families entering PLO / court will remain with the allocated Family Help Practitioner with the aim of reducing transfer points and preventing re-assessment. In preparation for this change, work is being undertaken to increase the workforce's skill base and confidence in working with families under PLO and proceedings.

A new operational Service Manager (SM) post will lead Court and PLO and will be integral to the development and oversight of the training and development of the workforce. The SM will also take lead in tracking and quality assuring PLO/court work to ensure that compliance and quality is maintained, reducing impact on families as service delivery and structures change.

It has been identified that capacity to change assessments are an area that would be beneficial in our work and to ensure cumulative harm is identified- we are working on how to embed this into practice.

Next steps

- Creation and use of capacity to change within parenting assessments to support in identifying and address cumulative harm, particularly neglect.
- Workforce training as part of families first changes to ensure the workforce is confident in its deliver of PLO / court proceedings
- The new Service Manager with the lead for PLO/ proceedings to ensure successful management this work

6.6 Children at Risk of Exploitation

A BCP Extra Familial Harm (EFH) Strategy was launched in 2024, which brought together 3 main strands - Missing, Exploited, Trafficked (MET), Most Serious Violence and Prevent. Work has been undertaken alongside Police and the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to ensure this work is measurable and effective and working towards the best outcomes for children and using data to inform our approach.

A monthly multi-agency MET panel has been in place since February 2024, allowing for identification of children assessed as high risk of harm of exploitation, sharing of intelligence, identifying themes and trends such as 'hotspot' areas, as well as reviewing disruption and diversionary activities.

A MET awareness month was undertaken in March 2025 and March 2026 providing training to hundreds of attendees on Child Exploitation, intelligence sharing, STRO's, Philomena Protocol, mapping of children at risk of exploitation and supporting completion of the Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (CERAF). This work resulted in better knowledge across all services and enabled questions to be asked, and information to be delivered.

CERAF triage meetings continue to be held by CSC and Police, reviewing all regular missing persons, medium- and high-graded CERAFs, which in turn allows for intelligence and trend information to be gathered and triangulated, alongside ensuring joint allocation of all high-risk young people within the police safeguarding hub.

For children assessed as high risk, High Risk of Harm (HROH) meetings are held 6-weekly, chaired by the Head of Service, to manage the level of risk, ensure diversionary activities are in place for the victim, ensure intelligence sharing and gathering, and agree disruption plans for identified perpetrators.

A total of 504 HROH meetings were delivered across 2024–2026, which averages 19 HROH a month. This reflects embedded practice and operational oversight to assess and review children in relation to high risk of exploitation. We know our children well and we know

who is at risk as a result, enabling us to plan effectively and to manage the risk collectively, as well as to act where risks are not reducing. Since implementing our EFH strategy, we have had not LSCPRs relating to exploitation which is a marked improvement on the previous practice.

Targeted work has been undertaken on identified hotspot areas along with a specific working group to identify and address gang-related activities in the BCP area. The police have embedded a routine intelligence bulletin which we share with Children's Social Care staff and key partners to share themes, trends and key perpetrators.

A new Family Support Group for parents/ carers of exploited young people was launched in October 2025 by Escapeline and an adult transitional safeguarding Social Worker in response to identified need for education and support for parents / carers of children at risk of MET. There has been positive engagement, an increase in referrals, and a confidential helpline has been developed.

Transitional safeguarding processes have been improved, including new guidance for care-experienced young people. Adult social care attend all HROH for young people aged 17.5yr olds to offer advice re transitional support. Post-18 CERAFs continue to be embedded, and cross-agency escalation on health-flagging for vulnerable over-18s is being worked on.

Partners in Health have updated the short CERAF for first responders to complete, e.g. A&E, Ambulance, GP.

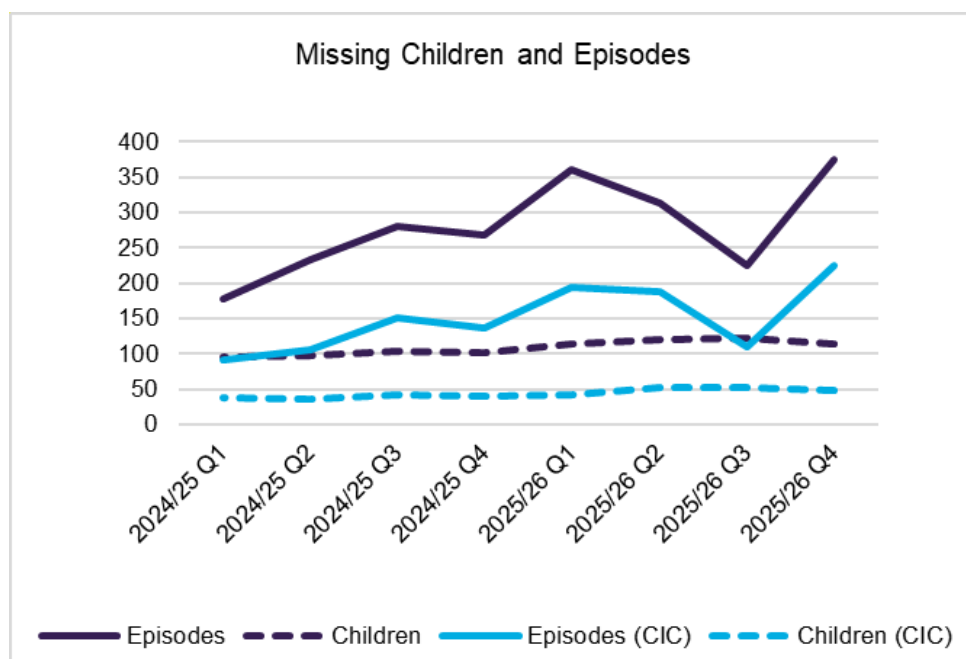
An independent review commissioned by the LSCB is currently occurring in April 2026 to review the effectiveness of the MET panel and multi-agency partnership working which will inform our next steps.

Next steps

- CEYP exploitation tool to be added to Mosaic enabling data to evidence compliance and improve identification of post-18 at risk of exploitation.
- Continuing to strengthen multi agency response to Extra Familial Harm and embed the use of the CERAF with partners.

6.7 Children who go Missing

Children who go missing are managed through our Missing, Exploited and Trafficked (MET) arrangements. In partnership with Dorset Police, we have strengthened coordination and support for missing children in BCP. We have continued to build workforce understanding of the links between missing episodes and vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking, supported through management oversight to ensure Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (CERAF) activity is completed for children who go missing regularly.



The daily missing meeting has been redesigned and has new terms of reference. The revised process ensures that the allocated CSC team attends the daily meeting with the police missing persons team, enabling timely sharing of critical information. This supports police risk assessment and grading, informs active enquiries to locate children quickly, and strengthens joint disruption activity of suspected perpetrators.

The daily meeting prioritises children who go missing repeatedly, identifying emerging themes and trends and refocusing activity on active safeguarding throughout the missing episode.

Engagement with British Transport Police has improved through escalation and national liaison, resulting in clearer pathways for sharing images and intelligence for children assessed as high risk.

Return Home Interview (RHI) documentation has been reviewed, updated and re-launched March 25, improving identification and sharing of intelligence around children's missing episodes, hotspot areas they attend and their associates, which further feed into the management of the missing episodes via the daily missing meeting and HROH's.

Work with Dorset Police has strengthened arrangements for children who are repeat and/or high-risk missing, including requesting allocation within the Dorset Safeguarding Hub (Police) where active police intervention is required. This aligns the response to missing children with our approach for children assessed as at high risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE), including the use of HROH meetings, strengthening senior management oversight of high-risk missing children, improving diversionary planning and enabling enhanced engagement with care providers.

As part of the MET panel action plan, our work with local residential providers and post-16 care providers has strengthened their management of missing incidents, improved reporting quality and embedded the Philomena protocol.

The Philomena protocol is embedded across the service and is used for children at home and in care where there is a risk that a child has gone missing or is likely to go missing.

Next steps

- Continued disruption of local hotspots
- Continued engagement with local care providers regarding their responses to children going missing and their reporting procedure
- Use of the planned review of exploitation by the LSCP to strengthen multi-agency responses

6.8 Children with Disabilities

Child Health and Disabilities Service (CHAD)

Children and families accessing the child health and disabilities team often benefit from long-standing relationships with skilled and knowledgeable social workers and other practitioners such as occupational therapists. Children's needs are well understood.

Area SEND inspection report: Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Local Area Partnership 17 to 21 November 2025

Current position

The Child Health and Disabilities (CHAD) teams continues to work collaboratively with children, young people, and their families, alongside partners across health, education, and social care, to respond to safeguarding concerns and promote positive outcomes. Practice remains rooted in a holistic, strengths-based approach that considers the child within their family, community, and wider support network.

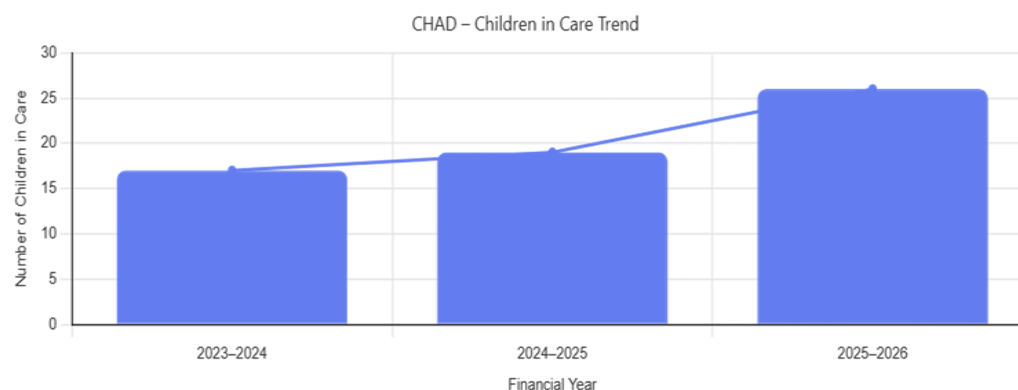
In recent months, CHAD has experienced some workforce turnover, including one Team Manager being seconded into the Principal Social Worker role. In line with changes under Families First, a decision was made to convert two Social Worker posts into Alternatively Qualified Practitioner roles. Early implementation of AQP roles within CHAD has been positive, with practitioners well supported by the team and contributing to continuity for children and families, while learning continues to refine role clarity and induction arrangements.

Strong and longstanding multi-agency relationships are in place with ID CAMHS, the Integrated Care Board (ICB), SEND services, education providers, and commissioned support services. During 2025/26, joint working with Adult Social Care - particularly the Preparing for Adulthood Team - was further strengthened. This collaboration was recognised internally following participation in the CQC inspection.

CHAD performance remains strong, as evidenced within our audits which show consistently high-quality practice and reflective learning.

The SEND inspection in 2025 recognised the commitment of practitioners to personalised, child-centred practice and the strength of partnership working across agencies. It also highlighted the importance of improving consistency, clarity of pathways, and the timeliness of support for children with disabilities and their families. These findings align with CHAD's own self-evaluation and improvement priorities.

The service continues to experience increasing complexity and demand and despite the creative and supportive approach to help families remain together, the complexities do correlate to a rise in the number of children with disabilities entering care.



Short Breaks and Early Support

Work identified through the review of Short Breaks provision is now underway, with procurement activity scheduled for the spring term of 2025/26. This responds to increased demand, changing needs, and feedback from families and practitioners. The review confirmed that Short Breaks continue to be highly valued by children and families, providing essential respite and helping to sustain caring arrangements.

Next steps (2026 onwards)

- Implementing Families First/ family Help model.
- Short Breaks transformation
- Embed locality-based structure



Chapter 7

**The experiences and
progress of children
in care including
permanence**

7.1 Children in Care

BCP Council currently has 644 children in care, marking a 15% increase compared to 2025 and making us a national outlier. Despite this growth, we have maintained consistent care and statutory duties are met. Our processes ensure we deliver safe and stable support. Timely reviews of care plans—completed for 99% of children in care—play a crucial role in meeting children's needs as they progress through their care journey and adapt to changes as they develop their sense of self and independence.

Achieving permanence

By their second looked after review, 99% have a clear permanency plan. Care plans are approved at Legal Gateway Meetings, where Heads of Service provide thorough scrutiny. Timely Children in Care reviews help ensure that both children and carers receive the support needed to make placements successful and maintain stability. As a result, only 8% of children experience three or more home changes over a 12-month period. While we aim to reduce this further, it is encouraging that this figure is lower than both our statistical neighbours and the national average.

We are currently enhancing our reporting processes to better track progress towards achieving permanence. This includes preparing for a system modification that will facilitate monitoring of early parallel planning and the duration of plans where permanence has not yet been attained. Rather than measuring percentage permanence achieved, we aim to introduce new indicators such as the proportion of parallel planning and potential drift in permanence plans, for example in cases involving adoption.

“Thank you for Jane making everything make sense and calming my mind when it gets overwhelming” ~ Alanna

Key Performance Indicators

	BCP Q4	National 2024/25	Stat N'ours 2024/25	Good+ LAs 2024/25
Rate of CIC (Mar 26) (number per 10,000)	86 per 10,000	67 per 10,000	58 per 10,000	68 per 10,000
% in care for 12+ months with 3+ placements (Mar 26)	8	10	12	11
% CIC visits within timescale (Mar 26)	92	n/a	n/a	n/a
% CIC reviews completed within timescales (Jan – Mar 26)	99	n/a	n/a	n/a
% of CIC that are UASC (Mar 26)	6	8	10	9

7.2 UASCs

6% of children in our care are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. At BCP, we recognise the unique needs of these young people and ensure they receive tailored support, such as access to legal advice regarding asylum claims. Our services are aware of the specific risks faced by asylum-seeking youth, including issues related to modern day slavery and trafficking. We use the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and Trafficking Risk Assessment tools to identify victims and provide them with appropriate assistance. Staff maintain close collaboration with the International Care Network (ICN), a local charity that supports refugees and migrants in the UK.

Currently, 16 young people are awaiting Age Assessments and Social Workers and Personal Advisors continue to have access to training to provide relevant support and assessments. The introduction of a new process and improved tracking has reduced delays in completing age assessments. The current wait time is 6 months. Our aim is to ensure that no young person waits longer than 10 weeks for an age assessment after being accommodated by the local authority.

7.3 Health of CIC

Initial and Review Health Assessments

We hold monthly meetings between Children’s Social Care, University Hospital Dorset, and NHS Dorset to coordinate health assessments for children entering care. Performance regarding Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) has improved, particularly in timely requests from CSC. Most IHAs or Review Health Assessments (RHAs) delayed beyond timescale result from children being placed out of area or declining a health assessment. Although our health partners collaborate with other NHS trusts, substantial delays persist in certain regions. Q4 data shows that 60% of children now receive their IHA on time; whilst this is still a priority, we are currently unable to compare this rate with statistical neighbours. Significantly our health colleagues continue to offer appointments to children who are placed within 60 miles of our area reducing some of the challenges.

We have achieved a strong performance in Review Health Assessments, with 92% completed within the expected timeframe. Collaboration with health colleagues has been crucial for this success and a proactive approach to advocating on behalf of the child. Our monthly meetings with health partners allow us to report exceptions and to find solutions to address any issues.

Dental

In December 2025, NHS Dorset introduced a new dental scheme for children in care and young people with care experience. This initiative provides access to dental services for those without an existing dentist or whose foster carers are currently funding private dental appointments. As a result, the proportion of children receiving up-to-date dental checks has increased to 80% in Q3. Data from March indicates that 76% of checks have been completed within the required timeframe; however, this figure is expected to rise as records are updated throughout the month.

Key Performance Indicators

	BCP 2025/26	National 2024/25	Statistical Neighbours 2024/25	Good+ LAs 2024/25
% IHAs within 20 days (Mar 26)	56	n/a	n/a	n/a
% review health assessment within timescale	92	90	92	92
% dental check within timescale	76	81	80	82

7.4 Education of CIC (Virtual School)

Over the last five years, attendance for our children in care has maintained a consistent upward trajectory, rising from 88.7% in 2021/22 to 92% in 2025/26. This places BCP above the national average of 91.2% for children in care for 12 months or more. Attendance at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 has remained consistently high at 93%, reflecting sustained engagement in learning, while Key Stage 4 attendance has improved markedly, increasing from 78.1% in 2023/24 to 80.8% this academic year. Persistent absence (attendance below 90%) has reduced significantly from 27.9% to 21.5% over the past two years, and severe absence (attendance below 50%) has fallen from 7.9% to 5.2%, now sitting below the national rate of 5.7%. Together, these improvements demonstrate the impact of strengthened multi-agency approaches, tighter monitoring, and consistent relational practice supporting school attendance.

A key area of focus remains our work to reduce suspensions, ensuring children experience minimal lost learning and feel a strong sense of belonging in their school communities. Over the past year we have achieved a reduction in repeat suspensions from 5% to 3%, and overall suspensions have fallen from 18.45% to 12.92%, bringing BCP below the latest national figure of 13.72%. This progress reflects our clear emphasis on restorative practice, timely and proactive planning, attendance at all reintegration meetings, redesigning behaviour policies with schools and providing training in therapeutic crisis intervention, de-escalation, trauma-informed practice and the use of language that cares.

Mentoring for Designated Teachers and the allocation of inclusion grants have further contributed to whole-school consistency and the development of environments that support regulation and engagement. Working with schools to maintain belonging, including increased use of alternative provision 'inside and alongside' school settings, ensures pupils remain connected to their communities while their needs are being met.

Engagement in Education, Employment and Training (EET) continues to strengthen, supported by a more coordinated approach across Children's Services, the Virtual School, and post-16 providers. A full programme of

direct work, including a strengthened 'Risk of NEET' programme, targeted mentoring, and structured re-engagement plans, ensures that young people receive timely and purposeful support.

EET levels continue to improve across key age groups. For 16–17-year-olds, EET has improved significantly from 74.5% to 86% over the last year. For Years 12 and 13, the proportion has improved from 73% to 80%. We have increased the number of young people in Year 12 and 13 supported into EET from 38 in last academic year to 56 in this academic year with a further 4 months left in the period, demonstrating the impact of more targeted transition planning, direct coaching, and partnership work. EET for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) remains strong, with 87% engaged, consistent with last year, and with all UASC of school age attending a registered provision compared to 7 not on roll at schools in April last year.

There has been a continued improvement in attainment, with the proportion of children achieving Grade 4+ in English and Maths rising to 32%, compared with 29% last year, reflecting strengthened academic support, targeted interventions, and improved attendance and engagement across Key Stage 4. More of our children are attending mainstream schools and this is supporting access to formal outcomes and progression to Post 16 education with 98% maintaining engagement with their courses past Day 43 indicating that the advice and guidance and Risk of NEET programmes that is provided as additional offers support our young people to transition to appropriate courses.

7.5 Children's Commissioning

- ✓ New Parent and Child Residential Assessment Centre (3 beds)
- ✓ Residential children's home beds increased by 47% (11 beds)
- ✓ Supported Accommodation Provision beds increased by 52% (32 beds)
- ✓ Tender and Implementation of Alternative Education Provision (AP) Framework
- ✓ Tender and Implementation of Supported Accommodation Provision Framework
- ✓ Establishment of Provider Forums across all commissioned service provision

Over the last 12 months, Children's Commissioning has successfully completed its transformation phase and is now operating as a mature, embedded business-as-usual function with strengthened governance, clearer accountability and demonstrable impact. A robust Commissioning Service Plan (2025–27) and CiC / CEYP Sufficiency Strategy (2024 – 2028) are fully in place, with commissioning governance embedded within established Children's Quality, Performance and Improvement Boards, replacing standalone improvement arrangements and reflecting increased organisational confidence and service maturity. Commissioning, Performance and Corporate Finance reporting are now integrated and routinely used together to inform budget management, forecasting and sufficiency planning, supported by the 'Working Smarter' programme which has delivered savings, cost avoidance and improved financial grip.

Significant progress has been made in quality assurance and provider oversight, with consistent monitoring arrangements embedded across Children's Social Care, SEND/INMSS and Alternative Provision. This includes regular in-person visits, strengthened contract monitoring, clear escalation routes and reinforced oversight of unregistered provision, alongside embedded links with LADO and Safeguarding in Education to provide stronger assurance of safety and compliance.

Sufficiency and market development activity has delivered measurable improvement, increasing local supported accommodation, registered

residential provision and post-18 accommodation for unaccompanied asylum-seeking care-experienced young people with further growth in provision scheduled. This has strengthened market resilience and improved local choice.

BCP Council does not operate any regulated children's homes or supported accommodation; all provision is commissioned externally, with oversight through commissioning governance, contract management and quality assurance to ensure it is safe, effective and meets assessed need.

Partnership working has also deepened, with joint commissioning arrangements agreed with Health, the establishment of a Joint Commissioning Partnership and improved collaboration with Education & Skills. Provider engagement has been refreshed through strengthened Provider Forums and events, supporting co-production, transparency and market stability. Underpinning this, data, intelligence and digital foundations are now materially stronger, with embedded Power BI reporting, automated scorecards and real-time operational data supporting both strategic oversight and frontline decision-making. This aligned commissioning activity demonstrates a clear shift from activity-based commissioning to intelligence-led, outcomes-focused practice.

Children placed in unregistered children's homes and safeguarding arrangements.

BCP Council reported that eight children in care are living in unregistered children's homes, mainly due to the inability of Ofsted-registered providers to meet their complex needs. While registered children's home capacity grew nationally, the Southwest remains underserved. Robust internal governance and strategic oversight, including regular reporting, monitoring, and engagement, ensure compliance and support for these children. The Council has increased local registered children's home and supported accommodation beds, enabling some children to return locally, and is working with providers to achieve Ofsted registration. The focus for 2026/2027 will be developing specialist provision for children with complex needs and expanding local registered residential options in line with sufficiency priorities

Next Steps

- Consolidate and embed outcomes-based commissioning by further aligning commissioning activity, contract management and performance reporting, strengthening the focus on impact for children.
- Deliver the next phase of Sufficiency Strategy priorities linked to market development, prioritising local residential provision for children with complex needs and including Parent & Child provision due to increasing demand. The aim being to reduce reliance on high-cost out of area provision by continuing to improve local choice and stability.
- Further strengthen quality assurance and contract management maturity, embedding consistent application and reporting, including deeper use of provider performance intelligence, strengthened escalation and continuous learning from monitoring, audit and complaints.
- Strengthen and embed the use of existing performance, demand and finance intelligence within commissioning decision-making, working closely with Performance & Intelligence to ensure data is consistently applied to sufficiency planning, forecasting and strategic commissioning priorities

7.6 Fostering, Supported Lodgings and Kinship

Delivering against a nationally challenging backdrop for fostering recruitment and retention, the fostering service continues to provide a broad, flexible and diverse offer that responds to children and young people at different stages of their journeys. This includes Parent and Child arrangements, Shared Care, Supported Lodgings, Staying Put, Private Fostering and, from April 2025, the inclusion of Special Guardianship Order assessment and support within the service.

Permanence and stability remain strong. 60% of children are now long-term matched, while kinship care continues to grow, with 103 approved households. The proportion of children placed within their wider family network has increased from 31.9% to 35.2%, and placement stability remains high, with very low levels of disruption. This reflects effective matching, strong ongoing support for carers and a responsive approach to emerging placement pressures.

Trauma-informed approaches, including PACE-focused training and Mockingbird constellations, continue to strengthen carers' confidence and ability to sustain placements during periods of challenge. This practice is shaped by feedback from carers and children, who consistently highlight the importance of relational support, practical advice and timely access to professional help.

The service places strong emphasis on listening to foster carers and children and young people and using their feedback to improve practice and the support offer. Foster carer feedback is gathered formally through annual reviews, which explore experiences of supervision, training, communication and support alongside outcomes for children. Learning from these reviews informs service-level improvements, including changes to training, supervision expectations and more tailored support packages.

Feedback is also gathered routinely through strong supervisory relationships, peer support, training events, and regular coffee and support groups. A six-weekly foster carer forum with the Head of Service provides a clear route for carers to raise systemic issues and influence service development, supporting carer retention and placement stability.

The developing offer for older young people, including Supported Lodgings and Staying Put, continues to strengthen pathways into independence. *It Takes a Family* supports safe and timely step-down from residential care into family settings where appropriate, with learning from young people's experiences informing improved transition planning and clearer expectations for carers.

Supported Lodgings is now Ofsted registered for 16–18-year-olds and will be inspected annually in its own right, providing independent assurance regarding the quality, safety and effectiveness of provision for young people preparing for adulthood.

As the service works towards the proposed expansion of the Southwest Fostering Hub, there is a clear recognition that mainstream fostering recruitment has been particularly challenging, with outcomes since joining regional arrangements not meeting expectations. While these challenges have limited growth in general fostering capacity, the service remains actively involved in co-design activity, ensuring BCP's local sufficiency

needs are clearly reflected as the model develops in line with government direction.

The service has developed a strong partnership with BCP Communications, which has had a positive and growing impact on recruitment. This collaboration has strengthened the promotion of all fostering schemes through targeted, co-ordinated campaigns across digital and social media platforms, improving consistency of messaging, raising the local profile of fostering and supporting a more strategic and sustained recruitment approach aligned with sufficiency priorities.

A Quality Assurance Framework for Fostering has been launched and is being embedded through a programme of Practice Learning Reviews. The framework focuses on improving the quality and consistency of practice, supported by agreed monthly learning themes, including kinship care, adolescence in fostering and standards of care such as allegations management. While still at an early stage, staff engagement is strong and early learning, informed by feedback from carers and young people, indicates a positive trajectory for sustained improvement in practice and outcomes.

- ✓ 66% of children placed with inhouse carers
- ✓ 35% increase in children placed with kinship carers
- ✓ 87% utilisation rate of available foster beds
- ✓ Supported Lodgings now Ofsted Registered

222
Fostering
households

68%
CIC in foster
care

57%
matched to
long-term

Next Steps

- Increasing the number of in-house foster carers.
- Delivery of the new Kinship Care Strategy.
- Strengthening support to kinship carers, building on stability and permanence achieved this year.
- Continuing to improve SGO pathways and support, increasing the number of children achieving long term permanence within their families.
- Expanding and strengthening It Takes a Family, supporting more children to step down from residential care.
- Increase sufficiency for 16+
- Participation in the co-design of the proposed expanded Southwest Fostering Hub to ensure local sufficiency needs are reflected.
- Develop further innovative practice, including access to additional bedroom grants.

Support from the Supervising Social Worker

“Our supervising social worker has always advocated for our family where necessary and goes above and beyond to ensure both the child in our care and our needs as carers are met. We have worked with our supervising social worker for a long time and greatly value the consistency and stability this brings. She is fair, honest and transparent, and always highlights what we are doing well whilst providing constructive feedback when required. We could not ask for more from a supervising social worker.”

Support from the Fostering Service

“We receive consistently good support from the fostering service. We are confident that there is always someone available during our supervising social worker’s absence. Management within the fostering team have also supported our supervising social worker in supporting us.”

Support from the Supervising Social Worker

“Our supervising social worker is incredibly caring, sensitive and reliable. She consistently validates the challenges we face as carers and reassures us about the quality of care we provide. She is an invaluable asset to us, often being our first point of contact when we experience administrative difficulties, and she provides clear guidance and support at these times.”

Feedback from a Young Person in Care (about Foster Carers)

“They don’t get enough credit for how well they’ve done. I’m not the easiest case, and they’ve helped me through some of the roughest times of my life, and they still try to do this for me today. I thank my lucky stars every day for them, because had I gone elsewhere, I wouldn’t be the young lady I am today. They’ve always been there for me, not just as carers, but as parents — not just people doing their job. If you want the definition of the best carers, look no further.”

Multi-Agency Support

“We found the stability meeting particularly helpful, as it brought everyone together and allowed us to have a shared understanding and joined-up approach. It was beneficial for us to see how the Virtual School, Educational Psychology and other professionals work together. Everyone involved was brilliant, and it genuinely felt like all professionals were proactive and committed to doing their job well in the best interests of the children.”

7.7 Private Fostering and Special Guardianship Orders (SGO)

Work in relation to Special Guardianship has strengthened significantly, with SGO outcomes now aligned to the national rate, accounting for 11.9% of children leaving care. The integration of the SGO Assessment Team into the fostering service has improved conversion rates and pathways, supported by a more robust and accessible SGO support offer.

The introduction of a dedicated SGO Support Team has led to a sustained increase in special guardians accessing support, significantly improving the service’s understanding of demand and need. A clearer, structured post-order offer – including coffee mornings, peer support, targeted advice and practical help – has replaced previously ad hoc arrangements and improved engagement. Between April 2025 and March 2026, a high volume of enquiries were received, with the majority progressing to advice, intervention or targeted support. This reflects increased confidence among special guardians to seek help earlier and is contributing to improved placement stability, family resilience and outcomes for children. Impact will continue to be monitored during 2026–27 to inform further development.

The service continues to hold the Private Fostering contract on behalf of Dorset Council, providing assurance and continuity across the area. Private Fostering demonstrates strong regional practice leadership, coordinating Southwest networks and supporting partner authorities to strengthen assessment, oversight and safeguarding. While numbers have not yet returned to pre-Covid levels, activity continues to increase steadily, supported by proactive promotion of private fostering across partner agencies and communities.

- ✓ SGO performance now in line with the national average
- ✓ Private Fostering assessment completion rate within statutory timescales across all private fostering activity is approximately 89.9%.
- ✓ Establishment of a dedicated SGO support offer

Next Steps: 2026–27

The service will focus on:

- Delivering the new Kinship Care Strategy
- Strengthening support to kinship carers, building on current stability and permanence
- Improving SGO pathways and post-order support to increase long-term family permanence

Feedback from SGO Carers:

Feedback from carers and professionals demonstrates growing confidence in the support offer:

“Thank you for a great coffee morning today, I believe it feels like the first time that I’m going to get the support that I’ve been asking for. Very impressed with today’s meeting very helpful.”

“A massive thanks for such a lovely morning, My bag of gifts is amazing, I shall think of you all when I drink. Eat and use all the smellies take care guys your all doing a very special job supporting all our diverse problems”

“I have to say I have been really moved by some of the positive stories that have gone out this week under Kinship Care Week and it shows the positive difference BCP Council is making to people’s lives. Great work! Your team are doing a fantastic job and rightly so you should be proud.”

7.8 Adoption

Aspire Adoption Panels scrutinise reports for matching of children with a plan of adoption from the local authority social workers. The ADM decision pre-dates this for application of Placement Orders put before the court. Agency Advisors from Aspire will quality assure local authority Child Permanence Reports and support children’s Social Workers where necessary to ensure all information is contained in the new Coram CPR. Agency Advisors also attend BCP Legal Gatekeeping during the care planning stage for every possible child where adoption may be considered and will track all children through their early entry into care. Further to this Annexe As are completed by the Family Finding Team for timely submission for Adoption Order applications.

Aspire’s post-adoption support team works collaboratively across multiple agencies and actively attends BCP team meetings to share our core offer and remit within Aspire’s post-adoption support services. Aspire works jointly with Early Help, Child in Need, and the Birth to Settled Adulthood teams, developing shared plans to support families. The interventions complement safeguarding plans by offering access to specialist therapeutic services that Early Help cannot provide—such as Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), Theraplay, and long-term play therapy.

Aspire Adoption Support also works closely with Core CAMHS to provide joint therapeutic support, ensuring that the needs of adopted children in BCP are met and raise awareness of the scope of post-adoption support and the challenges posed by the reduction in the Adoption Support Fund’s fair access limit. Aspire maintains strong relationships with the Virtual School and SEND services, complementing each other’s work. Aspire Post Adoption supports parents in understanding their child’s EHCP and in challenging it when it does not meet their child’s needs

In 2026, we plan to extend this further by providing child-led support within these schools. This initiative will help adopted children feel less isolated and foster friendships and identity through specialist after-school activities.

Aspire commissions therapists across BCP and Dorset and is exploring a partnership with a provider in Dorset to support adopted fathers. This

initiative aims to create a safe emotional space and highlight the different aspects of fatherhood and the importance of their role within families.

Aspire Adoption Family Finding Team case holds all children at the point of Placement Order therefor all statutory children in care responsibilities are held by the Aspire Social Worker. The Family Finding Team Manager also ensure attendance at Case Transfer Meetings from the BCP LA Social Work Team to ensure all task are completed before accepting transfer including arrangements for Keeping in Touch.

The cases held within the Aspire Family Finding Team are part of the BCP PLR Audit process with 2 cases per month being chosen at random. Timeliness for children is also reviewed via monthly performance data is reviewed monthly via Aspire attending BCP Data Performance Meetings and have also implemented an Aspire Quarterly Data and Performance Board in advance of submission to ASGLB national reporting of data for adopted children.

Next steps:

In January 2026 Aspire Adoption Quality Assurance Framework which has been agreed by Aspire Governance Boards and be implemented in 26/27.

Review and monitoring Adoption support demand, assessment timeliness, interventions, and outcomes will also be incorporated into the audit framework along with practice quality indicators

A Keeping in Touch Review is also being finalised to ensure adopted children and families are supporting and service needs are adequately resourced.

7.9 Advocacy

Coram Voice continues to be supported to strengthen the promotion and visibility of the service across relevant BCP Council service areas. Take-up of advocacy and Independent Visitor services for children in care and those subject to a child protection plan remains comparatively low, and the referral rate remains proportionately higher for children subject to child protection plans. The referral rate for our care experienced young people remains significantly low despite this being highlighted within child in care meetings and attendance by Coram Voice at 333 Care Leavers Hub.

Available data indicates that the low take-up of advocacy has not adversely affected the extent to which children’s voices are central to planning and review processes. Participation and inclusion of children and young people across child protection and looked after children arrangements continue to improve.

In addition, the IRO/Child Protection Chair visit template includes a mandatory question requiring confirmation that the child or young person is aware of, and understands, the Coram Voice advocacy and Independent Visitor service and whether they would like the IRO or Chair to make a referral on their behalf.

Next steps

Continued quarterly meetings with Coram Voice to monitor service delivery and demand as well as consideration of a new tender to ensure the service offer remains responsive, accessible and delivers value for children and young people.

24 children and young people in BCP received support from the IV Service in 2024/25



Chapter 8

**The experiences
and progress of
Care Experienced
Young People
(care leavers)**

8.1 Care Experienced Young People

At BCP, we are dedicated to staying connected with our young people, and current data shows strong performance in this area. Last year, we faced difficulties establishing a reliable process for evaluating housing needs and ensuring young people received appropriate support when seeking accommodation. We are pleased to share that the local policy and process have now been updated to prioritise the journey and experience of our young people, foster collaboration between agencies, and uphold our responsibilities as corporate parents. This is already having a positive impact, as most young people are now in suitable accommodation, and those waiting have safe places to stay. Additionally, the creation of a Youth Homelessness Prevention Board is providing strategic oversight and greater focus on prevention.

Following feedback from Ofsted, we reviewed our case closure process for those transitioning to extended support after age 21, making sure we offer the right level of assistance at the right time. As a result, there has been a 30% increase in the number of young people aged 21 and over receiving services, which reassures us that ongoing support is being provided where it is needed.

Next steps

We have worked hard to ensure that our local offer was reviewed and meaningful for our young people, but also that it is accessible and the reality of their experience; it will enhance access to practical resources and services. Adjustments to the allocation of financial resources will increase flexibility and eliminate obstacles to obtaining support and assistance through our new Aspirations Fund.

Key Performance Indicators				
%	BCP 2025/26	National 2024/25	Statistical Neighbours 2024/25	Good+ LAs 2024/25
In touch 17-18s	98	93	96	95
In touch 19-21s	98	93	93	93
EET 17-18s	69	64	64	66
EET 19-21s	51	54	54	55
Suitable accommodation 17-18s	92	91	93	92
Suitable accommodation 19-21s	93	89	88	90

8.2 Employment, education and training

Summary of our EET support offer for care leavers

Our care leaver EET offer is delivered through the Personal Adviser (PA) service, working closely with the Virtual School and Further/ Higher Education providers and employers. We maintain close oversight of participation, attendance and progress for our care experienced young people and use timely tracking and information-sharing to identify early signs of disengagement and respond quickly where risks of NEET emerge.

Support is coordinated through an agreed action plan and includes direct work to build aspiration, confidence and employability, alongside practical help to remove barriers to participation and sustain placements in education, training, apprenticeships, internships or employment. Where young people remain in education or training, planning and review are strengthened through routine and maintained Personal Education Plan programme (a minimum of 3 meetings across Years 12 and 13, and 2/3 meetings in Year 14 as appropriate), ensuring plans remain purposeful, responsive and focused on impact and inform the Pathway Plans.

Building on this offer, EET participation of our care experienced young people is improving. For those in Year 13 (age 18), engagement in Education, Employment and Training (EET) increased from 59% in September 2025 to 72% in March 2026. For Year 14, EET increased from 61% to 68%, reflecting ongoing efforts to sustain engagement in the later phases of transition planning and collaboration with colleges and employers to create bespoke opportunities and maintain participation. For 17-18 year old care experienced young people, the engagement with EET is 69% which is above both national and statistical neighbour outcomes.

Collaboration with our local college is focused on implementing a bespoke transition and engagement course from May 2026, aimed at sustaining Year 13 (age 17-18) participation in education for those who find mainstream pathways difficult and supporting a smoother journey into adulthood (Year 14) as young people become 'care leavers'. This programme will provide a vital bridge into Further/ Higher Education and

employment, improving retention and building resilience for young people who face barriers such as mental health needs or insecure housing.

Steps to Employment

Feedback from the Bright Spots survey showed young people want more chances to build confidence and explore career paths. In response, a new Corporate Parenting pledge prioritises work experience, supported by our HR department, including:

- Priority access to placements in every council department, plus opportunities to shadow senior leaders.
- Tailored career experiences, such as “day in the life” sessions and personalised shadowing.
- Each placement includes a supervisor and informal mentor.
- Inclusive recruitment with updated forms for care-experienced applicants.
- Ongoing feedback to improve the offer.
- Long-term coaching and mentoring.

We are combining this new offer with Virtual School resources and bespoke programmes, the 'Connect to Work' Programme through the Skills and Learning Service and wider network and community opportunities for greater flexibility. HR is also updating our careers site to feature roles and pathways for care-experienced young people (CEYP), making opportunities clearer and easier to access. Over the next three months, we'll refine the offer and train staff to ensure support for young people.

Next steps include supporting the launch of the site and training our staff so that feel supported and equipped to assist our young people.

8.3 Support into adulthood

Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) arrangements across BCP are increasingly well-established and reflect a shared multi-agency commitment to early identification, coordinated planning, and improved outcomes for young people with SEND as they move into adulthood. The 2025 SEND inspection recognised the strength of partnership working across Children's and Adult Services and the growing focus on pathways that support education, employment, independent living, health, and community inclusion.

Early preparation for adulthood begins from Year 9 and Year 10 through EHCP review processes, enabling timely conversations about aspirations and potential adult social care needs. The PfA team within Adult Social Care works closely with the Children's Health and Disability (CHAD) Service as well as our Children in Care Teams, SEND colleagues, education settings, and health partners to ensure that preparation is not delayed until a young person approaches age 18, but is embedded within ongoing planning. Closer working relationship has been established between Children's in Care/Care Experience Young People Service and Preparing for Adulthood Team. A significant strength within the local system is the Transition Planning Group (TPG), a multi-agency forum co-chaired by Adult Social Care and Children's Services. The TPG provides oversight and coordination for young people with complex needs and transition risks beyond SEND, enabling holistic discussion and shared decision-making. Importantly, the SEND inspection highlighted the value of forums that support joint problem-solving and clarity of pathways, and the TPG directly contributes to this system maturity.

The TPG considers a wider cohort of young people than those who meet eligibility for the PfA team, including young people who may not be Care Act eligible, but who require coordinated transition planning, such as:

- young people subject to Section 117 aftercare
- young people with complex health or mental health needs
- young people requiring structured planning despite not meeting adult social care thresholds

This inclusive approach ensures that young people and families do not experience gaps in planning solely due to eligibility criteria and that agencies remain accountable for transition outcomes. During 2025–26, a growing number of young people were referred to the TPG for discussion and pathway planning, including those who did not ultimately transfer to the PfA team, demonstrating the group's safeguarding and system-coordination role rather than a sole gatekeeping function.

Performance information shows positive outcomes for young people with SEND in relation to sustained education, employment, or training, and inspection findings acknowledged that many young people are increasingly well prepared for adulthood. However, we also recognise ongoing challenges, including rising complexity, increasing demand, and the need to further improve consistency of transition experiences across pathways and cohorts. Overall, preparing for adulthood in BCP is moving in the right direction, with clear evidence of system collaboration, inclusive planning through the TPG, and learning from SEND inspection findings informing service improvement.

Key areas for continued development include:

- further strengthening clarity and consistency of PfA pathways across education, health, and social care
- improving the use of data to track long-term transition outcomes
- ensuring timely transition planning for young people with complex needs who fall outside standard eligibility pathways.



Chapter 9
**The impact of
leaders on social
work practice with
children and
families**

9.1 Corporate leadership

BCP Council's commitment to Children's Services is stronger than ever, with the appointment of a new Chief Executive who is prioritising children at the heart of the council's agenda. Our corporate leadership recognises the scale of the continued challenge and is actively driving improvement and transformation across SEND and Children's Social Care. The political administration continues to support the service, maintaining an informal agreement with opposition parties to ensure Children's Services remains above politics and focused solely on outcomes for children and young people.

Regular 'Quartet' meetings continue to be held, attended by Chief Executive, DCS, Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder, and communications have been open, and confidentially respected. Their commitment has been demonstrated through ongoing financial support for transformation and improvements in Children's Services. There is good engagement with Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who offer high support and high challenge and there are regular briefing sessions with representatives of all political groups

Corporate Management Board (CMB) has endorsed these initiatives, and Children's Services' transformation programme is fully integrated into the Council's overall transformation agenda. The Children's Transformation and Strategic Board ensures ongoing development, accountability, and partnership working, with updated governance arrangements embedded following the December 2024 ILACS inspection. These arrangements now include the Children and Young People's Partnership Board, supporting the launch and delivery of the new Children and Young People's Plan 2025–2030.

The Corporate Pay and Reward project for the harmonization of pay, a legacy from Local Government Review concluded in December 2025 following 4 years of uncertainty for staff, and whilst Children's Services were able to secure local market supplements for Social Workers, which has been significant in the success of our recruitment campaign, the uncertainty around ending of these supplements has had an impact on retention and morale. In March 2026 a review of supplements was undertaken in line with the new corporate policy, and most were removed as pay now largely comes in line with regional and national comparators.

Corporate leads from the Directors Strategy Group are spearheading the embedding of Corporate Parenting as everyone's responsibility throughout the Council. This collaborative approach is being implemented through a dedicated Corporate Parenting project, which focuses on the delivery of three pledges agreed by Children and Young people and corporate services, they are:

- 1) **Increasing access to discounts and wellbeing support** A new benefits/discounts platform for staff is being extended to young people. They are also working on extending the Employee Assistance Programme including free counselling and advice to care experienced young people
- 2) **Improving digital inclusion for Care Experienced young people** - Work is starting on availability of laptops and phones for young people including reaching out to suppliers as part of a social contract.
- 3) **Expanding Work Experience opportunities for care experienced young people** – This includes increasing the range and number of placements across the council for work experience opportunities, training for staff in offering meaningful work experience opportunities as well as increasing mentoring opportunities for our young people.

Together, these pledges demonstrate sustained corporate commitment to improving the practical support, opportunities and life chances of our care-experienced children and young people.

9.2 Strategic leadership and partnerships

Strategic leadership in BCP Children's Services is stable and increasingly effective, providing clear direction, pace and grip across the system. Leaders set clear priorities through the Children and Young People's Plan, with a shared focus on outcomes, risk and early help/prevention. Leaders are visible and accountable, with a culture of challenge and learning.

Governance is well established and regularly reviewed to maintain clear accountability and oversight, linking strategy to delivery. Director-led quality, performance and systems boards scrutinise performance, practice quality, risk and improvement, supported by service-level groups that connect frontline practice to senior leadership and corporate governance.

Partnership working remains a strength, including through ICB change. Leaders work with statutory and community partners to deliver shared priorities and respond to safeguarding pressures. Safeguarding arrangements are well embedded through the BCP Safeguarding Children Partnership, with joint accountability and shared ownership of risk and outcomes.

System leadership has strengthened through partnership boards, including the Children and Young People's Partnership Board, which provides shared oversight and ambition. These forums support coordinated decision-making, escalation and collective responses to emerging challenges.

Leaders show strong political and corporate awareness, positioning Children's Services priorities within wider council strategies and financial planning. Regular reporting, scrutiny and engagement support transparency and informed decisions. Leaders are realistic about financial and workforce pressures, using evidence to prioritise resources, manage risk and protect frontline services.

The service has a confident, developing leadership culture. SLT and the wider leadership group take collective responsibility for improvement and model openness, collaboration and focus on impact. Staff engagement is prioritised through whole-service events, leadership forums and regular dialogue, supporting trust and shared purpose.

Leaders are self-aware and respond quickly when improvement is needed, with clear ownership, realistic plans and evidence of progress.

Priorities include deepening partnership maturity and strengthening consistency, so children and families receive timely, coordinated support.

Next Steps

Strategic leaders recognise that continued development requires a sustained focus on deepening system leadership and partnership maturity, particularly in the context of ongoing national reform, financial pressure and increasing complexity of need.

Over the next 12 months, leaders will:

- Embed the Children and Young People's Partnership Board as the main forum for shared strategic ownership and alignment of priorities, improvement and outcomes.
- Strengthen joint accountability across safeguarding, SEND, health and early help through sharper shared measures and use of QA and lived experience to inform redesign.
- Increase consistency and pace by streamlining governance and development so strategy translates into timely frontline practice.
- Strengthen corporate and political engagement so priorities, risks and progress are understood, and members can provide effective challenge and advocacy.
- Provide leadership through ICB change so children remain a priority and partnership decisions protect and improve outcomes.
- Build leadership capacity and succession (especially middle leaders) to sustain improvement and deliver Families First for Children and SEND transformation.

These actions will keep strategic leadership collaborative, sustainable and focused on improving experiences and outcomes for children and young people.

9.3 BCP Safeguarding Children Partnership

In 2025–26, the BCP Safeguarding Children Partnership (BCP SCP) strengthened oversight of multi-agency safeguarding practice and improved the quality of evidence and assurance. Leadership is stable through the Delegated Safeguarding Partners, with effective oversight via the BCP SCP Board and its subgroups. Governance was reviewed and refreshed, with updated group functions and published multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

Joint working has increased with key partnerships, particularly the Safeguarding Adults Board and Community Safety Partnership, including work on transitional safeguarding and domestic abuse. The partnership has also developed a Harmful Sexual Behaviour framework and training.

Assurance has been strengthened through a partnership Quality Assurance Framework. The Quality Assurance Group has improved insight into practice through digitising Section 11 audits of organisational safeguarding standards, a review of the multi-agency dataset, and a policy audit informing an agreed core policy framework (to be published).

The partnership has commissioned an independent thematic scrutiny into Extra Familial Harm to strengthen responses to exploitation, missing children and trafficking.

A new Learning and Engagement Group supports translation of learning into improved practice. This will strengthen governance of learning and development through composite learning plans, providing a focus on delivering on the findings from multi-agency audit and safeguarding practice reviews with targeted learning resources and events going forward.

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) Group has strengthened local review processes, including robust pre-SIN discussions to support consistent thresholds and effective rapid reviews. In 2025–26 the partnership completed four rapid reviews and one local learning review, and commissioned a thematic review on neglect, parental substance misuse and domestic abuse. Recurring themes include neglect, domestic

abuse, parental substance misuse, cumulative harm and gaps in transitional safeguarding.

This learning has informed refreshed partnership priorities: transitional safeguarding, neglect and the development of a multi-agency practice framework.

Engagement with education has strengthened through the Education Sub-Group, including increased Designated Safeguarding Lead forum engagement, review of the local Operation Encompass protocol, and development of welfare check guidance informed by national and local learning.

Next, the partnership will embed learning and improvements by:

- strengthening learning from reviews.
- completing multi-agency audits.
- preparing for Joint Targeted Area Inspections.
- responding to Section 11 findings.
- improving access to multi-agency policies and procedures; and
- reviewing escalation arrangements to support timely challenge and resolution.

9.4 Quality Assurance

Following integration of the Quality Assurance Framework across children's social care, compliance continues to improve, averaging 90.6% over the past year. Managers complete monthly collaborative Practice Learning Reviews (PLRs), supported by a moderation group and benchmarking led by Quality Assurance. We aim to moderate 30% of PLRs to ensure consistent grading and maximise learning.

Between April 2025 and March 2026, 75% of PLRs were graded good or outstanding. Moderation/benchmarking shows consistent use of grading, with 78% retaining the original grade across 2025/26.

The framework has been updated to strengthen focus on impact and outcomes, improve insight into experiences of minority groups, and sharpen capture and tracking of actions from PLRs.

Fostering PLRs are now embedded, with managers completing monthly collaborative reviews. Early evidence is positive, with 92% graded good or above.

Practice weeks will run three times a year and are moving from service-based to thematic focus (first theme: neglect). They provide protected space for observation, reflective discussion, collaborative PLRs and feedback from children and families, alongside learning sessions open to colleagues across the service.

Next steps

- Add Fostering PLRs to the PLR portal (June 2026) and develop a live Power BI dashboard.
- Deliver thematic practice weeks.
- Increase multi-agency audit activity and learning events with the BCP Safeguarding Children Partnership to strengthen assurance and shared learning.

9.5 Complaints and Compliments

During 2025/2026, 170 compliments and 461 Stage One complaints (both statutory and corporate) across Children's Services were received. This is a 35% decrease in compliments and a 26% increase in complaints from the previous year. 40% of Stage One complaints were related to Children's Social Care, and 52% to Education and Skills (not including cross service complaints.)

The vast majority of complaints are resolved at Stage 1, however, there has been an increase of 36% in Stage 2 escalations and 25% in Stage 3 escalations from the previous year. 37% of Stage 2 complaints were related to Children's Social Care, and 60% to Education and Skills. Ombudsman enquiries saw a decrease of 36% from the previous year. 81% of complaints were made by parents (with 61% coming from mothers), and key themes across social care remain as the previous year - communication and delay, or lack of agreed action.

There has been an 82% increase in enquiries from MPs/councillors from the previous year. Learning from complaints and ensuring they are dealt with efficiently and effectively will be a regular focus at the Quality, Performance and Systems Board. Some examples of learning arising from complaints include: a review of housing policies to improve provision for Care Experienced Young People; an evaluation of methods used by social workers to improve accuracy in ascertaining a child's feelings; embedding more streamlined processes to enable EHCCO's to have greater time to focus on communication response times; to ensure that explicit questions are asked around PR as early on in the consent and assessment stages as possible in light of changing circumstances and training provided to social workers in relation to Section 117 processes.

On 1 April 2025, the Compliments and Complaints service transitioned to the management of the corporate centre, to align with other council compliments and complaints services. A robust service charter is in place to support and oversee this arrangement to ensure continued accountability and communication with children's services.

9.6 Independent Review Service and Child protection Chairs

- ✓ 644 children in care
- ✓ 99% ICPCs quorate
- ✓ 87% ICPCs on time
- ✓ 95% RCPCs on time
- ✓ 66% of CYP attended their meeting
- ✓ 98% of children and young people participated in their meetings

Child Protection Chairs

Overall child protection numbers remain higher than national averages. The number of children on a plan for longer than 12 months has reduced and continued oversight of these children is in place.

Timeliness for child protection conferences remains strong. A small number of Initial Child Protection Conferences have been subject to short, agreed delays to support professional judgement and ensure they are meaningful for children and families. Following learning from recent reviews, practice has been updated so that repeat conferences are chaired by the same Child Protection Chair wherever possible. This strengthens continuity, relationships, and understanding of family history, supporting more robust risk oversight with minimal impact on overall timeliness.

Repeat child protection plans remain higher than national and regional averages. Where an ICPC is requested for a child previously subject to a plan, a review meeting involving the IRS Head of Service, Service Manager and Child Protection Chair is held to consider family history, previous intervention and current risk, supporting robust decision-making. A bi-monthly report will be introduced once sufficient data is available to identify themes, learning and share this with social work teams.

There is a continued focus on children subject of the PLO process to ensure their progress is effectively tracked within child protection

planning, reducing the risk of drift and delay and supporting timely, purposeful linked decision-making.

The team are preparing for the introduction of the Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams and are working with social work colleagues to shape this.

Work is planned to continue to review and understand the higher numbers of CP plans in this authority compared to the national average. Work is also being undertaken to consider the impact and outcomes of children subject to risk outside the home who are subject of a child protection plan.

Next steps

- Further develop work tracking and oversight of children on a CP plan for over 15 months continuing the focus on those children who are also subject of a Supervision Order.
- Targeted scrutiny of repeat plans providing a bi-monthly report which identifies themes and learning.
- Monitor the use of escalations within the child protection process to ensure drift is being highlighted at an earlier stage.
- Work with children's services to coordinate both a strategy that is aimed at supporting the reduction of CP plans where appropriate, to be in line with regional neighbours.
- Work continues to ensure that our service is inclusive, accessible and meets the individual needs of children, young people and their families.
- Review of how CP chairs approach the child protection planning process for children subject of a plan under
- Preparing for the introduction of the Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams.

Independent Reviewing Officers

- ✓ 99% of meetings were held within timescale
- ✓ 66% of children and young people attended their meeting

The number of children in care has continued to rise and is now at an all-time high. Despite this increasing demand, Independent Reviewing Officers have consistently maintained effective service delivery and a strong standard of practice. Timeliness of meetings continues to be good with over 95% of meetings taking place within timescale over the last financial year. Participation of children and young people in the care planning process is also good, although attendance at meetings being a continued area for development. Learning sessions from reviews have been held with IROs and CP chairs and we have noted that this has had an impact upon practice.

IROs have strong, effective working relationships with social work teams and mid-point reviews are embedded and consistently noted in practice with evidence of impact. IROs routinely contribute to legal gateway meetings, and their views are consistently sought by social workers within care proceedings. A key area for development remains ensuring IROs receive specialist assessments and relevant documentation in sufficient time to fully inform their views on proposed care plans.

The use and impact of DRP is an ongoing focus that needs to be strengthened, used more and be timelier.

Next steps

- Work with colleagues in children's services to help and support a CIC strategy aimed at identifying and supporting children who could return home and where a care order Can be discharged.
- Develop a process in which Independent Reviewing Officers will be included appropriately within the ADM process.
- Continue to ensure midways and oversight is in place to support children's plans and interventions be timely without drift or unnecessary delay
- Increase child attendance at meetings by being more creative in how we facilitate meetings; for example encouraging children and young people to lead their own meetings with support from their IRO as well as offering flexible ways to attend the meeting.
- Continue to embed learning from rapid reviews and serious incidents to ensure children and families continue to have independent scrutiny that considers if they are safe.

9.7 LADO

Despite rising demand, the LADO service has maintained a safe, high-quality offer. Referrals rose from 655 (2024/25) to 795 (2025/26): +21% overall, with consultations up 14% and threshold-met cases up 25%. Staffing changes have been managed through robust arrangements, with no impact on timeliness, quality or safety.

LADOs delivered five multi-agency Managing Allegations sessions and two bespoke sessions for an Academy Trust and Early Years providers. Ongoing promotion of the LADO role across partner and external organisations has increased awareness and demand.

LADOs maintain strong working relationships with partner agencies. Education settings remain the largest referrer, reflecting the area's high proportion of children and young people in education.

The service has strengthened partnership working with Education Safeguarding Advisors and the Early Years Safeguarding Service, improving joined-up working and information sharing. Joint work has also reinforced appropriate, proportionate referrals and that LADO should not be used as a default route.

Referrals from parents increased, but many related to complaints about safeguarding arrangements rather than concerns meeting the LADO threshold. LADOs have therefore developed a standard signposting response for cases where LADO has no role.

Next steps

- Deliver additional bespoke training for sports providers, BCP HR and Children's Social Care, alongside the multi-agency offer.
- Develop and launch the Safe After School initiative to promote safer out-of-school activities for parents and professionals.
- Improve data collection and analysis to inform service development.
- Reintroduce monthly peer audits, with quarterly moderation by the Head of Service, to identify themes and learning.

9.8 Principal Social Worker

Our Principal Social Worker role provides a focus on practice improvement and looking at the impact of practice change on our children and families. They work alongside our Talent Acquisition team, HR Business Partners, and Pay and Reward team around workforce strategy, recruitment and retention.

The role provides guidance on the development of the practice curriculum and development of training resources and leading on practice initiatives such as the Creative Life Story platform.

The PSW role was critical in embedding Our Practice Framework which is evidenced based in restorative and trauma informed approaches. Going forward the PSW role will focus on continued practice innovation and moving Our Practice Framework to business as usual. Our annual practice framework all-service conference developed and hosted by the PSW in March 2026 featured a keynote speaker expert by experience Mary-ann Hodd, on the theme of coproduction and was supported by our Children's Rights and Engagement Team.

The PSW moderates ASYE and Grade Progression portfolios to provide consistent quality assurance to ensure that our social workers can demonstrate the skills and experience needed to support and safeguard BCP's children and families. Additionally, the PSW has worked to align the Quality Assurance Framework with Education to provide consistent approach across services for children and is Vice Chair for Mosaic System Change Triage Group.



9.9 Financial Position

The general fund forecast outturn for 2025/26 as at end of Q3 was £105.2m, reflecting a projected overspend of £5.1m (5.1% above budget). This variance is primarily driven by an increase in both the number and complexity of children in care. It is anticipated that the final outturn will exceed the current forecast of £5.1m, due to additional care-related activity in the final quarter. The service has engaged the service of Impower to help with the identification and delivery of sustainable reductions in Children in Care numbers and costs, while ensuring value for money and positive outcomes for children. The contract requires an upfront investment of £0.561m in 2026/27. Savings have been estimated at £1m for 2026/27 with a further £1m in 2027/28. This investment will be funded by the expected in-year budget savings for 2026/27.

9.10 Children's Transformation Programme

In April 2025 the Children's Transformation and Strategy Programme was launched to build on ongoing transformation activity whilst expanding to include the new Families First programme and fully incorporating Education and Skills. The programme provides a holistic overview and a cohesive approach across the key areas of transformation and improvement within Children's Services, all supported by the BCP Council Projects and Programmes team. Key workstreams within the programme during 2025/26 have included:

- Ongoing work to establish and implement a new locality-based service delivery model, Strengthening Families, Supporting Communities.
- Continuing work to transform Children's Commissioning, delivering more effective processes, improved governance and financial management arrangements and enhanced reporting and assurance mechanisms.
- Defining Proof of Concepts for our Mockingbird, It Takes a Family and Reunification models.

- Support to scope and deliver the new Families First programme, in line with the Children's Wellbeing and Education Bill.
- Delivery of an Education and Skills project package which has supported systems improvement, placement sufficiency, stronger internal processes and greater efficiency.
- Supporting ongoing service improvement focussed on positive outcomes, sustainable services and promoting effective ways of working.

In 2026/27 the Children's Transformation and Strategy Programme will maintain and progress many of its key themes including supporting the service to work efficiently and effectively, promoting a 'One Team, One Approach' culture, championing intelligent and proactive use of our systems and data and delivering better outcomes for children. However, it will also evolve to ensure it continues to reflect legislation and guidance, the needs of our children and young people and the wider service and corporate strategy. Underpinned by an improved position for both Children's Social Care and SEND, it will support the service to transition from system wide transformation to more targeted transformation activity. This will include:

- Working collaboratively to deliver SEND Reform in line with national strategy.
- Evolving our Family Hubs to support the new Best Start in Life Strategy and increase school readiness for our 0-5 year age group.
- Continue to deliver our Families First programme, in line with the Children's Wellbeing and Education Bill.
- Embedding a 'One Team, One Approach' culture to underpin the new locality-based service delivery model.
- Delivering a new targeted Children in Care programme, promoting the best outcomes for our children and young people.
- Support ongoing service improvement across a complex and cross functional landscape.

9.11 Achievements and progress in implementing the Families First for Children Social Care Reforms.

Families First Transformation Programme – Annual Self-Evaluation Summary

BCP Council commenced implementation of its Families First Transformation Programme in 2026. During the first year, the focus has been on building strong foundations for sustainable system change. This has included the establishment of robust partnership governance arrangements to align a wide range of national reforms, extensive staff engagement and co-design activity, recruitment of a multi-disciplinary transformation team, and the development of a clear, phased implementation plan.

The programme is structured around five key strands, with significant progress achieved across each area to date:

1. Early Help Single Assessment and Partnership Pathways

An online, multi-agency Early Help assessment portal has been developed, enabling partners to complete a single, shared assessment for children and families who require early, coordinated support. This approach will reduce duplication currently created by multiple single-agency referral and assessment pathways and improve the quality and consistency of information shared across the partnership.

2. Review of Front Door Arrangements

A detailed analysis of referrals that result in No Further Action has been undertaken to improve understanding of system demand and thresholds. Building on this insight, a Strategic Partnership Group is developing a new Front Door operating model. The model will strengthen multi-agency representation and information sharing, with a particular focus on mental health services, and will move away from a process- and criteria-driven approach towards a conversation-based, strengths- and needs-led model.

3. Family Help Pilot

A six-month Family Help pilot has been launched to test new ways of working across Early Help, Targeted Support and Children in Need. The pilot includes:

- A single assessment framework across intervention levels
- Reduced transfers between lead practitioners
- Enhanced multi-agency working, including the integration of alternatively qualified practitioners within social work teams
- New induction, workforce development and practitioner support arrangements

The pilot operates on a 'test and learn' basis, with learning informing the wider system. Subject to evaluation, full implementation across Children's Services is planned by the end of 2026.

4. Multi-Agency Child Protection Team

A strategic model has been developed to strengthen the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). This includes increased partner involvement and the introduction of Lead Child Protection Practitioners to improve decision-making, quality assurance and coherence of multi-agency child protection responses. Further co-design work with partners is currently underway.

5. Family Group Decision Making

Existing Family Group Decision Making practice and workforce capacity have been mapped to identify strengths and gaps. Work is progressing to develop a sustainable implementation model, with plans to test and embed this approach across the system by the end of 2026

These workstreams are being supported by ongoing review and development of our **case management and performance management systems**, across the wider partnership to enable us to adapt, improve delivery and report on ongoing national requirements.

9.12 Children's Rights and Influence

Building Relationships, Supporting Inclusion, and Celebrating Achievements

The development of relationships across organisational directorates has enabled young people's voice to influence strategies and services for young people across BCP.

Children in Care and Care Experienced young people continue to share their views and lived experience through **UNITE and INSIGHT** participation groups. Opportunities have expanded using the 333 Hub, providing another space to hear the voice of those that may not wish to join group experiences. Online options have been used with the aim of increasing the reach of consultation topics. Delivery of activities in holidays has provided a route to build relationships with young people to encourage longer term youth voice engagement and can also stand in isolation as a piece of work that support our BRIGHT SPOTS learning.

Our **Corporate Parenting Board** has developed, with three new young people who were selected to act as representatives for their care experienced peers. Each meeting they choose a subject and run an activity with the board that aims to educate and challenge, based on lived experience. The topics chosen relate to the identified areas for development from the BRIGHT SPOTS survey (24/25), focussing on planning for the future, finance, health and well-being and relationships.

The **Directors Strategy Group** discussed what Corporate Parenting means and what BCP council can do as a corporate parent. Using the learning from BRIGHT SPOTS, a non-Children's Service director leads a working group to support and develop our approach, with the emphasis on what we can do as collective 'parents'. This has been an exciting shift in approach, with three strands of work currently being developed: access to IT; a BCP work experience offer for children in care and care experienced and providing access to discounts through the council's online benefit package. The latter also provides information and tools for money management and health and wellbeing support.

2025/26 saw the introduction of the **Language That Cares** Project. 6 care experienced young people worked with officers to create a masterclass. 4

masterclasses were attended to 107 officers from across Children's Services. The response from colleagues was overwhelmingly positive, with the power of young people's voice and lived experience at the centre of the learning. Young people have also presented on the subject to the Corporate Parenting Board and councillors. The Directors Strategy group have supported the agenda, and work continues to embed this as part of the culture in BCP council. This work continues into 2026/27.

In partnership with GOAL17, care experienced 16–25-year-olds accessed mentoring, with 25 referrals per year over three years, supporting national research for future delivery. Some local care experienced young adults have applied to be mentors, pending checks and training, which will inform future projects. Funding confirmation for 2026/27 is pending.

This year saw the third year of the **BCP Youth Fund**, a project to allocate funds to support opportunities shaped by young people across our community. Supported by our commissioning colleagues a group of youth volunteers learned the process of identifying projects, allocating funds and evaluating outcomes, gaining valuable skills while supporting community development.

We continue to develop our work to strengthen the breadth of the **voice of young people** we hear. We continue to strengthen young people's voices. Working with school colleagues, two SEND schools joined BCP Council to debate the term SEND in 2026. Nineteen young people participated, with most voting that the language is not inclusive and should be reconsidered. This feedback will inform national SEND reforms and local developments.

Next Steps

- Review of Directors Corporate Parenting workgroup – impact and next steps
- Language That Cares – training for foster carers and our fostering panel and the production of a digital induction option for use across workforce development
- Work with colleagues and young people to regularly review the Local Offer
- Mentoring project (subject to confirmation from DfE) and consideration of next steps based on funding confirmation.

- A regular opportunity for young people in the SEND cohort to inform and influence BCP strategy, systems and provision.
- Support the development of our Families First model with young people's consultation and engagement
- Ensure Children and Young People have their voices heard in our new family Group Decision Making practice.

9.13 Celebrating Our Young People

Each year we hold a celebration event (STAR Awards) for our children in care (0-15 years) and our care experienced young people (16-25 years). These highlight their strengths, with nominations welcomed from anyone in their network. Every young person nominated is invited to join us to celebrate, with the emphasis on fun and inclusion alongside individual and collective value. This year we received over 650 nominations, with around 140 young people bringing guests to celebrate. Those who can't join us always receive a certificate to recognise their achievement.

In addition, our annual Youth Voice event provides another opportunity for our young people to celebrate their influence on local young matters and includes all young people in BCP who get involved, such as joining the Youth Fund panel, becoming a young interviewer or being part of the range of projects that develop each year, led by young people's voice. Children in care and care experienced young people are celebrated within this as young people who influence systems while also developing their own skills.

We also recognise and celebrate that our young people are supporting BCP and getting involved in national agendas. TL is a young person's representative from BCP on the Homewards Project (supported by the Royal Foundation). RD is care experienced and representing the southwest as a national ambassador with CORAM VOICE. These young people are helping to make a difference using their lived experience and the skills and confidence they have developed from their youth voice journey at a national level.

9.14 Performance & Data intelligence

Performance and data intelligence within BCP Children's Services is widely used as a core enabler of effective leadership, governance and frontline practice. We are further strengthening the way data is brought together across services so that it provides a clear, timely and shared understanding of demand, performance, quality and outcomes for children and families.

The performance framework is well embedded into Children's Social Care. Data driven monthly Performance Action Group meetings ensure scrutiny of priority areas and regular attention to what is going well and what needs focus. Data scorecards are agile, with indicators and associated targets reviewed annually to align with service priorities. Many operational reports are automated within Power BI and accessible through a central portal, allowing drill down to child level data.

Data is well understood and widely used at strategic and operational levels, including front line workers who use an operational tracker. This has been one of the top three most used Power BI reports across the council since its launch in summer 2023.

Last year the team was successful in a bid to participation in the DfE Children's Social Care Private Dashboard Early Adopters Scheme, working with the DfE to test automated data feeds, improve data quality and validation, and shape the future national approach to more timely, less burdensome statutory data collection.

Next steps

- Developing more accessible performance products such as infographics and high-level summaries for staff, leaders and Members.
- Develop a more integrated performance framework that brings together children's social care, education, SEND and early help intelligence to support a whole-system view.
- Support national, regional and local transformation projects in terms of data collection, returns and success monitoring.

9.15 Workforce Development

Workforce Development for Children's Services is delivered through the People and Culture Centre of Expertise, with a dedicated Children's Services Workforce Development Manager and strong links with Children's Services leadership. This provides corporate consistency while ensuring workforce development remains aligned to Children's Services priorities, practice risks and improvement activity.

Learning priorities are jointly shaped by Workforce Development, the Principal Social Worker, Quality Assurance and service leaders, informed by audit findings, Practice Learning Reviews, inspection learning, service transformation and themes emerging from children, families and carers' lived experience. This ensures development activity is targeted, responsive and focused on improving practice quality and outcomes for children.

The service benefits from strong early-career pathways, including ASYE, Step Up to Social Work, student placements and degree apprenticeships. During 2025–26, 10 practitioners successfully completed their ASYE and 2 social work apprentices qualified and registered with Social Work England; all have secured permanent roles within Children's Services. Workforce stability continues to improve, with the proportion of permanent staff rising from 63% to 78% over the last 12 months, supported by targeted recruitment activity and the conversion of agency staff to permanent posts. This has strengthened continuity of relationships for children and families.

A refreshed Children's Services curriculum was embedded during 2025–26, aligned to the Practice Framework and focused on strengthening analysis, reflective decision-making, child-centred practice and the consistent application of evidenced based trauma-informed and restorative approaches. This supports national reform, including the Families First Programme and the One Team, One Approach service model. Evaluation feedback and quality assurance findings indicate increased practitioner confidence, improved consistency in assessments and planning, and stronger alignment between learning, supervision and day-to-day practice.

Practitioners consistently report that learning opportunities support reflection, peer learning and the application of learning into practice, including more confident child-focused analysis and adaptation of practice informed by lived experience.

Leaders recognise ongoing challenges, including capacity pressures affecting attendance and the need to further strengthen how the impact of learning on practice is evidenced. While feedback from learning and development activity is consistently positive, improving learning transfer, evaluation completion and clarity of impact remain a key priority.

Next Steps

Over the next year, Workforce Development will focus on strengthening impact through:

- Supporting managers to embed learning through supervision, using reflective prompts linked to the Practice Framework and drawing on audit and Practice Learning Review themes.
- Supporting delivery of the refreshed Social Care Workforce Strategy once approved, aligning workforce priorities with Families First and the One Team, One Approach service model.
- Improving evidence of impact through refreshed evaluation tools, increased completion rates and stronger quality assurance links.
- Sustaining the refreshed curriculum and protecting priority learning linked to known practice risks and cultural change.
- Strengthening workforce sustainability and readiness for reform, including preparation for the Early Career Framework and future capacity requirements.

9.16 Our focus moving forward

Children's Services in 2026/27 want to secure and maintain transformation efforts so children and families receive help earlier and in a more coordinated way. This includes better safeguarding, increased stability and permanence, improved outcomes for care leavers, all supported by a reliable workforce, strong quality assurance, and effective use of data.

Key priorities for 2026/27 are:

- Effective management of Children in Care numbers
- Deliver the Families First programme (including the Family Help model) to boost early intervention, reduce transitions between services, and improve assessment and planning consistency.
- Implement the new locality-based service model ("One Team, One Approach" / place-based working).
- Keep a strong focus on ILACS improvement goals, including:
 - Consistent responses to children at risk of exploitation
 - Better support for older care leavers
 - Enhanced safety planning where there are safeguarding concerns
- Strengthen approaches to Extra Familial Harm, exploitation, and missing children, with improved multi-agency working and tracking.
- Improve permanence, sufficiency, and stability by expanding local resources (such as foster care capacity, kinship support, step-down from residential placements, and SGO pathway improvements).
- Accelerate SEND improvements, particularly those required by statutory guidelines.
- Continue building quality practice and leadership through strengthened quality assurance, performance and data intelligence, and workforce development, which includes supervision, training, retention, and stability.
- Active and meaningful involvement of partners to further develop sustained partnerships particularly through ICB changes

Top three priorities for strengthening:

Priority 1: Effective management of Children in Care numbers

- Innovative strategies to help children remain at home
- New ways to manage risk

Priority 2: Increase sufficiency, ensuring more children have access to local homes

Priority 3: Active and meaningful involvement of partners to further develop our Local Area Partnership arrangements and system approach for delivery of improved outcomes for our children and young people.

Top three risks for the future:

Risk 1: Demand, complexity, and capacity: Rising demand and increasingly complex needs place extra pressure on both statutory services and early help.

Risk 2: Workforce stability: Challenges in recruitment, retention, pay and overall workforce stability can lead to inconsistent practices; partner organisations may also face instability and reorganisation.

Risk 3: System financial sustainability and sufficiency: Financial constraints may limit flexibility, innovation, creativity, and long-term approaches.

BCP Children's Services continues to demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and a commitment to achieving outstanding practice in a challenging landscape. Our drive for transformation, early intervention, and partnership working is underpinned by skilled practitioners and a culture of reflective learning. By harnessing the strengths of our workforce, embracing innovation, and prioritising the wellbeing and safety of children and families, we are well positioned to build on our achievements and face future challenges with confidence. Together, we remain committed to deliver positive outcomes, ensuring every child benefits from the support and opportunities they deserve.

