

Shropshire Council
Service User Diversity Report 2016

Contents

I. Introduction

- A. About this report
- B. National equality policy and legislation
- C. Corporate equality policy and practice
- D. Local places and people

II. Where we are in 2016: progress made

Supporting User people with protected characteristics

A. *Publish more visibly:*

Characteristics: rurality and social inclusion

B. *Collect and analyse more proactively:*

Characteristics: gender; sex

C. *Work more jointly:*

Characteristics: race; religion and belief

III. Where we aim to be in 2017: strategic actions to achieve

IV. Background tables

I. Introduction

About this report

This report sets out to share information and statistics about the diversity of Shropshire Council's service users and communities. It is published on an annual basis. It is intended to act as a complementary report to diversity information also published on an annual basis about the workforce, which is largely drawn from local communities. The service user report and the workforce reports are published online on the Shropshire Council website at www.shropshire.gov.uk

The service user diversity report forms part of efforts to continue to increase the depth, breadth and focus of the evidence base about the people who live and work in Shropshire. This helps the Council to maintain its strategic and service area level data in order to be positioned to meet future ambitions, challenges and opportunities such as public sector reform, devolution, potential impacts of Brexit, etc.

Service delivery arrangements in Shropshire involve opportunities to ensure that service usage data can be systematically recorded by Council colleagues in service areas across the ten groupings of people whose needs Shropshire Council thinks about in particular in its decision making processes. This includes the nine groupings described as having what are termed Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. *For more detail on these groupings, and examples of service area data, please see next section of this report plus appendices.*

The Rurality and Equalities Specialist, based in Commissioning Support Services, liaises with colleagues who are specialists in the fields of data acquisition, customer insight, performance and intelligence to collate the equality and diversity information that is collected, and to collectively analyse what the data is telling us about our communities and about the diverse groupings within our communities.

This helps the Council to understand likely barriers to accessing services, and to plan how to respond to and cater for the diverse and changing needs of diverse and changing communities.

National equality policy and legislation

Organisations are expected by national and international governments and bodies to have policies and practices that address equality and diversity effectively, and that place these matters at the heart of all decision making processes. For Shropshire Council, equality is about using national laws and policies alongside local commitments to protect human rights and to remove unfairness and discrimination.

It is also about making effective use of national research available via the Equality and Human Rights Commission and other national sources, and making appropriate and timely links into Government policy and practice, whether to utilise evidence from Government report and from parliamentary select committee inquiries, or to help shape Government policy, such as via calls for evidence from Government or from bodies such as the Rural Services Network (RSN).

In order to demonstrate proactive commitment to equality, the Council needs to be able to:

- Understand the social, economic and environmental context in which it operates;
- Forecast likely changes and challenges to any or all of the above;
- Ensure that the Council is equipped to continue to deliver on national and international equality aims and local policy drivers.

In so doing, we are mindful of **national and international policy and legislation**, including the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act 2010, together with the Human Rights Act 1998 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, forms a robust framework of protection for equality, diversity, social inclusion and human rights.

We also refer to guidance for public sector organisations, which may be found on the [Equality and Human Rights Commission website](#), together with national research and examples of good practice in policy development and service delivery.

Advice and support for individuals may be found via the [Equality Advisory and Support Service website](#). This is the national helpline that sets out to advise individuals on issues relating to equality and human rights.

Corporate equality policy and practice

In complying with the Equality Act 2010, and in seeking to be proactive, we show that we meet what is called the **Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)**. The legislation states that a listed authority must comply with both a general equality duty and with specific duties, as set out in the Act.

The **general equality duty** may be described as the duty on a public authority, when carrying out its functions, to have what is called **due regard** to the three equality aims. These are:

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

To demonstrate full compliance with the **specific duties**, the Council publishes annual information about workforce diversity and service user diversity, as well as working towards corporate equality objectives that will help to achieve any of the things mentioned in the general equality duty.

The **Shropshire Council Equality Objectives Action Plan** is a key strand of the corporate and partnership approach of Shropshire Council towards continuing compliance with the PSED. Corporate Equality Objectives Action Plans are required to be published by local authorities at a minimum of four yearly intervals. Our Cabinet endorsed the 2016/2020 Action Plan at its meeting on 13th July 2016.

The **progress that we are making** here in Shropshire builds upon the first Equality Objectives Action Plan 2012/2016, endorsed by Cabinet back in 2012. This was updated in 2014, following a mid-cycle stocktake of compliance with the PSED, and published online as a year end report as at 31st March 2015.

It included actions across the following three areas:

- publish equality and diversity information more visibly;
- collect and analyse equality and diversity data more proactively;
- work more jointly with partner organisations on equality-related issues.

Placing continued emphasis upon such actions is helping us to meet our general equality duty under the PSED.

The Equality Objectives Action Plan 2016/2020 enables up to date positioning of the Council to assist in these efforts to meet our general duty; to seek to demonstrate good practice in so doing; and to facilitate timely links with other corporate policy and strategy development, utilising the core value of Equality and Inclusion as set out in the draft **Shropshire Council Corporate Plan 2016/2017**.

This value is defined as: *“Treating everyone as equal regardless of their circumstances and backgrounds, and identifying and helping people who may need support”*. The Equality Objectives Action Plan for 2016/2020 accordingly sets out ways in which the Council may demonstrate application of this and other corporate values, and ongoing progress towards achieving the national equality aims.

Equal opportunities form a core element of good policy making around **healthy, resilient and prosperous communities**. This is partly in recognition that greater economic activity by all groups in society contributes to and boosts the local economy as well as aiding individual prosperity and wellbeing. A society in which everyone feels valued, and where their skills and talents are used to the full, is a productive and resourceful society. It is also about social inclusion. A society in which everyone feels they have a part to play, and in which people respect the views of other people, is a resilient and caring society.

When we talk about **social inclusion**, the groups that we are thinking of in particular are: families and friends with caring responsibilities; people with health inequalities; households in poverty; refugees and asylum seekers; rural communities; and people considered to be vulnerable.

A key Council role, endorsed by the wider community through views expressed in the **‘Big Conversation’**, and supported by staff, is to ensure that the right services and support are in place for the most vulnerable. This includes groups described as having ‘Protected Characteristics’.

When we talk about these **'Protected Characteristics' groupings**, they are something that we look at as well as social inclusion when considering the PSED obligations. 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.

As with all of our communities of place and interest, we aim to involve people in ways in which they may want to be involved, can be encouraged to do so, and are able to do so, in order to support and sustain them as resilient communities. Our focus on locality working that recognizes our rurality and sparsity and the diversity of our communities relates directly to this aim.

Local places and people

Shropshire is a predominantly rural unitary authority, where no area is without inhabitants but where the population is just under one person per hectare (0.96 persons; source Office for National Statistics (ONS) mid year estimates 2014).

With a terrain that covers 319,736 hectares, the county size is approximately ten times that of all the Inner London Boroughs (31,929 hectares; source ONS Census 2011). However, whilst all inhabitants expect equitable access to services, facilities, learning and training opportunities, and support and advice mechanisms, including online, the reality is that digital connectivity remains an issue for the county as for other rural counties.

This is not least as around 35% of the population lives in villages, hamlets and dwellings dispersed throughout the countryside, where for example mobile phone coverage is inconsistent or non-existent. The remainder of the population lives either in one of the 17 market towns and key centres of varying size, including Ludlow in the south and Oswestry in the north, or concentrated in Shrewsbury, the central county town located by the River Severn.

Transport also poses practical challenges within Shropshire and across its borders to Cheshire and Staffordshire to the north, Wales to the west, Herefordshire and Worcestershire to the south and east, and across its eastern flank to Telford and Wrekin and the West Midlands. This is due to dependence on key arterial road routes that are liable to flooding, limited public transport, and nature of the often hilly terrain. High transport costs and service delivery costs arise accordingly, given these digital and physical challenges, not only for householders and businesses but also for commissioners and providers of services including adult social care and community mental health care.

III. Where we are in 2016: progress made

Progress may usefully be demonstrated via the following case studies, taking the three key strategic strands of our work and linking them to Protected Characteristics.

Last year, we looked at a range of data across **all groupings**, when we talked about how we respond to national ONS Census consultation. We also looked at **age**, when we talked about aspects of children's services, and we looked at **race** and at **religion and belief** as well as age, when we talked about how we work with primary schools to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day.

This year, we take a closer look at **social inclusion**, in particular how rurality can affect social inclusion, and at **gender** and **sex**. We also return to **race**, and to **religion and belief**, to cover Holocaust Memorial Day as our efforts continue to grow a cherry tree orchard of remembrance across Shropshire.

A. Publish more visibly

Context

Material on the Council website and on the intranet has been updated and is kept under review, to aid a range of audiences to see a range of materials. This features evidence about service user and workforce diversity, guidance for service areas assessing equality impacts and seeking to rural proof their services, and links to related information for communities, such as support for those wishing to report hate crimes, and support for those wishing to join in with help for projects such as Syrian refugee family resettlement.

Characteristic: Rurality and social inclusion

Rural communities continue to face the same unchanged major challenges in remaining sustainable into the future. Such challenges include fairer funding for rural areas; inadequate digital and physical infrastructure; lack of affordable housing, particular rented housing; fuel poverty; risks of social exclusion, including for groupings such as rural young people, people who are members of the LGBT community, and people at risk of mental ill health due to physical isolation; and an ageing demography. By way of example, Shropshire has a disproportionately older population, with resulting challenges for commissioners and providers of services including social care and community mental health care.

For Shropshire, a number of channels have been utilised in the last year through which to seek to not only alert Government to the precise nature and dimensions of the challenges faced by Shropshire and other rural county authorities, but also provide hard evidence and cogent argument to inform and aid equitable and inclusive decision making across Whitehall. This has also helped to raise the authority's profile at national level.

Key channels have included:

- Responses to a number of parliamentary select committee inquiries with regard to: the digital economy; digital skills; the Local Plans Expert Group recommendations, “Countries of Culture” inquiry into regional arts funding and regional impact of local authority settlements on the cultural sector; and rural tourism;
- Responses to calls for evidence from CLG and Defra with regard to Local Plans, and to rural planning and farm diversifications, linked to the Government’s measures for economic growth outlined in the Rural Productivity Plan;
- Rural demographic and financial data to aid input to Greg Clark MP’s visit to Shropshire, in his then capacity as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government;
- Bespoke sessions with the county’s MPs to articulate the need for assured and comprehensive broadband and mobile phone coverage;
- Policy input and evidence provision to aid Ofcom work on developing a Universal Service Obligation (USO) for broadband;
- Local policy work on BT payphone retention, which is helping to identify where issues remain with mobile phone coverage, as well as where rural communities have issues or concerns such as over road safety, alongside opportunities to work together. An example of this would be work by officers from across the Council with parish councils on adoption of local K6 red kiosks and subsequent installation of defibrillators, to provide a resource for visitors to the county as well as for the rural community itself.

The national vote in favour of Brexit, and the challenges and opportunities that brings, may be said to include opportunity for the government to devise policies specifically aimed at resolving the problems faced by UK rural communities and businesses across all sectors.

Whilst it has been identified that there is a risk that the Government will not continue funding for rural communities which comes from Brussels and which supports the rural economy, the Government has to date guaranteed to continue **funding rural development projects** signed while the UK is still in the European Union.

The Chancellor made an announcement at the Conservative conference on 3rd October 2016, which clarified that successful EU Countryside Stewardship scheme applications would now be funded until the contract completes. **Farm subsidies** are guaranteed until 2020. These amount to over £2billion in payments annually through the Rural Payments Agency (RPA).

B. Collect and analyse more proactively

Context

At an organisational level, the majority of the equality and diversity information that the Council holds relating to service users is collected and monitored within service areas. They also use an Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA) approach, to help to identify whether or not any new or significant planned or anticipated changes to services, including policies, procedures, functions or projects, may have an adverse impact on a particular group of people, and whether the human rights of individuals may be affected. This is so that we are thinking as carefully and completely as possible about all Shropshire groups and communities.

An increased use of Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessments by service areas is helping to ensure that equality data is being collected on an ongoing basis and considered when service changes are planned, and that there is ongoing engagement with people in Protected Characteristic groupings and people at risk of social exclusion. This includes those living in rural households, who may for example be at such a risk due to lack of access to services.

The ESIIAs are published online in the dedicated area of our website about equality, diversity and social inclusion, as well as being integral to committee reports to Cabinet as a very visible record of service area and corporate efforts in this regard.

Characteristics: Gender; Sex

At a national level, we are always looking for exemplars and evidence about how others approach positive action to aid people who are in Protected Characteristic groupings. One of the really useful ways to do this is to look out for parliamentary select committee inquiries, to which we may not necessarily contribute, but from which we may very helpfully learn something of value that we can then apply to local situations. It can also be the case that we discover what we are doing is a good way to do things anyhow.

An example of this approach would be the **Women and Equalities Committee inquiry entitled “Women in executive management”**, set up to look at the following, principally through a one-off oral evidence session:

- The situation for women in senior roles;
- The barriers to women achieving senior positions;
- The measures being taken by organisations to improve the situation;
- Actions the Government should take in this area

The Committee has not yet concluded its findings and produced its report for the Government to consider. There is much for us to consider here in Shropshire and to seek to use as comparator information in the meantime, from the evidence supplied to the Committee, particularly around working practices.

This is presented here as extracts of transcripts from the interchanges between individual witnesses to the Committee, followed by commentary made by Human Resources colleagues about the Shropshire position. This commentary is also available in the sister report to this Service User Diversity Report, about the current workforce of Shropshire Council.

Vivian Hunt, Director of McKinsey UK:

If we think about the **leadership** cadre, obviously senior decision-making leadership is typically at the CEO and CEO minus one or two level. However when you are thinking about access and progression for women and towards gender balance, you need to look at talent at lower levels, which is typically where women get stuck or face challenges around slower progression. It relates more to passing through middle management.

It is clear, when you look at the data from the 30% Club and other reports like Women Matter, **ambition amongst female talent in companies is not the problem**. Most women, when they leave a company, leave for another job. What they typically are solving are the constraints and flexibility and agility of that role, in addition to an exciting professional development opportunity. Secondly, the vast majority of women in the world, and indeed in the UK, need to work. They want and need to work, so finding something that is a good fit with their professional skills and ambitions, with their family and life stage, with their personal circumstances, is an important and urgent issue. Ambition is not the challenge.

The talent pipeline is there. **Women are 37% of the economy yet they are 50% of the population. If we simply closed that gap and moved towards participation parity at any skill level—senior executive, mid-skilled or low-skilled jobs—it would be a significant boost to the economy and would provide lots of options for women to have different paths and roles that were the right fit with their choices.**

Why we cannot close that gap has more to do with the structure of the roles: for example, saying that every senior executive role has to have had these three or four functions, lived in two or three countries and ticked this set of criteria boxes; it might be a set of skills demonstrated as opposed to a set of roles. There is a number of ways in which roles can be more agile and more flexible in how they are delivered.

Fiona Cannon OBE, Director of Diversity and Inclusion, Lloyds Banking Group:

If you look at the issue around agility, which is one of the big issues around flexible working that we know really impacts on women, it is one of the issues around why women may choose to go down certain paths and not other paths, because they look at some business roles and think that they would never be able to do that because they have to combine work and home. Some of that is about busting some myths, because people do work in different ways and we have got a programme at Lloyds that is absolutely about busting those myths.

There are lots of organisations now, which we have case studies on through the Agile Future Forum, that are really starting to look at this issue that Vivian referenced about most organisations being based on a 19th century model of 9.00 to 5.00, five days a week, start work at 16 and retire at 60, linear career. That goes for even the best organisations already. That model does not work.

Helena Morrissey, Chief Executive Officer, Newton Investor Management, Founder, 30% Club:

I will jump in there, as I am Chief Executive of a fund management company. I get my job done by using technology. I was in America last week; life goes on back at the office. There was the little thing of the referendum. **You do not need to be sitting at your desk to contribute. Presenteeism is probably a big problem still, in terms of perceptions of how hard people are working. We need to move to more output-based assessments, going back to the revolution of what good looks like.**

Most City institutions still focus on, “Are you in the office? Are you seen to be there? Are you seen to be saying yes to everything?” rather than “What are the actual results that you are generating?”

Fiona Cannon:

I would agree. I feel very strongly that this is the shift that needs to happen if we are really going to make a difference, not just to women but to anybody that is looking to work in a different way. **Our organisations are not fit for purpose in the 21st century. In fact what is happening, the technology that we are so used to in our personal lives is often not used in our work lives. There is this complete disconnect. Technology does allow us to start looking at working in a different way. It is not about reducing hours necessarily, but it is about working differently.** There are a large number of organisations that are starting to move into that space now.

The problem that we have had traditionally with flexible working is that it has been very much seen as an employee benefit rather than a benefit to the business, and therefore it is about individual arrangements. In a sense **what we have been doing is trying to fit women into a pattern that actually was based on an area where you had somebody at home and somebody in the workplace. Actually, we need to change our structures fundamentally.** As Vivian was saying, that goes for things like how you performance-manage someone who is not in the office in the same way as someone else.

There are really fundamental questions that need to be asked that go to this issue about how you really drive talent through an organisation, and not just women. Even if you look at the fact that we are all living and working longer, how do you help at that end of the process as well as the millennials who are coming in who are just not going to put up with the status quo?

Helena Morrissey:

Fund management is a very specific area within financial services but obviously it is ultimately to do with performance. **12 or 14 years ago, when the markets were weak—it was nothing to do with gender diversity—I introduced a four-day voluntary working week for people. It was literally four days and you save 20% of the salary bill rather than make redundancies. To my surprise, as many senior men as any women took it. To this day, some of our most senior fund managers at Newton are still working a four-day week. It broke the stigma, going back to this idea that you are not trying to squeeze women into existing practices.**

I asked one of the male fund managers what he did on his fifth day and he said, “I read; I exercise; I think,” and I thought I should make it compulsory. It is a results-based business. Clients are happy; I asked one if they knew he only worked four days a week and they said, “How long has he been doing that for?” I said, “Since 2002”, so it is thinking a bit more laterally and not just adapting slightly.

Melanie Richards, Vice Chair and Board Member, KPMG:

We did something similar during a previous downturn, and similarly we got a response from men and women, so we do know that is possible. I would also pick up on the point that Fiona made that **we see as much pressure from millennials now around the working practices that we have, and so we make all sorts of flexible working practices available to our people.**

The more important question you ask is whether they get promoted and whether they see themselves getting through the organisation. Yes, they do, and there are lists that are produced of people who are agile working—I cannot remember what the list is called—and we have people on that list and we are very proud of them.

Vivian Hunt:

Our experience has been similar at McKinsey. We have a global initiative called All In, and it is deliberately inclusive of all of our employees, male and female, diversity of all different types, but the approach that we are using gets quite specific. First, it is upgraded flexible arrangements for all employees. That ranges from something as simple as part-time to more flexible time, so, for example, you are being paid instead of for four days a week you might say 90% and then you can manage how and when you take the 10% off. Again, **we found not just parity of enrolment but more men than women were interested in having more planned, more purposeful control of their schedules and time off.**

We also have an initiative, specifically when people do have to take breaks or have interruptions in their career, be it related to family, older parents, illness, where colleagues can ramp off and ramp on, and we deliberately have them focus on our client impact and client service initiatives but allow them to focus on fewer activities and to really make sure their exit and integration is successful.

We measure ourselves on how many colleagues and how many women successfully ramp back on. So far in our pipeline, the numbers appear to be not only holding up but strengthening. 36% of our manager level—so people who have been at McKinsey for just four or five years—are women and our most recent promotion had 70% women, which is a high point for us. It suggests that the pipeline and retention is getting better with more flexibility.

[ENDS]

Shropshire Council Commentary:

- Shropshire Council's gender split within the workforce has always fallen at around 80-20 split with the majority of our staff being female. This is largely down to the types of roles that the organisation holds which are historically and predominantly female orientated, such as care roles, cleaning and catering roles as well as a large proportion of part time positions.
- Shropshire Council promotes gender equality. Our flexible working policy enables employees to request flexible working whether that be in terms of working hours or locations such as working remotely so that employees can achieve a work life balance.
- Homeworking forms part of our flexible working policy enabling employees to request to work from home on either a permanent or ad-hoc basis. In addition, annualised hours make it easier for our employees to work on a more flexible basis where service needs allow.
- Flexible working can be requested by all employees except agency workers and school based employees. Both Males and Females can request to work flexibly.
- The Council's maternity, adoption and surrogacy adoption leave policy emphasises that policy with regard to adoption and surrogacy applies to both men and women. In addition, the Council operates Keeping in Touch or KIT days, with guidance set out as follows:

Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days

- An employee on maternity, adoption or surrogacy adoption leave is able to work for up to 10 days during their leave without losing any maternity or adoption pay and without bringing their leave to an end. For record keeping purposes working for part of a day will count as one day. Work may include training or any activity undertaken for the purposes of keeping in touch with the Council.

- Such days could include staff or team meetings, occasional days of work etc. and should where possible, be agreed in advance by the line manager and employee before the employee goes on leave.
- Any such work is by arrangement with the manager who will keep a record of the number of days work undertaken during the maternity leave. KIT days are not compulsory and neither party can insist on work been undertaken or being given any work to do.

C. Work more jointly

Context

The Council collects and uses equality and diversity data as part of a range of partnership and corporate approaches towards meeting the needs of service users. These approaches involve consultation and engagement with current and potential service users, communities, and local and regional stakeholders in the business sector such as housing developers, social care providers, and the Marches LEP.

Partnership approaches very much also encompass liaison work through and with the local voluntary and community sector, particularly through the Shropshire Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly and its forums of interest. The Council also seeks out good practice in the field of equality and diversity policy from public sector bodies, such as NHS Foundation Trusts and other local authorities. Examples include Cornwall, Cumbria, Gloucestershire and Leicestershire local authorities.

In the last year, the Council officer lead on equality has also met with the officer equality lead at Telford and Wrekin Council to share good practice, and contributed to Worcestershire's ongoing efforts to compile regional approaches towards supporting local authorities in PSED compliance,

Characteristics: Race; Religion and Belief

A key example of how we have worked with partners during 2015/2016 and to date with regard to a Protected Characteristic relates to the Council's efforts to work with organisations locally and nationally and with the local community to prepare for and help **Syrian refugee family resettlement** in Shropshire.

Shropshire Council's Cabinet approved recommendations in September 2016 to continue the Council support to resettle up to 60 Syrian refugees in the county.

To date eight families (33 individuals) comprising of 16 adults and 17 children have now successfully resettled into the county from two arrival flights over the summer. As the number is still well below the quota to which the council has committed, the September report sought approval for a further five families to be rehomed here. This will take the total cohort in Shropshire up to 15 families over the next 12 months, or around 60 people, dependent on family size.

This followed our announcement earlier in 2016 that the Council had committed to taking up to 60 individuals as part of the Government's Syrian repatriation programme. As a result, Shropshire's Syrian Refugee Cross-Party Working Group was set up to oversee the Syrian refugee resettlement in Shropshire.

The group has been working closely with Refugee Action who were appointed to oversee the resettlement of families in the county as well as the British Red Cross and local volunteers who have been helping the new arrivals settle into their new homes and schools, access local services, and identify ways to help them integrate with local communities. The first five families arrived at the end of June followed by a further three families which arrived in August.

Ruth Houghton, Shropshire's Syrian Refugee Co-ordinator and Head of Service: Improvement and Efficiency for Adult Services, Shropshire Council, has said in press release:

"We are really pleased to see that our first families are quickly settling into their local communities, all children are now attending local schools and nurseries, and families are also undertaking English speaking and employment classes. Many are also now contributing to their local community through a variety of volunteering activities."

"Since the crisis in Syria has escalated, the council has received numerous offers of help from individuals and communities who've already organised themselves to provide aid. Several independent groups have been set up across the county to help and support Syrian refugees and a diversity day held in Shrewsbury on 23rd July 2016 received many offers of voluntary support and good wishes and welcome remarks."

Louise Calvey, Head of Resettlement at Refugee Action, said:

"We're delighted to be working with Shropshire Council and partners to resettle Syrian families in the county. It's wonderful to see the families warmly welcomed to Shropshire and the contribution they are already making to their new communities. Local support makes a huge difference as our dedicated staff and volunteers work with our partners to support these individuals, who have faced unimaginable horrors, to rebuild their lives with dignity."

The Cabinet report also gained approval for provision of further support to resettle 42 children and young people under the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) scheme. This will include assisting Kent with their challenge of supporting up to 2000 children that have arrived there as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children.

Currently, seven unaccompanied minors from across Europe are being supported in Shropshire, two from Kent and a further five who had arrived in the county independently. The Council is working with fostering services and other providers to help identify the range of available accommodation needed to support the young people. Both the Syrian refugee resettlement programme and UASC scheme are being funded through a specific grant payment from central government.

Shropshire's Syrian Refugee Cross-Party Working Group continues to liaise with the Home Office to make arrangements to accept further families over the next 12 months.

The group works with the Home Office and the Government's West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP) to put in place arrangements to house and support the refugees. Refugee Action have been supporting families in registering with their local GP, and ensuring that school-age children are found places at schools. They also ensure that appointments are booked with the Department for Work and Pensions regarding benefits, and that refugees are given a case worker and a tour of the area.

Another key area of joint work within Shropshire is our work with primary schools to commemorate **Holocaust Memorial Day on 27th January** through the annual planting of cherry trees and the continued involvement of inter faith forums. This was after a first cherry tree was planted with Mereside CofE Primary School in Shrewsbury in the centre of the county in 2015, to link in with commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

We therefore decided to plant cherry trees, and to make links with the natural environment and with the Jewish festival of Tu B'Shevat. The cherry trees are Black Oliver flowering cherry trees, an old variety native to the West Midlands. This is the one we are using to symbolise the importance of the fruit tree to the Jewish faith and indeed world faiths. The trees are sourced through Shropshire Council's the Incredible Edible project whereby fruit trees are grown locally in peat free compost.

2016 saw a second tree planted, in Oswestry in the north, with Woodside Academy, with a short interfaith service developed with the school, the interfaith forums, and the local Councillor. The first tree was measured by the school children at Mereside to see how it had grown, and they talked about its importance to their school and how they are nurturing it in its setting just next to the school.

2017 will see a third cherry tree planted with a primary school in the south of the county, as the Council begins to grow a cherry tree orchard of remembrance across Shropshire, with further measuring of the first two trees by the children as they themselves grow up. We have chosen Bishop Hooper Primary School, who have graciously said yes.

On the day itself, we are planning a trip to take in all three schools. This will involve Mr Mark Michaels from the Jewish community and Imam Sohayb Peerbhai and others from the inter faith forums; the children measuring the existing trees to see how they have grown, and planting the new one; lighting of candles; and prayers.

It was Church Stretton Secondary School's plans to light a special 70th Anniversary Auschwitz Candle in 2015, one of just 70 across the country, that set us thinking about what happens in primary schools, and how an approach that starts in primary schools could hopefully only help once they got to secondary school and were faced with the necessary learning about this awful truth.

Secondary school involvement in planting cherry trees is being actively organized for 2017, with five due to take part. We are saying to the secondary schools that we would ideally like them to use the prayers we have developed for primary schools, and will share the order of service that we are working up with the interfaith forums for the primary schools, with the hopes that they are able to use it themselves on the day or at some suitable point that week.

The ceremonies we are conducting with the primary schools in 2017 will take the HMD theme of “How can life go on” and we will use it to talk locally about KinderTransport during World War Two with Jewish children settling in England, and the Syrian refugee families settling in Shropshire in the present day.

This approach is enabling young children to understand about the Holocaust and other genocides in a way which is age appropriate, which sees the fruit trees growing with the children and in time bearing fruit, and also helps them to show care for the beautiful natural environment of Shropshire.

There is a dedicated section on the Council website, in which we have described the corporate approach taken.

IV. Where we aim to be in 2017: strategic actions to achieve

The Council uses a wide range of customer feedback mechanisms and information exchange mechanisms, including social media, to facilitate open feedback from a range of audiences and stakeholders. The views, issues and learning from people living and working in Shropshire are welcomed and encouraged via this ongoing engagement basis as well as through specific consultation exercises.

The Council’s intelligence sources, national data, and the efforts of exemplar authorities, clearly demonstrate that there can be challenges in finding out more about the needs of individuals in communities. Creating opportunities to identify and collect service user equalities data, in ways that respect confidentiality whilst helping to produce robust information and quality intelligence, will assist in targeting available resources. It will also help in seeking a fair and equitable share of central government funding, and accessing other funding, e.g. existing EU funding for social inclusion, which is a strategic activity through the LEP, and eg any other funding streams post-Brexit.

The Council therefore very much welcomes any data that people in Shropshire may feel able to share, and will observe confidentiality and anonymity in so doing. We continue to target our local efforts at finding out where there are gaps in equality and diversity data, and in finding out where there may be barriers to accessing particular services, for people with one or more of the Protected Characteristics and for people who are at risk of social exclusion.

We also continue to build on our knowledge to help influence service area policy, in order to take actions that will enhance the likely positive impact or mitigate against the likely negative impact of policy on any of the groupings in our community, with increasing use being made of our Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA) templates and Diversity Monitoring Charts to help us.

The Deputy Portfolio Holder, Councillor Gwilym Butler, has been appointed Member Champion for equalities, in which role he supports efforts to highlight to Government the inequalities faced by people in Protected Characteristic groupings, which can be exacerbated for those living in rural areas.

The Deputy Portfolio Holder also leads locally on promoting the Equality Objectives Action Plan more widely with local partners including town and parish councils and the VCS. This links to ambitions to share materials across sectors, in order to pool resources for maximum effect and increase understanding amongst the general public, service users and communities of the challenges faced by people with Protected Characteristics and people at risk of social exclusion.

How to find out more:

Please see our web pages about equality, diversity and social inclusion on www.shropshire.gov.uk

Please also contact Mrs Lois Dale, Rurality and Equalities Specialist, via telephone 01743 258528, or email her at lois.dale@shropshire.gov.uk

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 will also be true in Scotland when the relevant legislation is 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.
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.

Protected Characteristic	Definition
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)	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

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

Table two: this is a table to show the ten groupings in Shropshire, along with examples of information sources for service areas.

Protected Characteristic and other groups in Shropshire	Examples of information sources for service areas
Age (please include children, young people, people of working age, older people. Some people may belong to more than one group eg young person with disability)	Adult social care data; Blue Badge records; Census 2011 profiles; children's centre data; concessionary fare records; housing services data; schools data; leisure facilities usage
Disability (please include: mental health conditions and syndromes including autism; physical disabilities or impairments; learning disabilities; Multiple Sclerosis; cancer; HIV)	Adult social care data; Blue Badge records; Census 2011 profiles; concessionary fare records; housing services data; schools data; leisure facilities usage
Gender re-assignment (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)	Customer complaints and comments data; national proxy data
Marriage and Civil Partnership (please include associated aspects: caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)	Housing services data; Registrar records
Pregnancy & Maternity (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)	Housing services data; Registrar records
Race (please include: ethnicity, nationality, culture, language, gypsy, traveller)	Adult social care data; Census 2011 profiles; children's centre data; concessionary fare records; housing services data; schools data; leisure facilities usage
Religion and belief (please include: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Non conformists; Rastafarianism; Sikhism, Shinto, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, and any others)	Adult social care data; Census 2011 profile; Housing services data; Registrar records
Sex (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)	Adult social care data; Blue Badge records; Census 2011 profiles; children's centre data; concessionary fare records; schools data; leisure facilities usage
Sexual Orientation (please include associated aspects: safety; caring responsibility; potential for bullying and harassment)	Customer complaints and comments data; drug and alcohol service customer records; national proxy data
Other: Social Inclusion (please include families and friends with caring responsibilities; people with health inequalities; households in poverty; refugees and asylum seekers; rural communities; people you consider to be vulnerable)	Adoption and fostering data; Adult social care data; benefits customer data; children's centre data; housing services data; leisure facilities usage; planning policy records eg Place Plans