

Shropshire Council

Annual Service User Diversity Report 2023

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1. Our county and its people

Geography and demography

If you are looking for Shropshire on a map of the United Kingdom, you will need to look to the middle of England on the map, and then to the far west of Birmingham, just next to the middle of Wales. For our communities and businesses, travel to work patterns across our porous borders indicate large numbers travelling for work to the West Midlands, to the South and East, and North and North West, to Cheshire, Staffordshire and Manchester and beyond, as well as into Wales.

Shropshire is the second largest inland rural county in England, after Wiltshire, and one of the most sparsely populated. Shropshire is approximately ten times the size of all the Inner London Boroughs put together (31,929 hectares), with a terrain covering 319,736 hectares. An additional dynamic is that, unlike for example Cumbria, the population is dispersed across the entire county, rather than there being any areas where no one lives at all.

Based on the mid-year population estimates published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the population of Shropshire has grown by 6.5% from 307,100 at mid-2011 to 327,178* at mid-2022. This compares with 7.5% growth for England. The ONS 2018 sub-national population projections, which pre-date the 2021 Census, estimate Shropshire's population will rise by 13.7%, reaching 371,900 by 2038.

Shropshire has a population density of 1 person per hectare (319,730 hectares), compared to 4.4 persons per hectare nationally (13,027,843 hectares). Shropshire is one of the most sparsely populated local authorities in the country with approximately 540 hamlets, villages and market towns widely dispersed across the County. The 2021 Census revealed only six settlements had a population of over 10,000 people (Whitchurch – 10,100, Shrewsbury – 76,800, Oswestry – 17,500, Ludlow – 10,000, Bridgnorth – 11,900 and Market Drayton – 12,600).

The 2021 Census showed 97.7% of Shropshire's population lived in 139,581 households and 2.3% lived in communal establishments. The number of households in Shropshire has grown by 7.6% since 2011. Household growth in Shropshire has largely been driven by a significant rise in single person households and couple households with no children, a reflection of Shropshire's ageing population. These household types make up 62.7% of all households in Shropshire.

*NOTE population figures are estimates and not accurate to single digit. ONS supply the data unrounded so users can do their own calculations.

There is a ONS Analysis Tool that enables easy access to the 2012-2021 mid-year population estimates - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/analysisofpopulationestimatestoolforuk>.

The ONS 2018 sub-national household projections, which pre-date the 2021 Census, estimate the number of households in Shropshire will reach 171,876 by 2038, growth of 23.1%. The 2021 Census revealed there were 147,757 dwellings in Shropshire, growth of 8.99% since the 2011 Census (135,572 dwellings). The Census estimated 0.35% of Shropshire's housing stock were second homes and 5.18% were vacant.

The Shropshire Core Strategy 2011 and SAMDev 2015, planned for 25,700 new homes in Shropshire during 2006-2026. A new draft Shropshire Local Plan (2016-2038) was submitted to the Secretary of State for examination in September 2021 and this is ongoing. The draft Local Plan proposes a requirement for 30,800 new dwellings and around 300 hectares of employment land during 2016-2038.

Challenges and approaches

An emphasis on inequalities within society and within communities, including access to decent and energy efficient housing, healthcare, education and employment, whether by public or private transport or via digital means, should also include better national recognition of geographical and societal interdependencies rather than a separation out of different strands of policy.

Being an inland county brings its own challenges. There is a dependency on a limited number of key arterial transport routes, for trade and supply including freight through the county to Wales and Ireland, or up to the North West, as well as for everyday transport for local communities and businesses. It is also quite literally exposed to extreme weather conditions, with roads that are liable to flooding, and a lack of viable alternatives leading to congestion and lengthy diversions.

The physical terrain poses practical challenges for digital and physical infrastructure, as well as the high service delivery costs and access issues associated with a dispersed and ageing population.

It is within this geographical context of cross border travel patterns, for residents, visitors, and businesses, that we develop and deliver services with and for our diverse communities. The exigencies of adjusting to external factors of climate change and political change, including energy costs, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and the economic and social upheaval continuing to be caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, are allied to the challenges of preserving and maximising our natural capital and seeking to address cost of living worries.

These external factors provide further context to our local strategic and collaborative approaches, which continue to be towards meeting rural and community needs, and in so doing achieving economic recovery and moving towards stability and growth.

The Council has been significantly underfunded under successive governments when compared to urban areas. This is an equity issue. The Council joins with other rural local authorities to campaign through channels such as the Rural Services Network (RSN), the Britain's Leading Edge (BLE) grouping of rural and coastal local authorities, and the County Councils Network (CCN), for a fairer distribution of the

funds which the Government decides to allocate to support local government services, so that historical imbalances do not continue.

Our collegiate approach is to collect and share evidence about community needs and how we are tackling them, with other local authorities, and with NHS partners, at sub regional, regional and national level. Sometimes this will be through for example the Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care System (ICS) covering the Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin local authority areas, where partners are working jointly on health and care services. Sometimes this will be through collective responses through the RSN and CCN, eg on transport challenges and on digital connectivity and digital inclusion.

We also submit responses directly to Government Departments and through such opportunities as present themselves in liaison with the elected MPs for Shropshire.

An example in 2023 of a direct response was to a DLUHC request for information about how local authorities identify and respond to religious hatred and extremism.

Deprivation and inequality

Shropshire is generally regarded as a relatively affluent location; however, there are pockets of deprivation and according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2019) Shropshire ranked as the 174th most deprived local authority (out of 317). Due to its rurality, in terms of access to services Shropshire is amongst the most deprived localities in the country.

The IMD is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas (Lower Layer Super Output Areas or LLSOAs) in England. LLSOAs are a statistical geography created by the Office for National Statistics for the Census. They are areas consisting of a minimum of 1,000 to a maximum of 3000 population. There are, in all 39 separate indicators spread across 7 distinct domains of deprivation, which are weighted and combined to calculate the overall index of deprivation (IMD).

This is an overall measure of deprivation experienced by people living in an area and is calculated for every LLSOA in England. All LLSOAs are then ranked according to their level of deprivation relative to other areas.

The higher the rank the more deprived an area is, so an area with a rank of 100 is more deprived than an area with a rank of 200. The IMD also contains two supplementary indexes Income Deprivation Affecting Children (IDACI) and Income Deprivation Affecting Older People (IDAOPI)

There is no definitive threshold of deprivation and the IMD measures deprivation on a relative not absolute scale, so a neighbourhood ranked as 100 is more deprived than an area ranked 200, but this doesn't mean that it is twice as deprived. There are 32,844 small areas (LLSOAs) in England with an average population of 1,500, where one is the most deprived and 32,844 the least. In Shropshire there are 193 LLSOAs with an average population of 1645.

A snapshot analysis of the IMD2019 has been prepared by the Performance, Intelligence and Insight Team to give an overview of the results for Shropshire. This is available on the Council website. Reports have also been prepared for the Overall IMD and each of the seven Domains.

Shropshire has become slightly more deprived since 2015 with an increase in the average score from 16.7 in 2015 to 17.2 in 2019, an increase of 0.5.

Shropshire is the 174th most deprived local authority in England out of a total of 317 lower tier authorities (rank of average score). This measure shows Shropshire has become relatively more deprived compared to other areas since 2015. Lower tier authorities include non metropolitan districts, London Boroughs, unitary authorities and metropolitan districts. Note in 2015 there were 326 lower tier local authorities whereas there are 317 in 2019.

When looking at the other two main measures of deprivation (rank of average rank and rank of proportion of LLSOAs in most deprived 10% nationally) these show Shropshire has also become slightly more deprived relative to other local authorities since 2015, however the rank is out of 317 authorities and in 2015 the rank was out of 326 authorities.

Compared to 2015, 33 LLSOAs had become more deprived in 2019, 19 had become less deprived and 141 had remained the same. This is a net change of 14 LLSOAs becoming more deprived. The largest net changes can be seen in the Income Domain where there was a net increase of 30 LLSOAs becoming more deprived also in the Barriers to Housing and Services there is a net change of 40 more LLSOAs had become more deprived and in the Income deprivation Affecting Children Sub-Domain there is a net change of 41 LLSOAs becoming more deprived.

In the Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Sub-Domain there is a net change of 13 LLSOAs becoming less deprived and in health a net change of 25 LLSOAs becoming less deprived.

Whilst all seven domains help us to consider impacts in equality terms for our communities, it is pertinent from a social inclusion angle to note that the domains include Barriers to Housing and Services, Health Deprivation and Disability, and Income.

We have also said, in a submission in 2022 to DCMS with regard to Dormant Assets Consultation, that with community needs becoming increasingly complex and requiring integrated approaches it may be unhelpful to focus solely on local amenities and social infrastructure.

Our concern here is one of exclusion, should this be the sole option. We need support to go into enabling and infrastructure support e.g. through faith communities and through voluntary sector organisations, rather than into community wealth funds that from our reading of it are designed to either fund provision of new assets or seek to maintain existing assets.

Whilst other more urban areas may have organisations of a size that can manage assets or which already operate assets that may benefit from long term funding, we simply do not have organisations of that nature. And we have lost individuals along with their expertise, as a result of the pandemic, with some sadly deceased and with others deciding that they did not want to carry on running some of the smaller organisations that worked at grassroots levels here.

Although the Indices of Multiple Deprivation are widely used data sets used to classify relative deprivation of small areas in the UK, they typically poorly represent deprivation in rural areas and can lead to rural areas being overlooked when it comes to the allocation of funding and planning for rural health and social services. A focus on the 10% most deprived areas under the Index of Multiple Deprivation would not work well for Shropshire. We have very mixed communities where high-income households live alongside pockets of those who are most deprived, masking the problems that exist when whole areas are assessed.

We also have an older population, many of whom are asset rich, but still struggle to afford to heat their homes and afford the increasing cost of food. We would like the Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP) index to be considered alongside IMD with indicators for fuel poverty, food insecurity, child prowers, claimant count, economic inactivity and low pay.

2. The legislative framework in which we operate

Following guidance and legislation

The **Equality Act 2010**, together with the Human Rights Act 1998 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, forms a framework of protection for equality, diversity, social inclusion and human rights.

Shropshire Council seeks to ensure that, like other public authorities, it is compliant with the **Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)**. Guidance on this was updated by Government in December 2023 and issued to all local authorities.

This **Duty**, as set out in the Equality Act 2010, may be described as the duty on a public authority, when carrying out its functions, to have what is called **due regard** to three equality aims.

These equality aims are listed below.

- Eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Advancing equality of opportunity;
- Fostering good relations.

As a local authority, we must comply with both a general equality duty and with specific duties, as set out in the Act.

- To demonstrate full compliance with the **general duty**, we are required to publish annual information about our workforce and service user diversity.

- To demonstrate full compliance with the **specific duties**, we are required to publish one or more equality objectives which we think we should achieve.

The frequency for these objectives to be published is a minimum of every four years.

The regulations also specify that a listed authority must publish its equality information and equality objectives in a manner which is accessible to the public and may publish this information within another published document.

In terms of meeting the **general duty**, our annual diversity reports are on the Council website, with reports from previous years retained as well as the most current ones, to enable trend analyses.

In terms of meeting our **specific duties**, we also publish the equality objectives action plans for 2016 to 2020 and for 2020 to 2024. These are in the section on “equality, diversity and social inclusion”, along with further background and complementary information about this policy area. Further information and practical guidance is available for our workforce on our staff intranet.

Government guidance states the following:

“The duty does not dictate a particular outcome. The level of “due regard” considered sufficient in any particular context depends on the facts. The duty should always be applied in a proportionate way depending on the circumstances of the case and the seriousness of the potential equality impacts on those with protected characteristics. Overly bureaucratic and burdensome approaches without reference to the equality aims specified in the legislation should be avoided. Public authorities must not ‘gold-plate’ their compliance with the duty at the unjustified expense of the taxpayer and of private or voluntary sector contractors. Similarly, regulators should not try to impose the duty on private companies that would never be bound by it.

“It is for the decision-maker to decide how much weight should be given to the various factors informing the decision. The duty does not mean that decisions cannot be taken which disadvantage some people (provided this does not constitute unlawful discrimination), but the decision-maker should be aware of the equality impacts of these decisions and consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. The decision-maker should consider ways of preventing, or balancing the effects that their decision may have on certain groups. They should decide which mitigations, if any, they might want to put into place in reconsidering the decision. The mitigation should be proportionate to the problem at hand.

“The duty requires decision-makers to understand and take account of the consequences of their choices, having due regard to the aim of eliminating conduct prohibited by the act, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations. At the same time, the duty is not a rubber stamp. It is a legal requirement. Making decisions without having due regard to the duty can be unlawful”

Describing Protected Characteristics

The Equality Act describes a number of **Protected Characteristics** groupings ie characteristics that people may share.

Local authorities such as ourselves and other public sector organisations are obliged under the Public Sector Equality Duty to have 'due regard' to the needs of people in these groupings in our decision making processes. The nine groups are, in alphabetical order:

- Age;
- Disability;
- Gender reassignment;
- Marriage and civil partnership;
- Pregnancy and maternity;
- Race;
- Religion and belief;
- Sex;
- Sexual orientation.

Government guidance states the following:

“Someone has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment if they are proposing to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone a process or part of a process to reassign their sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex. Authorities should take care to undertake their assessment by reference to the protected characteristics set out in the act. They should not use concepts such as gender or gender identity, which are not encoded in the act and can be understood in different ways.

“Marriage and civil partnership is a protected characteristic but not a ‘relevant’ one. This means you have to consider it only in relation to the first aim of the duty. Discrimination because of marriage and civil partnership is only prohibited in relation to the work provisions of the act. This is because the parts of the act covering services and public functions, premises and education do not apply to that protected characteristic. See sections 28(1)(a), 32(1)(b), 84(1)(b), and 90 of the act.

*“**Having due regard**” means properly considering the 3 aims identified in the act, and how they relate to the function you are exercising, and then deciding what weight to give them. It is not a duty to achieve a particular outcome. The level of “due regard” considered sufficient in any particular context depends on the facts. A proportionate approach should be taken to the resources spent on duty compliance, depending on the circumstances of the case and the seriousness of the potential equality impacts on those with protected characteristics.*

“When assessing the equality impacts of a decision, organisations should consider the positive and negative impacts, not just the negative. For example, policies designed to support integration and community cohesion may have a positive impact across a population, even if not targeted at any one group in particular.

“Eliminating unlawful conduct prohibited by the act” means eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation, failure to make reasonable adjustments and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the act.

“Advancing equality of opportunity” means having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their relevant protected characteristics
- take steps to meet the different needs of people who share a relevant protected characteristic
- encourage participation in public life or any other activity by underrepresented groups
- take steps to meet the different needs of disabled persons

“Considering people’s different needs and taking steps to meet those needs can be relevant to avoiding indirect discrimination. There are specific provisions in the act about making reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities.

“It is important to note here that the duty to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity is not a duty to put in place positive action measures. Positive action means measures permitted under the act that aim to alleviate disadvantage or under-representation, or to meet the particular needs of those who share a protected characteristic. It may be appropriate to consider positive action as part of the second aim of the duty, where adverse impacts have been identified. However, the duty is not a positive action programme and the use of positive action is voluntary. Positive action must balance the seriousness of the disadvantage suffered, or the extent to which people with a protected characteristic are under-represented, against the impact that the proposed action may have on other people.

“Fostering good relations” means having regard to the need to deal with prejudice and support understanding. For example, some decisions have the power to bring divided groups together and to support their mutual understanding. Other decisions may inadvertently cause people with one protected characteristic to blame people with another for a social problem.

“Unless there is a clear correlation with a protected characteristic, considering demographics that are not protected characteristics will not help you to comply with the duty. In fact, it could obscure compliance in your supporting records. Examples of demographics that are not protected characteristics include:

- class
- gender
- gender identity
- caring responsibilities
- single parenthood

Depending on context, some of them may be linked to race, sex, or gender reassignment.”

Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments

It is a legal requirement, laid upon us as a public sector body through the Equality Act 2010, for local authorities to assess the equality and human rights impact of changes proposed or made to services.

Government guidance states the following:

“Decision-makers’ supporting records are sometimes known as equality impact assessments. As with government legal compliance documents in general, there is no requirement to publish these assessments. The anticipation of publication could even have a “chilling effect” on decision-makers’ consideration and records. Many documents including equality impact assessments can be requested as part of court proceedings or a Freedom of Information request. But there may be circumstances where you decide that it would be helpful to publish the assessment, like a consultation process.”

Carrying out impact assessments helps us as a public authority to ensure that, as far as possible, we are taking actions to meet the general equality duty placed on us by the Equality Act 2010, and to thus demonstrate that the three national equality aims are integral to our decision making processes.

As reinforced in the updated guidance, it is up to us as an authority to decide what form our equality impact assessment may take. By way of illustration, some local authorities focus more overtly upon human rights; some include safeguarding. It is about what is considered to be needed in a local authority’s area, in line with local factors such as demography and strategic objectives as well as with the national legislative imperatives.

We need to be in a position to be able to demonstrate to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) that we have made every effort to carry out our equality impact screenings, and that we have done so at every stage where it would be appropriate to do so.

In Shropshire, the tool that we use to do this work is referred to as an **Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA)**

This is a single screening template, usually presented as an appendix to a committee report, either to Cabinet or to the Strategic Licensing Committee. ESHIAs thus form part of the committee paper documentation for elected members to consider in decision making processes: and are a crucial component within such considerations as well as demonstrating our open and transparent approach.

Our ESHIA screening sets out to ensure that “due regard” is being given to equality, equity, social inclusion and health and wellbeing.

For us, this is about maximising the opportunity of a legal requirement in relation to considering impacts for the nine Protected Characteristic groupings to augment it with our own extra efforts as a council.

Whilst there are nine national Protected Characteristics with regard to individuals in groupings of people in the community, as set out under the Equality Act 2010, we add a tenth one as a Council, around **social inclusion**.

When we introduced this additional category, back in 2014, it was with the recognition that whilst it did not carry the legal weight applied to the nine Protected Characteristics, it was one that we very much wanted to introduce to complement our considerations about individuals, wherever they may live in our rural and sparsely populated county.

Rurality is not in itself a Protected Characteristic as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Advice given by the Rurality and Equalities Specialist to an oral evidence session of the Task and Finish Group on Rural Proofing in 2023, in which the national and local context was given around rural proofing, or assessing proposed service changes for likely impacts upon rural communities, emphasised that the only specific requirement around rural proofing is that placed upon Defra to rural proof other Government Department policy and service changes.

Social inclusion better reflects the circumstances in which individuals and households may find themselves, whether that is households living in rural isolation or in market towns; those living in fuel poverty or on low incomes; veterans or serving members of the armed forces and their families; and people we define as being vulnerable. This then picks up on economic factors and environmental considerations as well, at local and national level, enabling us to for example think about the impacts in our local area of the national cost of living crisis.

When we talk about people who are **vulnerable**, the definition that we are using to describe a vulnerable person is:

“An individual who is identified as having complex needs and/or requires additional support to enable them to access services and support”

Complex needs may be described as difficult personal circumstances and/or life events that affect individuals. The following list of circumstances and events is intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive: alcohol and/or drug dependency; bereavements; adopted from care or leaving care; indebtedness; divorcing or terminating a civil partnership; experiencing redundancy, retirement or unemployment; experiencing homelessness or being threatened with homelessness; leaving the armed forces; leaving hospital; people who are victims of crime including domestic violence; people with one or more of the nine national Protected Characteristics.

Our additional efforts to consider impacts of decisions through the screenings that we undertake involve considerations around **social inclusion**, around **health and well being**, linked to health impact considerations; around **environmental impacts**, linked to climate change considerations; and around **economic impacts**.

None of these are currently legal requirements under the Equality Act 2010.

Together, they add value or at least ensure that the Council is visibly seeking to take an holistic view of impacts: and as importantly for our service areas is taking a proportionate and time efficient way in which to do so through use of a single template.

Our ESHIA screening therefore sets out to ensure that “due regard” is being given to equality, equity, social inclusion and health and well being, in line with our local aspirations as set out in the **Shropshire Plan** as well as our national legal obligations.

Using appropriate terminology

There is **intersectionality** across the Protected Characteristic groupings. This term is growing in usage, to indicate that a person will perform belong to at least three groupings, ie Age and Ethnicity, and the Sex or gender to which they were assigned at birth; and that during the course of their lives they may then describe themselves as belonging at one time or another to one or more other groupings as well, eg Religion or Belief eg Marriage or Civil Partnership.

Whilst it can be tricky to keep on top of terminology and acronyms with regard to equality, equity and diversity, the recommendation would always be to ask a person with whom you are interacting, either as a member of the public or as a colleague in an organisation, how they would like to describe themselves.

Standard descriptions, such as those used in the Census 2021, are extremely helpful in providing consistency and therefore aiding comparability. However, these do not and could not pick up on differences and diversities such as the changing needs of someone with a mental health issue, or the range of ethnic origins of people living or working in Shropshire.

Umbrella terms like ‘B.A.M.E.’ and ‘Eastern European” should be avoided. They are at best lazy and at worse unhelpful, to us and to the diverse communities that we seek to serve.

They do not help because in grouping people together by colour without sufficient thought to their heritage, or by geographical region without sufficient thought to country, we are making generalisations rather than making genuine efforts to work with all our communities, including those represented in our own workforce.

The advice is either to be specific about a particular grouping, or to use the term ‘ethnic minority’ as a preferred term if there is a need to extend this to a wider grouping, and to explain why.

This enables us to be inclusive and respectful, whether we are talking about Black people of African heritage, where to be Nigerian is to not be Rwandan, or White people from Eastern European countries, where to be Polish is to not be Bulgarian.

We are a county of diverse communities, however small, and each is due respect. Sometimes, for example if talking about health inequalities, we may need to use a broader term than a single country due to commonalities across ethnic minorities;

sometimes we will want to recognise dual heritage and mixed heritage; sometimes we will want to celebrate a shared heritage across a region, as with South Asian Heritage Month.

With a workforce drawn from the communities that we seek to serve, our efforts include helping them to be seen and celebrated, and helping to demonstrate that if a commemoration or observation is important to them and their communities, it is important to Shropshire Council as well.

3. Progress across our action areas

a.) Introduction

The Council sets out to demonstrate equal treatment to people who are in Protected Characteristic groupings and people at risk of social exclusion, and to people who are not, through having what is termed 'due regard' to their needs and views when developing policy and strategy and when commissioning, procuring, arranging or delivering services.

In 2022, we said that *“Further work is planned around tackling racism and other forms of discrimination, weaving together all three activity strands as we seek to make progress across all three national equality aims.”*

We are pleased to now report on our local progress on this and other actions as follows:

b.) Local progress during 2023

i.) Tackling racism and other forms of discrimination

Marking Stephen Lawrence Day on 22nd April 2023, we took the opportunity to introduce a national Race Equality Matters initiative, #MyNames.

This should mean that in our interactions with service users and communities, colleagues adopting this initiative visibly demonstrate our efforts to show respect towards people from a range of heritages and cultures.

In a poll published by Race Equality Matters, 73% of respondents from more than 100 organisations had said they had their names mispronounced. To help, we have asked our workforce to voluntarily add phonetic email signatures, just as is already the case with voluntary use of personal pronouns.

If someone has a name that people find difficult to pronounce, we often:

- pronounce the name incorrectly and the individual is then known by that 'new name'.
- give a nickname, whether the individual likes it or not.
- give a surrogate name just to make things easier, for example Abdullah becomes Jeff, or
- simply don't say their name.

This initiative is also about consideration of people's names through our communication channels for engaging and communicating with service users, the wider community, and partner organisations, whether digital, face to face, or written.

It links into the Council's strategic equality objectives, through which we seek to make progress on achieving the three national equality aims. We shared the following guidance with our workforce accordingly:

Every time that you talk to someone, please take the time to find out what their name is and how to say it. Show that you are actively listening. This will demonstrate that is not just alright to take the time to do so, in what can seem a very hurried world; it is right and welcoming to do so. Tell them that you would like to get it right.

Every time that you introduce someone to someone else, this will then give you another opportunity to just check that you have got it right. This will have the ripple effect of showing both parties that we take the time to show all due courtesy to all individuals. If you meet someone again after a while, it's fine to just check how you should pronounce their name.

Every time that you need to take someone's details to record for form-filling or other purposes, please ask them to say it to you. Show that you are listening actively. You could also ask them to write it down for you, or spell it and repeat it back to you. This will help us in a very practical way as an organisation to make sure that we get our data collection right, first time and every time.

Every time, take the time.

This initiative was shared with and supported by the Shropshire Council Anti Racism Forum (SCARF). This is an internal staff support group open to everyone across the Council. The group meets online every two months, and is currently co-chaired by four officers on a voluntary basis.

We also:

- worked with Wolverhampton City Council to share information for Africa Day on 25th May 2023;
- issued resources around the rich heritage of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community;
- shared materials with Wolverhampton City Council and with Telford and Wrekin Council around South Asian Heritage Month; and
- targeted our efforts as a council to mark Black History Month in October through national Show Racism the Red Card Day, which was on Friday 20th October 2023.

The following press release was issued as part of our efforts to tackle racism:

Press release:

Show Racism the Red Card Day to help mark Hate Crime Awareness Week and Black History Month in Shropshire

As part of national Black History Month, Shropshire Council will mark Wear Red Day on Friday 20th October, to show racism the red card in Shropshire. This will be achieved through members of staff sending in photos during the week of themselves in red or with red items in the background, to form a visual gallery of support on staff computer screens, with a special design for the day on the screen.

The Council works with the national charity Show Racism the Red Card on this initiative every year, along with partner organisations including local unions and the NHS.

The week leading up to 20th October is also Hate Crime Awareness Week: a national week of action to encourage communities affected by hate crime, local authorities, police forces and other key partners to work together to tackle local hate crime issues.

Councillor Cecilia Motley said:

“Shropshire Council councillors and staff across our rural county are Showing Racism the Red Card from wherever they live or work, through sharing photographs of themselves with red props such as flowers, toys, and backgrounds to build up a lockscreen collage of commitment over this week. I am delighted to join with Cabinet members and Executive team in our own show of support for efforts we must continue to make to tackle racism and other forms of discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

“Racism is a form of hate crime, and we also take this opportunity to re emphasise that here in Shropshire, we will not condone any hate crime in any form. We therefore condemn recent leafleting of houses in Shrewsbury with material that is anti-immigration, as this is directly opposed to our stance as a Council to welcome refugees to our county. We have shared this with the police who were able to advise that they are already aware of the matter, and we will continue to liaise with them on tackling hate crime.

“There are many positive and courageous actions that people have made in the past in Shropshire, in standing up against inequalities in society, including towards people of colour. National Black History Month gives us a very timely opportunity to find out more about our local history. In so doing, we can reach a fuller collective understanding of the contributions that people of colour have made to life in Shropshire, as well as moving forward together to help Shropshire to be a welcoming county, to and for everyone.”

Ash Silverstone, UNISON Branch Secretary and Member of UNISON's National Executive Council representing Black Members said:

“UNISON is wholeheartedly committed to rooting out the scourge of racism and all other forms of discrimination wherever it exists. This is why UNISON took the decision to make 2023 the Year of Black Workers.

“It has long been understood that there is far more that unites us than divides us, and I am confident that Shropshire Council, in liaison with UNISON, will continue to play its part through Show Racism the Red Card Day and other initiatives, to reinforce the Council’s commitment to joining the growing coalition of conscience across our country to challenge the status quo, push back against the tide of racism and bigotry, and support all of Shropshire’s communities to take the next step on our journey towards Justice.

“One of the key ways in which the union is seeking to work with local authorities and with other organisations is through the UNISON Anti Racism Charter, recently adopted by Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service. We are delighted that Shropshire Council has also signed this Charter today”.

ii.) Publishing equality and diversity information more visibly

In seeking to publish more visibly, the Council intranet was used throughout the year to share information and awareness raising pieces around a range of cultural and religious festivals and observations. This included practical advice on how to support Muslim colleagues who were observing Ramadhan; information about Chinese New Year and South Asian Heritage Month; and Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh, and other festivals and observations eg Bodhi Day, Diwali, Hanukkah and Vaisakhi.

The information was shared with healthcare and social care colleagues across Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care System (ICS) and with West Midlands local authorities through the West Midlands Local Authority Equality Officers Network, with similar sharing from others, notably Wolverhampton City Council, and Telford and Wrekin Council.

The Council also marked the UN International Days for Women, on 8th March, and for Persons with Disabilities, on 3rd December, along with Africa Day, Stephen Lawrence Day, Windrush Day, and Black History Month in October, through information pieces for the workforce. These were through use of poetry as well as commentary and personal perspectives.

Additionally, the Council issued press releases during the year around equality and diversity, including efforts to praise local initiatives around Pride Month in June 2023, including Ludlow Pride and Shrewsbury Pride as well as highlighting ongoing activities to support LGBTQ+ communities. We flew the Rainbow Flag to show our visible commitment, for LGBT+ History Month in February, for Pride Month in June, and for Shrewsbury Pride in September 2023.

Online resource packs for the external website were produced in liaison with Archives and with Libraries, for Gypsy Roma and Traveller History Month, for LGBT History Month and for Holocaust Memorial Day, which commemorates the Holocaust and other genocides.

The following press release is an example of one of our efforts to publish visibly and in so doing seek to foster good relations, one of the three national equality aims.

Press release:

Remembering Srebrenica:

Shropshire Council action to tackle antisemitism and islamophobia

Shropshire Council held an interfaith ceremony on the morning of Tuesday 18th July 2023, to commemorate the events of twenty-eight years ago in Bosnia, where over 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were murdered because of their faith.

The ceremony was held at the memorial cherry tree planted outside Shirehall in Shrewsbury. The tree formally commemorates the role of the armed forces in humanitarian efforts around genocides such as befell the Muslim community in Srebrenica.

Children from Mereside Primary School, representatives of the two inter faith forums in Shropshire, and our local councillors for the area, Mrs Rosemary Dartnall and Mr Tony Parsons, all took part in the ceremony. This included everyone tying flower and leaf motifs to the tree, in a visible sign of this year's theme, "Together We Are One".

The symbol of the national Remembering Srebrenica organisation is the Srebrenica Flower: this is a symbol of remembrance of the Srebrenica Genocide. Its eleven petals represent the day the genocide began, while their white colour represents the innocence of its victims. The flower's green centre represents hope for justice and recognition of the genocide.

Councillor Kirstie Hurst-Knight, portfolio holder for children and young people, said;

"I am delighted that the children of Mereside School continue to join with us and with inter faith forums in honouring those who were killed at Srebrenica and in thanking the armed forces for their humanitarian role at Srebrenica and in other genocides. This tree holds a special place in my heart, as I was privileged to take part in its dedication ceremony two years ago, and to share the role that my own grandfather played in liberating Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. We must never forget those who died, and I am confident that their memory will live on in these children and in this tree."

During the ceremony, there were three Srebrenica prayers: a Christian one, read by our local councillors Rosemary Dartnall and Tony Parsons; a Jewish one, read by Mark Michaels and Sohayb Peerbhai, representing the South Shropshire Interfaith Forum; and a Muslim one to close, read by Reverend Ken Chippindale, representing the Shrewsbury Interfaith Forum.

By way of further background, Mereside was the first school to plant a cherry tree with us, to commemorate the Holocaust and other genocides. This was back in 2015, and we plant at least one further cherry tree with a different primary school each year. We are gradually growing a cherry tree orchard of remembrance across the county. The Srebrenica tree is therefore a very special tree within our orchard.

All the children from year three at Mereside School came to the ceremony, and six of them read out the following words. The children were: Esmé ;Harley; Harry; Jake; Lilly; and Una.

- *“This cherry tree is important because we can take our families to see it and tell them why we have planted it. This means that we keep the memory of those who were killed alive.*
- *“This cherry tree is special because we have come here together today which shows that together we are one.*
- *“This cherry tree is special because it is a place in our community where people can come and remember Srebrenica.*
- *“This cherry tree is special to us because it gives us a place to reflect and remember the people who died.*
- *“This cherry tree is really important because it helps us to remember Srebrenica and all the people who were killed.*
- *“This cherry tree is special because people of all faiths can come and remember those who have died.”*

Remembering Srebrenica is a charitable organisation whose aim is to raise awareness of the genocide in Bosnia and bring people together to tackle hatred and help build safer, stronger communities in the UK.

For more information, please see resources on the following websites

Remembering Srebrenica website: www.srebrenica.org.uk

HMD Trust website: www.hmd.org.uk

iii.) Collecting data more proactively

As ever in the proactive collection of data and in the establishment and maintenance of a truly robust evidence base, there are a number of challenges to consider, for us as a Council and in partnership with Public Health and NHS colleagues across the Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care System (ICS).

1. Make sure everyone is using the same definitions. Otherwise you will be trying to compare apples with pears.
2. Whilst completeness is the aim, recognise there can be limitations. These can be system limitations and client willingness to permit use.
3. Develop means to identify areas of data weakness – incomplete, inaccurate etc.
4. Develop action plans to address any areas of weakness

The following presents an example of where we have set out to use the ONS data in ways that will help us to make comparisons grounded in the most up to date information available to us as a local authority; it is a comparator analysis of demographics for Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin.

Headlines – Comparison Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin

- At mid-2022, ONS estimate Shropshire's resident population was 327,178 people and Telford and Wrekin's resident population was 188,871 people ⁽¹⁾.
- The population of Telford and Wrekin has grown at twice the rate of Shropshire during 2011 to 2022 (13.2% compared with 6.5%.)
- Telford and Wrekin has a significantly younger age structure than Shropshire. The number of children aged 0-15 years has risen by 9.9% since 2011, compared to a decline of -2.2% in Shropshire. The result is children make up 19.9% of Telford and Wrekin's population compared to only 15.8% in Shropshire.
- Shropshire's working age population has risen by only 0.4% (810 people) since 2011, compared to significant growth of 8.8% in Telford and Wrekin.
- Just over a quarter of Shropshire population at mid-2022 were aged 65 years or over, compared to only 17.8% in Telford and Wrekin. However, Telford and Wrekin's older population has grown at a faster rate when compared to Shropshire.
- The average age in Shropshire (45 years) is higher when compared with Telford and Wrekin (40 years.)
- Shropshire has a dependency ratio of 71.3% compared to 60.5% in Telford and Wrekin. By 2043, Shropshire's dependency ratio is projected to reach 90.3%, compared to 70.7% in Telford and Wrekin. ^(Appendix B - Def.)
- The ONS 2018 sub-national population projections estimate the population of Telford and Wrekin will reach 212,314 by 2043 and the population of Shropshire will reach 381,514. These projections pre-date the 2021 Census but based on the recent ONS mid-2022 population figures, population growth of 16.6% by 2043 is estimated in Shropshire and 12.4% in Telford and Wrekin ⁽²⁾.
- Shropshire is a rural local authority with a population density of only 1.02 persons per hectare. This compares with 6.51 persons per hectare in Telford and Wrekin and 4.08 persons per hectare nationally.
- The 2021 Census identified 76,503 households living in Telford and Wrekin and 139,581 households living in Shropshire. Since 2011, the number of households rose by 14.9% in Telford and Wrekin, twice the growth experienced in Shropshire (6.5%).
- The ONS 2018 sub-national household projections estimate the number of households in Telford and Wrekin will reach 89,225 households by 2043 and 178,215 households in Shropshire. ⁽³⁾
- Household growth in Shropshire has largely been driven by a significant rise in single person households and couple households with no children, a reflection of Shropshire's ageing population. These household types make up 62.7% of all households in Shropshire. This contrasts significantly with Telford and Wrekin which has experienced a 41.5% rise in couple families with children, to the point that this household type is now the largest at 35.5%.
- The 2021 Census showed Shropshire had an average household size of 2.27, significantly lower than Telford and Wrekin (2.40) and England (2.37). ⁽⁴⁾

Population Characteristics

- In Shropshire, 19,136 (5.9%) of people were born outside the UK, an increase of 4.7% since 2011. This compares with 17.4% of the total population nationally and 11.4% in Telford and Wrekin. ⁽⁵⁾
- Of those people born outside the UK, now resident in Shropshire, the largest proportion were born in Poland (0.5% of Shropshire's total population or 1,678 people.) Similarly, in Telford and Wrekin the largest population group were born in Poland (3,481 people or 1.9% of all residents). India was the second commonest country in Telford and Wrekin, whilst Germany was the second commonest country in Shropshire (0.5% or 1,518.)
- The 2021 Census showed Telford and Wrekin has a more ethnically diverse population than Shropshire. In Shropshire 96.7% of the population identified themselves as 'White', compared to 88.2% in Telford and Wrekin and 81.0% nationally. ⁽⁶⁾
- The broad ethnic group of 'Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh' represents the second largest population group in both Telford and Wrekin (5.4%) and Shropshire (1.3%). Nationally this population group represents 9.6% of the total population.
- The largest religious group in Shropshire identified themselves as 'Christian' (55.5%), with 37% stating they had 'No religion' and 0.5% stating they were Muslim. This contrasted with Telford and Wrekin, where only 47.6% of the population described themselves as 'Christian', less than half the population for the first time. In Telford and Wrekin 40.9% of the population stated they had 'no religion' and 2.7% of residents stated they were 'Muslim'. ⁽⁷⁾

Health

- Life expectancy at birth currently stands at 83.7 years for females and 80.2 years for males in Shropshire. This contrasts with 81.9 for females and 78.2 for males in Telford and Wrekin. Nationally life expectancy at birth for males (79.4 years) and females (83.1 years) surpasses life expectancy at birth in Telford and Wrekin but falls slightly below Shropshire. ⁽⁸⁾
- Estimates of healthy life expectancy are helpful in understanding future demand for health and social care. In Shropshire healthy life expectancy is 67.1 years for females and 62.8 years for males. This means that women live for an average of 16.6 years when they are not in the best of health, and men for 17.4 years. This contrasts with Telford and Wrekin where healthy life expectancy for females is 60.3 years and for males 57.6 years, indicating females will live for an average 21.6 years when they are not in the best of health and males 20.6 years. ⁽⁹⁾
- In response to the 2021 Census, 16,445 people in Shropshire and 11,354 people in Telford and Wrekin indicated they were in bad or very bad health. Using the age-standardised proportions to allow comparison, 4.5% of Shropshire's population were in bad or very bad health, 6.5% of Telford and Wrekin's population and 5.3% nationally. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Ageing Population

- Using the mid-2022 population estimates as the base year, the 2018 SNPP project growth of 50% in the 65 years and older population and 98% in the 85 years and over population by 2043 in Shropshire. This compares with 45.6% and 97.7% in Telford and Wrekin and 38.5% and 75.9% nationally. The growth in numbers of residents aged 65 years and over represents a significant and growing challenge in terms of the provision of health and social care.
- The growing older population will adversely impact numbers of people suffering from a range of conditions and disabilities where prevalence increases with age. In Shropshire there will be approaching, 3,800 more dementia sufferers in 2040 than there are now and in Telford and Wrekin 1,300 more. ⁽¹¹⁾

65 years and over population	Shropshire		Telford and Wrekin	
	2023	2040	2023	2040
Dementia	6,217	9,980	2,212	3,519
Depression	7,468	10,671	2,892	4,105
Falls	23,211	34,289	8,817	12,913
Visual impairment (75+)	2,797	4,282	1,011	1,541
Cardiovascular disease	28,097	40,669	10,756	15,496
Mobility	16,060	24,505	5,938	8,985
Limiting long-term illness: day-to-day activities				
Limited a little	22,028	31,648	8,592	12,228
Limited a lot	18,630	27,750	9,366	13,855

Disability

- Based upon age-standardised proportions, the 2021 Census, showed 20.5% (36,526 people) in Telford and Wrekin described themselves as disabled under the Equality Act, compared to 16.9% (59,990 people) in Shropshire. ⁽¹²⁾

Provision of unpaid care

- Using age standardised proportions, the 2021 Census showed that 9.1% (50,877 people) in Shropshire were providing unpaid care, compared to 10.6% (30,153 people) in Telford and Wrekin and 8.9% nationally. In Shropshire 2.5% (8,531 people) were providing 50 or more hours of unpaid care, compared to 3.5% (5,899 people) in Telford and Wrekin and 2.7% nationally. ⁽¹³⁾

Deprivation

- The overall Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 estimated 5% of Shropshire's population lived in areas falling within the 20% most deprived nationally. This compares with 24.9% of Telford and Wrekin's population (45,100 people.) ⁽¹⁴⁾

Housing

- The 2021 Census showed that in Shropshire, 68.6% of households (95,784) owned their own home, compared to 59.9% (45,864) in Telford and Wrekin and 61.3% nationally. In contrast, the percentage of households living in social housing (18%) and private rented accommodation (21.2%) was higher in Telford and Wrekin, when compared with Shropshire (13% and 17.5%).⁽¹⁵⁾
- Detached dwellings are the most common dwelling type in Shropshire (57,276 dwellings or 41%). In contrast, semi-detached dwellings are the most common type of dwelling in Telford and Wrekin (29,065 dwellings or 38%) and nationally (31.5%). Terraced housing is substantially lower in Shropshire (15.8%), compared to 20.3% in Telford and Wrekin and 23% nationally. Only 8.9% of households in Shropshire and 10.1% of households in Telford and Wrekin live in flats, maisonettes, or apartments. Nationally, 22.2% of all households live in this dwelling type.⁽¹⁶⁾

Car ownership

- In Shropshire, the 2021 Census showed a greater reliance on cars or vans for travel, with 86.2% of households (120,299) having access to a car or van. This compares with 81.3% (62,184) in Telford and Wrekin and 76.5% nationally. This indicates more households are reliant on other forms of travel such as public transport in Telford and Wrekin (18.7%), compared to Shropshire (13.8%).⁽¹⁷⁾

Appendix A: Source Information

- (1) Mid-Year Population Estimates 2011-2022, Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 26/11/2023 - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/analysisofpopulationestimatestoolforuk>
- (2) 2018 based Sub-national Population Projections, ONS, released 24/03/2020 - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/localauthoritiesinenglandz1>
- (3) 2018 based Sub-national Household Projections, ONS, released 29/06/2020 - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/householdprojectionsforenglanddetaileddataformodellingandanalysis>
- (4) 2021 Census - Create a custom dataset (Average household size = household population / number of households) - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/create>
- (5) 2021 Census (Table TS004 - Country of Birth) and 2011 Census (Table KS204EW - Country of Birth) - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/summary.asp?mode=construct&version=0&dataset=2024>
- (6) 2021 Census (Table TS021 and TS022 - Ethnic Group and Ethnic Group (detailed)) - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/summary.asp?mode=construct&version=0&dataset=2041>
- (7) 2021 Census (Table TS030 and TS031 - Religion and Religion (detailed)) - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/summary.asp?mode=construct&version=0&dataset=2049>

- (8) Life expectancy for local areas of the UK: between 2001 to 2003 and 2018 to 2020 - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/lifeexpectancyforlocalareasoftheuk/between2001to2003and2018to2020>
- (9) Health state life expectancies, UK: 2018 to 2020 - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/healthstatelifeexpectanciesuk/2018to2020>
- (10) 2021 Census - Table TS037ASP - General Health - Age Standardised proportions - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/summary.asp?mode=construct&version=0&dataset=2092>
- (11) Projecting Older People Population Information (POPPI) Oxford Brookes University / Institute of Public Care - <https://www.poppi.org.uk/>
- (12) 2021 Census Table TS038ASP - Disability - Age-standardised proportions - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/summary.asp?mode=construct&version=0&dataset=2093>
- (13) 2021 Census Table TS039ASP - Provision of unpaid care - Age-standardised proportions - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/summary.asp?mode=construct&version=0&dataset=2094>
- (14) 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation, Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI) for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), released 26.09/2019 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>.
- (15) 2021 Census Table TS054 - Tenure - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/summary.asp?mode=construct&version=0&dataset=2072>
- (16) 2021 Census Table TS044 - Accommodation type - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/summary.asp?mode=construct&version=0&dataset=2062>
- (17) 2021 Census Table TS045 - Car or van availability - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/construct/summary.asp?mode=construct&version=0&dataset=2063>

Appendix B – Definitions

Dependency Ratio - The dependency ratio is an age-population ratio of those typically not in the labour force and those typically in the labour force. It is used to measure the pressure on the productive population. The dependency ratio relates the number of children (0-15 years old) and older persons (65 years or over) to the working-age population (16-64 years old).

iv.) Working jointly

Considering equality, diversity and social inclusion enables us to plan and deliver services that are responsive to the needs of our diverse communities, with a workforce that is representative of those communities and that is sensitive to the needs of those communities.

We do this in partnership not only with other public sector bodies but also with the business sector and the voluntary and community sector. Where this involves organisations arranging and delivering services on our behalf, for example where we have commissioned a service, they are expected to demonstrate that equality and diversity are similarly at the core of their own strategic thoughts and actions.

This includes social value appraisals of potential companies hoping to work with us.

An example of our working jointly in 2023 in order to facilitate improvements for diverse communities is the approval given by Cabinet to the signing of the Safe Ageing No Discrimination (SAND) Covenant. The following is a direct extract from the Cabinet report taken in November, which may be viewed in full on the Council website in the section on committee papers.

[extract from Cabinet report starts]

Synopsis

Cabinet is requested to agree a protocol for determining whether to approve proposals to sign up to specific covenants and campaigns. If approved Cabinet is asked to sign up to the Safe Ageing No Discrimination (SAND) Covenant, the first to then be considered using this protocol.

Executive Summary

2.1 The perceived needs for a protocol are as follows:

- To ensure alignment is visible between any particular covenant and campaign, the Shropshire Plan, and our obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty set out in the Equality Act 2010.
- To ensure that the approval process and approach thus demonstrates transparency and facilitates objective consideration of intersectionality across the Protected Characteristic groupings defined in the Equality Act 2010.
- To facilitate consideration of time commitments anticipated, by officers and by councillors, and any financial commitments, known or unknown.

2.2 The adoption of such a protocol will also enable the Council to continue with a consistent approach whereby we should not be signing up to be part of a campaigning organisation. This has been the case whether we have sympathy for and empathy with the views of said organisation, and whether we find ourselves to be in accord with perhaps only elements of such a campaign.

2.3 Safe Ageing No Discrimination CIC (SAND) is a group working to improve the experience of older and old lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people as they access health and social care services. Groups and organisations in Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin local authority areas are invited to sign up

through a Covenant to five broad commitments, agree an annual action plan for change, and then report progress and share their next year plan at an annual event.

- 2.4 The intention of the Council as a proposed signatory would be to work with SAND, as with others in the voluntary and community sector, with regard to not only health and social care needs but also overall social inclusion endeavours that will value diversity and promote cultural and social efforts in so doing. Assurance would be given to SAND that we will not expect them to speak as the sole advocates on behalf of the diverse LGBTQ+ community or of older people within the community.
- 2.5 In terms of alignment with the Shropshire Plan, it could be a positive move for the Council to sign up to the SAND Covenant so that the following key aspirations could be progressed, alongside potential embedding of the Covenant aspirations within Council policy and practice:
- *Healthy economy: We'll develop Shropshire as a vibrant destination that attracts people to live in, work in, learn in and visit.*
 - *Healthy environment: We'll enable safer, sustainable, diverse and inclusive communities that pull together by reducing anti-social behaviour and risk of harm;*
 - *Healthy organisation: We'll enable a skilled, happy, healthy, diverse, inclusive, empowered, and proud workforce that influences and leads change, addressing any inequalities.*
 - *Healthy people: We'll work with partners to develop, commission and deliver the right services and support that meet the needs of children, young people, adults and families in the right place, at the right time.*
- 2.6 This is because the signing of the SAND Covenant could be considered to have potential positive economic and societal impacts for the wider community, as well as equality and health and wellbeing impacts for people who may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other (LGBTQ+) at any life stage. Signing it would emphasise the policy intentions of the Council to foster and create an inclusive and welcoming county.

Recommendations

That Cabinet -

- 3.1 adopt the proposed protocol attached at Appendix 1
- 3.2 sign up to the Safe Ageing No Discrimination (SAND) Covenant, as the first to be considered under this protocol, with the following provisos:

- that assurances be given by SAND to seek to support work across the Protected Characteristic groupings of Age and Sexual Orientation, recognising depth and diversity within these groupings as well as their particular field of working with older people;
- that officers engage with SAND itself and share and develop joint good practice with other advocacy organisations, to complement engagement efforts with and for all Protected Characteristic groupings.

Conclusions

- 9.1 Use of a protocol would aid thorough consideration of requests to sign up to covenants and campaigns, ensuring that any such covenants and campaigns are only supported where they will assist the Council and partners in meeting strategic and community objectives.
- 9.2 The Safe Ageing No Discrimination (SAND) organisation has described itself as working with the LGBTQ+ community and service providers to develop inclusive practice in general, while focussing on the particular experiences and needs of LGBTQ+ people. To sign the Covenant would complement continuing officer efforts to share ideas and support ongoing actions to raise awareness of and celebrate a range of initiatives and events within our overall strategic equality policy framework. It will thence help to meet identified aspirations within the Shropshire Plan.

[extract ends]

c.) Looking forward for 2024

i.) Reviewing overall progress 2020-2024

2020 saw the preparation and publication of our **Equality Objectives Action Plan for 2020 to 2024**, approved by Cabinet on 6th July 2020.

This enables positioning of the Council to assist in efforts to meet its PSED, seek to demonstrate good practice in so doing, and facilitate timely links with corporate and national policy and strategy development, not least around endeavours to address health inequalities and to tackle racism and other forms of discrimination.

The Corporate Equality Objectives Action Plan 2020 to 2024 report provides a visible way in which to chart the progress that we are seeking to make to meet the national equality aims during the period 2020 to 2024.

Our Council-wide equality actions in this four year period have been framed across the following three areas, and we have been reporting on them in this way accordingly:

- Publish equality and diversity information more visibly;
- Collect and analyse equality and diversity data more proactively;
- Work jointly with partner organisations on equality-related issues.

ii.) **Setting new strategic equality objectives for 2024-2028**

2024 will involve an overall review of progress during the four years, and the defining of objectives and actions for the next four years, drawing upon good practice and lessons learned on our journey so far. These will be presented to Cabinet for discussion and approval in their roles as community leaders.

For service users and the wider community, we said in 2022 that an area of focus would be the national Covid public inquiry, for which then PM Boris Johnson announced the finalised terms of reference in June 2022. Sessions were due to take place across the UK from early 2023 as it aims to identify lessons from the Government's handling of the pandemic.

We identified a specific action pending the direction being taken at national level over management of the pandemic, and the local learning to be gained in order that inequalities might be better understood and addressed:

- **In specific reference to BAME communities, follow up on recommendations of the Runnymede Trust to the current Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry around the unequal impacts of Covid-19 for BAME groupings, and those within the Public Health England (PHE) June 2020 report *“Beyond the data; understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups”*; with regard to data collection and to liaison with faith communities and the voluntary and community sector**
- **The Runnymede Trust has recommended action in this area, and the PHE has recommended action in this area as follows:**

“Research and data: to deepen our understanding of the wider socio-economic determinants, improve data recording of faith and ethnicity and greater use of community participatory research.”

Ethnic minorities were significantly more likely to die with Covid-19, according to official figures. The PHE report has brought into sharp relief the additional challenges in ethnic minority communities around finding out about and accessing service, in terms of the information and support that we provide, and the ways in which we seek to provide such help.

This also brings in joint efforts across our area and work with other neighbouring authorities, public sector organisations, and the voluntary and community sector across our borders.

An inquiry spokesperson said the unequal impacts of the pandemic would be at the forefront of its work. With the inquiry still ongoing, we are not in a position to report further at this time. Instead, the intention is that we will scope out an action for 2024-2028 to follow on from the action we had hoped to progress in 2024-2028 timeframe.

4. Concluding Remarks

We hope that you have found this report to be interesting and useful, and we look forward to taking this and other opportunities to continue to report on progress in meeting our local equality objectives, and in so doing serving to aid achievement of the national equality aims. Please also take the time to look at the sister report on workforce diversity as well.

Table one: this is a table to show the ten groupings of people whose needs Shropshire Council thinks about in particular in its decision making processes
Main definitions source: Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

Protected Characteristic	Definition
Age	Where this is referred to, it refers to a person belonging to a particular age (e.g. 32 year olds) or range of ages (e.g. 18 - 30 year olds).
Disability	A person has a disability if s/he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
Gender reassignment	The process of transitioning from one gender to another.
Marriage and civil partnership	In England and Wales marriage is no longer restricted to a union between a man and a woman but now includes a marriage between a same-sex couple. [1]. This is also true in Scotland where relevant legislation has been brought into force. [2]. Same-sex couples can also have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must not be treated less favourably than married couples (except where permitted by the Equality Act).
Pregnancy and maternity	Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth, and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.

Protected Characteristic	Definition
Race	Refers to the protected characteristic of Race. It refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.
Religion and belief	Religion has the meaning usually given to it but belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (e.g. Atheism). Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.
Sex	A man or a woman
Sexual orientation	Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.
Social inclusion (additional grouping in Shropshire; not a required grouping under legislation)	Families and friends with caring responsibilities; people with health inequalities; households in poverty; refugees and asylum seekers; rural communities; people considered to be vulnerable, ie having complex needs and/or requiring additional support; veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families; young people leaving care.

[1] Section 1, Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013; [2] Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014.