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Venue: Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY3 8HQ

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CABINET

TO FOLLOW REPORT (S)

7 Children's Social Care Ofsted Report and Next Steps (Pages 1 - 34)

Lead Member – Cllr Ruth Houghton, Portfolio Holder for Social Care

Lead Officer – Sonya Miller, Service Director Children and Young People

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Committee and Date

Cabinet

10 September 2025

Item

Public



Children's Services Ofsted Report and Next Steps

Responsible Officer:

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Ruth Houghton

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 This report summarises the recent three-week Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), of Shropshire Children's Services and outcomes achieved.
- 1.2 It also outlines the work undertaken to drive the service to achieve Outstanding as its recent final judgment, including actions taken by the service after the November 2023 Ofsted focussed visit that identified areas for improvement in specific child protection practices.
- 1.3 These actions outlined below, renewed governance, performance and management approaches that underpin the services delivery model are intended to enable the service to retain the Outstanding judgement going forward. The continuous improvement model in place are responding to challenges effectively and secure developments robustly.

- 1.4 A Children's Improvement Board was established with cross party representatives and officers working together, alongside SLIP, (service led improvement partner) activities and Department for Education advice and support accessed.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report provides the background and updated position relating to the recent Ofsted ILACS inspection visit 16th June 2025 to 4th July 2025, where Shropshire Children's Services achieved the Outstanding overall rating.
- 2.2. This is an overall improvement since the ILACS judgement of Good overall achieved in February 2022.
- 2.3. The judgements made are as follows and can found in the published Ofsted report.

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children in care	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding

- 2.4. Inspectors' comments highlighted below are in the published report and describe their key findings and professional reasons for their judgement.
- 2.5. Children in Shropshire achieve positive outcomes and demonstrate measurable progress due to effective services that comprehensively address their needs and mitigate risks.
- 2.6. Since the last ILACS inspection in February 2022, and particularly since the subsequent focused visit in November 2023, which identified a decline in child protection practice, senior leaders have taken purposeful action to implement a wide range of evidence-based improvements across the service. These improvements are having a discernible and positive impact, enabling vulnerable children, care leavers and families to make and sustain significant change, ultimately improving their lives

- 2.7. Senior leaders are ambitious, family focused and firmly child centred. Taking a whole-council approach, they have worked closely with political leaders and multi-agency partners, demonstrating unwavering commitment to improving outcomes for children and care leavers.
- 2.8. Leaders have cultivated a culture of ambition and continuous improvement. All areas of service are characterised by many areas of excellence, compassion, and a resolute focus on outcomes. Listening to children, understanding their lived experiences and acting on their views are strongly embedded in practice.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That Cabinet acknowledges this outstanding achievement and the positive impact on the lives of children, young people and families.
- 3.2. That Cabinet acknowledge the Council wide commitment to sustaining and embedding this outstanding achievement, at the same time recognising the preventative benefits that doing so will bring to children, young people and families.
- 3.3. The report to be shared with Full Council on the 25th September 2025.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. Children's Services maintenance of these high standards must be continued to avoid the risks of having an inadequate or requires improvement judgement in the future.
- 4.2. These judgements often lead to significant additional spending requirements and improvement work requiring additional funding of £10-15m upwards, with higher costs often aligned to external intervention imposed on Local Authorities as a result. This could include Department of Education advisors and external reviewers being recommended. This can reduce the autonomy of the service, including requiring structural changes, and therefore impact the whole council.
- 4.3. Children's Services are securing a clear plan to address next steps recommendations made for development by Ofsted, alongside working together across the council and system partners through the Ambitions Board to continue to build on the achievements to date.
- 4.4. It is essential to retain the outstanding practice seen across many areas of Children's Services that is enabling the children, young people and their families of Shropshire to thrive.

4.5 Risk table

<i>Risk</i>	<i>Mitigation</i>
Potential deterioration of capacity if demands increase on the system.	Children's Services current operating model of increasing early help capacity, secure threshold application, appropriate referrals from partners and timeliness of intervention, securing children and young people's long-term homes quickly including adoption was evidenced through the inspection. Performance and demand tracking that is embedded across the system evidence that we are seeing reduced numbers of open cases (per child) monthly, there are 699 children looked after as @ 04/09/25, including 32 unaccompanied asylum seekers through the government scheme in place. This is a reduction overall from 2023/24 and to date numbers of children requiring care for their safety is less than those leaving care month on month. The service is monitoring and tracking these areas of demand weekly/monthly with clear management oversight and service manager check and challenge sessions in place. Benchmarking data will be available in October 25 re numbers of Children looked after per 10.000 and Local Authority spends; the service will be evaluating its position against that when available to. Our drive is to reduce the numbers of children in our care, secure the right placements/homes for them quickly and exit children from the system as quickly and safely as we can with family and friends, if possible, for them. If not long-term fostering or adoption are applied. The implementation of the Families First Programme nationally driven should also enhance further the principle and practice of right service, right time, building on prevention and early intervention to prevent families escalating into children's social care going forward.
Placement capacity and homes for children and young people not meeting need.	Building our internal capacity will be crucial to avoid the impact of placement breakdowns on costs and impact on children and young people's well-being. The fostering transformation programme and work related to building on our children's homes is in place. Adoption is supported alongside the regional adoption agency and we have evidenced good practice in this area including sibling groups being placed together in the forever homes and family.
Outcomes for children and young people deteriorate. Practice standards and statutory timeliness (the activity of the service), deteriorate.	A continuous improvement approach of high expectation, high challenge and high support is embedded as business as usual across all areas of Children's Services. Performance weekly check and challenge sessions, audit monthly process, learning events and quality assurance activity underpinned by management oversight supervision and leadership overview of decision making and spend.

	DCS quarterly updates evidence what we know, what we are developing and improving, what our next steps are for addressing this. This framework allows the service to have transparent conversations about challenges that are identified quickly and responded to quickly with robust remedial actions. Monitoring of the challenge is put in place until resolution is secured.
Imposed spend on the council by DFE because of Ofsted determining standards and outcomes have deteriorated through their annual engagement meeting reviews with the DCS and intelligence gathering including performance tools nationally used re the CHAT Tool.	Potential for imposed spending against the budget for improvements required to safeguard children. Often more than £10-£15m depending on the issues noted. Can include increased staffing, resources and services, specialist support and intervention, and DFE advisors oversight

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. Shropshire Council continues to manage unprecedented financial demands as budgeted for within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy approved by Council on 27 February 2025 and subsequent updates. It is also addressed in our monitoring position presented to Cabinet monthly. Significant management action has and continues to be undertaken to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all reports provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. Where non-essential spend is identified within the Council, this will be reduced. This may involve
 - scaling down initiatives,
 - changing the scope,
 - delaying implementation, or
 - extending delivery timescales.
- 5.2. The Ofsted Inspection does not consider the financial implications of the delivery of services, instead focussing on the quality of delivery and experiences.
- 5.3. Given sufficient time, the outstanding practice evident in Children's Services will reduce the numbers of children and young people in the care of the Local Authority. Evidence from other areas who have sustained and embedded outstanding practice demonstrates that this leads to reduced costs in this area and the ability to re-direct funding into even greater preventative services. This further strengthens the numbers of children and young people coming into care and enables greater family orientated support to be provided safely. This is the basis for the national Children's Social Care reforms, Families First Partnership (FFP).

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. The rural nature of Shropshire and the statutory requirement to ensure children and young people are safe, is for the majority of children's practitioners visits to be face to face. In the hub and/or at other locations like community venues or even school

depending on the families and the situations circumstances. This does place a demand of workers across the service to travel to family homes. This places a demand on energy fuel and consumption.

- 6.2. Where the service can use the Teams function is used for meetings to reduce the impact of our workforces use of their cars, However some of the service's statutory functions require face to face time to be secured: including child protection multi agency case conferences, legal meetings, direct work sessions with children, young people and their families, court directed events and family time being some examples. Where the service can, and it is appropriate, we do use the Teams function comprehensively across the services. Of course, this is also reliant on the families access to a laptop and internet in their own homes too.

7. Background

- 7.1. Following the Good overall judgement ILACS in 2022 Shropshire Children's Services agreed a vision to underpin the next steps of the services development. Delivering this vision has been the focus of the service since the ILACS 2022 by implementing the beliefs and behaviours that underpinned the vision set out below.
- 7.2. **By treating our children and young people with respect, love and trust and with the right amount of encouragement we can inspire them to dream big, build relationships and connections that matter, and together with kindness and a sense of belonging we can do great things.**
- 7.3. Children and young people should live in their family homes and their communities when safe to do so and their needs can be met. They will be supported to access services in their communities that enable their families to thrive and children to secure good outcomes without escalating into statutory child protection or Looked After services.
- 7.4. We should work together with families at the earliest opportunity to enable and empower Shropshire's families and young people to achieve their best lives.
- 7.5. Our Early Help services enable families to access preventative support, reducing and preventing the risk to children and young people of experiencing significant harm. Through this approach the numbers of referrals now coming through to the social care service have reduced and we continue to build strong partnership relationships, securing positive interventions, assessments and parenting support across Shropshire.
- 7.6. We deliver this through a culture of evidence based restorative practice and strengths-based relationships that we know can change lives. Our leadership and practice are underpinned by these behaviours and values.
- 7.7. Children and young people subject to child protection plans will experience a social work intervention and partnership approach that enables them to be safer and remain in their family homes and communities. We will make timely decisions about when their needs cannot be met in their home environment and securing their permanence plans as quickly as we can.

- 7.8. We are aspirational for the Children we look after in our care when they cannot live in their birth family. Strong corporate parenting support across the council enables us to parent and support our children as our own, encouraging them and advocating for them, to be the best version of themselves and to live their best life.
- 7.9. Children and young people should have the benefit of being able to grow up in a family, either their own or foster care. When they do have to live in a children's home for a period, we are aspirational in always working towards them moving back into a family environment when they are ready to do so.
- 7.10. Children should make excellent progress in our care. Plans are creative and in line with the wishes and feelings of the child. Long term support is provided to families where children have returned home or to connected carers through Stepping Stones.
- 7.11. Our care leavers deserve high quality support and ongoing relationships as we stay connected, and we ensure they are accessing education and employment opportunities at the right time for them.
- 7.12. A focussed visit was undertaken by Ofsted (as part of their usual routine) in November 2023, Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for children subject to a child protection plan, with a particular focus on the quality and impact of pre-proceedings interventions. This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. This identified some key areas of practice within specific areas of the service that required improvement work to be secured.
- 7.13. During the Focused visit in November 2023 the Executive Director of People and the Chief Executive agreed the implementation of an Improvement Board to address the challenges experienced in Children's Services that inspectors had seen. This included caseloads being too high at that time, high turnover of staff in specific teams, and the need to reduce drift and delay with child protection plans and securing permanence for some children.
- 7.14. An Improving Outcomes for Children plan was agreed underpinned by the practice principle that "All children have the right intervention, at the right time, and live with a family, theirs or another one, where it is safe and right for them to do so"
- 7.15. December 2023 The establishment of the Children's Improvement Board was approved by full Council with the priority of the drawing up of a Children's Improvement Plan. Key areas of improvement were identified service wide with a focus on Children in need, child protection and public law outline matters.
- 7.16. The Initial Meeting was held on the 5th of Dec 2023. Executive Directors, Local Government Improvement Advisor, Cross party members and other relevant council department Assistant Directors were members. The Chief Executive Chaired the meeting.
- 7.17. The Children's Improvement Plan was developed. The Cabinet and the full council supported this.

- 7.18. The Board met monthly and received reports on progress and challenge updates against the action plan, including Quality Assurance Reports.
- 7.19. The Action plan had seven areas of development and was applied across the service where relevant.
- 7.20. The Board had a performance dashboard that measured the progress of key areas of improvement, e.g., caseloads, social workers/ agency social workers, changes in social workers, as well as the performance measures as per the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) dashboard.
- 7.21. Staffing capacity was addressed and 19 additional permanent posts agreed, 4 social workers, 4 Specialist Child Protection Social Workers (pilot), 3 additional Team Managers, 5 additional Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO), and a Permanence Coordinator. Legal Executive to progress Special Guardianship Orders conversions and Placement with Parents discharges.
- 7.22. Sector Led improvement partnerships (SLIP) were agreed and commissioned to support the service developments of Quality Assurance (QA) and Audit, Front Door, and Early Help.
- 7.23. DfE Improvement Advisor, Gladys Rhodes White, was invited by Shropshire Council to offer high challenge, support and expectations into the system and offer critical friend conversations of improvements being undertaken.
- 7.24. The Shropshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership worked together to start driving the "Turning the Curve Agenda", spotlight sessions were held, and the Partnerships operating model has been evaluated and re-established in line with Working Together 2023 requirements. The national agenda for reform of children's services is understood and planning for the transformation and implementation is underway. A recently appointed Families First Partnership (FFP) Strategic Lead will be driving the implementation of the national Families First Agenda, under the direction of the Director of Children's Services.
- 7.25. Progress has been made as a result and good/outstanding outcomes for children and young people have become increasingly consistent and impactful on their lives. This is evidenced through the continuous improvement work embedded in the system, including weekly performance check and challenge meetings, auditing, feedback from children, young people and their families, senior leadership review and management oversight.
- 7.26. SLIP work has been undertaken with Wiltshire Local Authority (LA) reviewing and learning re QA, audit and closing the loop – this is ongoing.
- 7.27. We are completing more child journey audits, increasingly being judged as good and outstanding. Theme led dip sampling is embedded in the system and proactive challenge is in place through the management structure, and support is applied to resolve challenges timely and effectively. Our audit practice and performance oversight through the leadership team is evidencing positive impacts for young people and their families.

- 7.28. We are learning from these outcomes, providing immediate remedial actions including training if required, engaging the team managers and seeing closing the activity in children and young people's records.
- 7.29. The Independent reviewing officer (IRO) footprint is seen in children's records and offers appropriate support and challenge when required. IROs are gathering children's wishes, feelings and views and the Independent Chair scrutiny work has increased.
- 7.30. Caseloads have reduced across the service and are now mostly manageable, and social workers told the inspectors when asked. Caseload management is a specific issue in different teams and management oversight and supervision facilitates the workers throughput as needed. .
- 7.31. Early help referrals have significantly increased, and weekly transfer meetings are securing timely transfer to the right team at the right time. Monitoring is consistently embedded.
- 7.32. The number of changes of social worker has significantly reduced over the last 9 months.
- 7.33. Early help provision and pathways are continuing to support children and families, and they are benefitting from this quickly at the point of referral. This is reducing the likelihood of families requiring social work intervention.
- 7.34. We are completing assessments more quickly and have clear performance oversight embedded avoiding drift and delay.
- 7.35. If children need to come into care for their safety this is done in a timely and effective manner
- 7.36. We are starting more and completing Public Law outline (PLO processes) more effectively. This is the work undertaken alongside families prior to court proceedings being instigated to avoid the proceeding if possible. Pre proceedings work, including commissioning of specialist assessments and support services is embedded and care proceedings are being completed more quickly. Care Proceedings are timelier.
- 7.37. We are securing permanence outcomes for children including Special Guardianship Order (SGO) and Adoption plans securing their futures and forever families.
- 7.38. Service managers are chairing legal planning meetings and decision making is collaborative with legal colleagues and operational managers.
- 7.39. The service has completed the work with the SLIP Wiltshire LA to improve the experience for families of the pre proceedings and legal pathways. This has influenced the development of the procedures and practice guidance that has been updated.
- 7.40. The July 2024 focused visit by Ofsted looked at the local authority's arrangements for children in care, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. There were positive reflections made, and good practice seen in these areas, with

practice improvement recommendations made to further enhance the services provided.

- 7.41. Additional service developments continued to be implemented, including a project team to review and oversee all children and young people that were subject to Placement with Parents (PwP) and living at home with their parents on care orders. Alongside practice learning, they identified those children that they could take back to court to have care orders revoked, enabling the children and their families to no longer require statutory intervention. This also applied to children and young people where special guardianship orders were identified as their permanence plan.
- 7.42. The project team developed and delivered good practice workshops across the service to support the timeliness of practice and improvements became embedded in the system.
- 7.43. The case management teams progressed permanence outcomes within their caseloads to. Adoptions, Special Guardianship Orders and Placement with parents' arrangements, revocation of care orders have continued to progress and become timelier.
- 7.44. Permanence tracking, check and challenge is embedded in the system and fortnightly reviews and weekly performance meetings are supporting with high expectations, challenge and support for this work to be progressing. Additional fostering panels and agency decision maker (ADM) time is also agreed to enable children's outcomes to be secured.
- 7.45. The corporate parenting strategy (2024-27) was influenced by the voice of care experienced children and young people. This included the council pledge and the Care Leavers Local Offer, both of which were co-produced with care experienced children, young people.
- 7.46. The corporate parenting strategy was presented to full Council on 12th December by the Lead Member and care experienced young person (Co-chair of Corporate Parenting Steering Board). There was an emphasis on bringing love back into the system, shaping and delivering services with care and compassion.
- 7.47. Participation and listening to the voice of children and young people is subject to continuous improvement and this was seen as a strength during the recent inspection
- 7.48. Establishing the new DCS role according to statutory guidance will allow exclusive attention to children's services. This will help sustain current standards and support ongoing improvements aligned with the Families First Partnership (FFP) national agenda for change.

ILACS Inspection Preparation and Outcomes

- 7.49. Preparation for the ILACS inspection picked up further pace in October 2024 with the appointment of an Ofsted improvement lead, working with the senior leadership team to focused on the specific requirements and information needed to successfully engage in the three-week inspection programme.

- 7.50. Weekly Ofsted and performance meetings were held addressing the requests for information sought by Ofsted.
- 7.51. Annexe A requirements are the eleven child-level data lists that cover the period of 6 months before the date of notification. This requires continuous review, updates and collaboration across performance, reporting, LCS and operational teams.
- 7.52. A self-evaluation framework is required to include cross service information, gathering evidence that demonstrates what we know about social work practice, what we are doing to address the challenges, and having identified the challenges ourselves, what remedial actions do we have in place to address them.
- 7.53. The last 6 months of service audits are also required with moderation and closing the loop activity evidenced. In addition to specific documents needing to be gathered and sent to the inspectors for their review. They chose up to 12 of these children for deep dive review and would be talking with social workers directly about their work.
- 7.54. Week one the inspectors are off site, but require the information as outlined above, we start organising their diaries and embedding the logistics plan for week two and three when they will be on site.
- 7.55. A council project team was put in place and was responsible for ensuring the logistics, evidence gathering, and communication with inspectors, the service, partners, SLT and members was planned for and put in place.
- 7.56. The service also held biweekly Assistant Director update sessions with all of children's services to give updates, share performance challenges, or audit learning and secure remedial actions collaboratively with practitioners and their managers directly.
- 7.57. Performance and practice challenges increased further into the new year 2025, with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), closing the loop activity – ensuring actions from audits are completed.
- 7.58. Team Managers were engaged and responding proactively, receiving tools to support their focus areas. Monthly End to End meetings and Performance Management Group engage the Team managers directly every other week as a check in, discussion with them about a practice issues, auditing together and challenges in the system to seek solutions are ongoing.
- 7.59. SLT weekly performance and business meetings have oversight and provide challenge, continuing to drive the readiness for Ofsted across the teams. Through a culture of children first, high support and high challenge, alongside high expectations for the service children and young people receive.
- 7.60. The team are also focussed on collating good practice examples and enabling the frontline workers to be able to demonstrate the very best of their practice when inspectors call in their children's records.
- 7.61. After a three-week period of working with Ofsted inspectors, Shropshire Council Ofsted ILACS Inspection ended on Friday 4th July 2025.

- 7.62. The inspection held over a three-week period, included detailed case work analysis, data review, and interviews with partners, children, and families, and assessed the service across four key areas including:
- 7.63. The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families – outstanding
- 7.64. The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection – outstanding
- 7.65. The experiences and progress of children in care – outstanding
- 7.66. The experiences and progress of care leavers – good
- 7.67. Overall effectiveness – outstanding
- 7.68. This achievement reflects significant progress since the overall good judgement secured in 2022, and Ofsted focused visits undertaken in 2023 and 2024. It also builds on the current ratings of our six children's homes rated good and outstanding.
- 7.69. It's great that Ofsted's findings and judgement have recognised this organisational achievement and highlighted your dedication and ongoing commitment to children, young people and their families.
- 7.70. The following outlines the considerable work and complexity of an ILACS three-week inspection and the demands it placed upon services and practitioners already undertaking their day jobs to safeguarding children and young people in the community.

Day one Monday 16th June 2025

- 7.71. The inspectors were offsite for the first week, but the service and project team worked with them daily to be prepared for their arrival on the following Monday for the fieldwork they planned to undertake across the operational teams.
- 7.72. The DCS had a set up meeting with the inspectors and they outlined their requirements for the inspection; they had specific lines of enquiry for Shropshire from the focused visits and performance data and advised they would be seeking evidence to assure themselves these matters were or had been addressed whilst undertaking their work in the service.

Week one

- 7.73. The Timetabling for week two and three was agreed, this requires planning and set up of the meetings expected (usually 4 meetings per inspector), in addition to visits being arranged to meet children and young people in their home and or group that they are attending.
- 7.74. We had four inspectors on site week one and six onsite week three including an HMI for schools, in addition to a specific inspector that undertakes a Quality assurance role.

- 7.75. There were over **95** bespoke meetings arranged, with the DCS, Ofsted Keeping in Touch meetings, staff, partners, adults' services and the Virtual school, CAFCASS, Local Judiciary, Chief Executive, Portfolio Holder and children, young people and their families spoken with. In addition, there were internal keeping in touch meetings held sometimes twice daily with operational Service Managers and relevant internal colleagues joining.
- 7.76. From day one the senior leadership team were working alongside their operational teams and social workers to quality assure their children's records, offer support and be available for debriefing staff as they meet with inspectors to secure any key lines of enquiry. Including during their weekends.
- 7.77. The project team managed all enquiries, performance and children's records system (LSC) colleagues, senior leaders PAs, and support staff oversaw the governance of the inspection and managed the flow of information from and to the inspectors themselves, as well as ensuring the inspectors diary was secured and all meetings and feedback were successfully implemented and understood.
- 7.78. The IT team secured the inspectors laptops and access to systems and building management colleagues ensured the Ofsted requirements in terms of room bookings and locations was in place.

Day Two

- 7.79. Uploading of Annex A data requests, these 11 lists of data reflect the whole range of interventions and support being provided for children young people and their families, as well as our care leavers information.
- 7.80. At the time of inspection **2092** children and young people were allocated to social workers, with more being subject to referrals made into the front door requesting potential service.
- 7.81. A list of all the services auditing activity over the last 6 months is also required, **199** completed audits were listed with judgements and children's ID numbers being provided for this period.
- 7.82. The inspectors choose **12** audits benchmarked against the Annex A data; they interrogated these in relation to the quality and impact of audit practice for the children and young people involved. They also ascertain if the audit judgements are reflective of an organisation that knows what good looks like.

Day three

- 7.83. Ofsted require the **Information used by the local authority to manage services for children and young people**, we call this The Library in children's services, it expects a wide range of documents used as evidence to assure inspectors again, we know what good looks like. We uploaded **315** separate documents by 12 noon that day to meet the requirements of the Ofsted requests.

Day four

- 7.84. The local authority shares the documents set out below for each of the 12 children's case records that inspectors chose from the audit list. This included

each Child's assessment, Child in need, child protection, care or pathway plan, Chronology, and supervision record. These are collated and quality assured by a team of people prior their upload onto the Ofsted portal.

Ofsted Inspectors are on site weeks two and three:

- 7.85. The inspectors met with social workers, early help practitioners, education colleagues, Personal Assistants to Care Leaver (PA's), Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO's), legal colleagues, Permanence Tracking Officers, CAFCASS, reviewed commissioning work, the judiciary and children, young people and their families, including foster carers and adoptive parents. These **69** meetings all required timely planning, room bookings, team calls arranged as part of the timetabling exercise.
- 7.86. Inspectors met with our care leavers group and spent an evening in Chelmaren Home speaking with children about their lived experience in Shropshire's services.
- 7.87. **92** social workers (including disabled Children's team), and early help practitioners, fostering and adoption workers, independent reviewing officers and virtual school colleagues, all attended meetings with the inspectors directly.
- 7.88. A project team offered daily support to organise, manage, and ensure all activity was timely, planned and secured each day.
- 7.89. The final feedback meeting that included the Chief Executive, The Leader and Portfolio Holder and Senior leadership Team and DFE advisor was held on Friday 4th July 2025. Where the Outstanding judgement was announced internally.
- 7.90. Following this the report is written, shared with the Local Authority as a draft for any factual inaccuracies or challenges if required, and subject to Ofsted's rigorous internal Quality Assurance process.
- 7.91. The DCS, Tanya Miles, was able to share the Outstanding judgement with staff, council colleagues, children and young people and partners during a planned event on Friday 8th August 2025. This also included the official handover to the new DCS, David Shaw.
- 7.92. The report was published on the 12th of August 2025, following the Ofsted Quality Assurance process agreeing the findings and final judgment of Outstanding that was made.
- 7.93. We are very proud of our children, young people and their families, and care leavers who all continue to thrive and achieve their aspirations including education, employment, and training opportunities.
- 7.94. We are very thankful for a staff team that demonstrate their care and advocacy for the children they are working with every day, and this was reflected in conversations, in their records and in the feedback received from the children themselves.
- 7.95. We were also proud that the inspection itself was organised, calm and responsive to all the requirements Ofsted made of us as an organisation. This reflected a professional organisation that knows itself well.

- 7.96. We are pleased that our social work practice, collaboration across teams and services in the council and multi-agency working has been seen by the inspectors and judged as outstanding.

'By treating our children and young people with respect, love and trust and with the right amount of encouragement we can inspire them to dream big, build relationships and connections that matter and together with kindness and a sense of belonging we can do great things.'

- 7.97. The recent ILACS has evidenced successful implementation of the vision set "putting love back in the system", this contributed significantly to the outstanding outcome achieved.
- 7.98. The services self-evaluation shared with inspectors demonstrated clear evidence that we knew ourselves well, we were focussed on the right challenges and that the vision of putting love back in the system, alongside a collaborative culture across the service and council had secured the improvements needed in the service. Most importantly the outcomes for our children and young people were consistently good and they were seen to be achieving and thriving whilst being supported by their social workers, and the teams of workers around them.
- 7.99. Direct practice was subject to significant scrutiny and the inspectors found evidence in children's records, speaking with social workers and speaking directly with children, young people and their families that assured them about the outstanding impact our children's workforce was having in their lives.

The outcomes noted below were all evidenced as the inspectors worked through the system and services during their time with us in Shropshire.

We have increased early help provision and pathways and more children and families are benefitting from this.	We have decreased numbers of referrals into social care by applying thresholds appropriately and access to the right service for the need presented.	We are completing assessments more quickly and have clear performance oversight embedded.	We are starting more Public Law Outline (pre court proceeding meetings), more quickly and resolving matters more quickly.
We are securing permanence outcomes for children including Special Guardianship Orders and Adoption plans securing their futures.	We have more children leaving care than coming into care.	If children need to come into care for their safety this is done timely and effectively.	We keep most of our children close or within Shropshire if they do become looked after.
We are enabling more children to live either with their family, or within a family environment, stepping them back from residential care effectively when it is right for them.	We know our care leavers needs and enable them to access the offer effectively, keeping in touch and supporting them in the community with education employment and training when appropriate for them.	We are demonstrating our aspirations for our children and young people on their records, that show good understanding of their needs and good outcomes for them.	We are completing care proceedings more effectively .

- 7.100. The outcomes outlined above were observed throughout the inspectors' visit as they engaged with our systems and services in Shropshire. The service remains

committed to embedding the continuous improvement cycle, which now forms an integral part of everyday practice. By maintaining high standards and robust quality assurance processes, we are well positioned to swiftly address any challenges or reductions in performance, ensuring effective remedial action when necessary.

- 7.101. With the conclusion of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB), a new Ambitions Board for Children in Shropshire is being established. Like its predecessor, this cross-party group will be chaired by the Chief Executive, DCS, Lead Member and attended by multi-agency senior leaders and specialised services. The Ambitions Board will drive the council's vision for children and young people, with agendas focused on sustaining current successes and further enhancing service delivery and outcomes.
- 7.102. An Ofsted Service Development Plan must be submitted to Ofsted by 19th November 2025; this will form the foundation of the Ambitions Board's work. The inaugural meeting, set for 18th September 2025, will bring together members to co-design the Board's initial priorities, with these and other service improvements incorporated into Shropshire's Ambitions Plan for Children and Young People 2025–2028. Updates on progress towards delivering the Ofsted Development Plan will be reported to Overview and Scrutiny through the performance report.
- 7.103. The plan will specifically address Ofsted's two recommendations: ensuring meaningful and sustained participation of children, care leavers, and their families in all aspects of strategic planning and service evaluation (including fostering) and strengthening our response to the emotional well-being and mental health needs of care leavers.
- 7.104. Our focus will include building on the strengths of the care leavers' service, which recently achieved a 'good' judgement in its first Ofsted ILACS review, with the goal of securing an 'outstanding' outcome in the next inspection, expected in three years' time.
- 7.105. We will include the priorities agreed together at the first Ambitions Board in the Ofsted Service Development Plan, calling it **Shropshire's Ambitions Plan for the children and young people of Shropshire 2025 – 2028**.
- 7.106. The Families First national agenda is setting the scene for the overarching national requirements of children's services development going forward.
- 7.107. A Families First Partnership (FFP) Strategic Lead, Natasha Moody, has been appointed to drive this agenda for Shropshire across services, the community and all our partnerships. There will be briefings and information shared as the programme of work and plans are secured.
- 7.108. Shropshire Youth Services was announced as one of only 12 national pathfinder areas for the Local Transformation Fund, supported by the National Youth Agency to help create youth services that are sustainable, inclusive and genuinely impactful.
- 7.109. Shropshire continues to participate in the national SEND and AP Change Programme, including the development of the latest phase of exploration to inform national reform in this area. Particular focus is being placed on developing

inclusive mainstream practice across all education settings and a range of other specific developments.

- 7.110. These are significant opportunities for Shropshire Children's Services alongside partners and council colleagues to further develop services and practice that will enable children, young people and their families to have increased access to preventative and early help services to prevent escalation and build upon our current youth offer in the community to offer impactful services and additional community opportunities that will enable young people to feel heard and seen in Shropshire.
- 7.111. This outstanding judgement also creates a good opportunity for the service to attract the permanent workers needed going forward. There is work continuing to secure updated adverts and communications that include this achievement to endeavour to encourage more applications going forward.

8. Additional Information

- 8.1. The link to the Ofsted ILACS schedule is below for information only, this schedule is updated regularly by Ofsted, it is helpful to retain the link going forward to ensure that you are viewing the most up to date version.

[Inspecting local authority children's services - GOV.UK](#)

- 8.2 This schedule outlines the nuts and bolts of the process and what Ofsted are looking for in their evidence gathering when working in the Local Authority during an inspection. This includes data, a library of evidence, direct conversations with the workforce, partners, judiciary and children, young people, and their families.
- 8.3 The Chief Executive and Portfolio holder meet with Ofsted Inspectors to talk with them about the council's vision for children and young people in Shropshire
- 8.4 We share a comprehensive self-evaluation with them; this includes a leadership overview of work delivered to date.
- 8.5 The self-evaluation answers 3 questions:
- What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice in your local authority?
 - How do you know it?
 - What are your plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?
- 8.6 We were judged good by Ofsted during the last full ILACs held 7th Feb 2022. Two focused visits were held in the Local Authority since that full inspection these are undertaken in relation to a specific theme and help over several days in the Local Authority:
- Children's Service Focused visit 23/11/23 Child Protection work.
 - Children's Services focused visit 30/07/24 Children Looked After.

Local Government Association national advice and guidance is embedded below:

Is your council in a strong position to continue to improve outcomes for children and young people and their families?

<https://search.app/nXwDPKxemnTMwZfJ8>

View the top tips from portfolio holders for children's services.

<https://search.app/QvHNJYocmuko2L4i8>

The following guide offers a high-level overview for all councillors of key issues with regard to child safeguarding.

<https://search.app/xwqhkpBJXqSJvPag9>

Every councillor has a role to play in embedding corporate parenting principles and doing all they can to support children in care.

<https://search.app/uLBSkbKacafccREM8>

Is your council doing all it can to improve outcomes for children and young people? This document, specifically developed for chief executives.

<https://search.app/wVkWXG6JVfssDrZG7>

Must-Know_-Childrens-services-guide-to-effective-cross-council-working-_Local-Government-Association

<https://search.app/nySX4j5V2c48KCmT6>

9. Conclusions

- 9.1. Shropshire Children's Services have demonstrated the positive impact of collaboration with partners (external and internal) and council services to achieve the outstanding judgement following the recent ILACS inspection.
- 9.2. The service is continuously striving to maintain the high standards of practice achieved and looks forward to the impact of the significant national agendas for change further enhancing the outcomes for the children, young people and families of Shropshire.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Local Member: All

Appendices [Please list the titles of Appendices]

Appendix A - Inspection of Shropshire local authority children's services

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Inspection of Shropshire local authority children's services

Inspection dates: 23 June to 4 July 2025

Lead inspector: Jenny-ellen Scotland, His Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children in care	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding

Children in Shropshire achieve positive outcomes and demonstrate measurable progress due to effective services that comprehensively address their needs and mitigate risks.

Since the last ILACS inspection in February 2022, and particularly since the subsequent focused visit in November 2023, which identified a decline in child protection practice, senior leaders have taken purposeful action to implement a wide range of evidence-based improvements across the service. These improvements are having a discernible and positive impact, enabling vulnerable children, care leavers and families to make and sustain significant change, ultimately improving their lives.

Senior leaders are ambitious, family focused and firmly child centred. Taking a whole-council approach, they have worked closely with political leaders and multi-agency partners, demonstrating unwavering commitment to improving outcomes for children and care leavers.

Leaders have cultivated a culture of ambition and continuous improvement. All areas of service are characterised by many areas of excellence, compassion, and a resolute focus on outcomes. Listening to children, understanding their lived experiences and acting on their views are strongly embedded in practice.

What needs to improve?¹

- Meaningful and sustained participation of children, care leavers and their families in the strategic planning, development and evaluation of services across all areas, including the fostering service. (enabler 2, national framework)
- The response to the emotional well-being and mental health needs of care leavers. (enabler 1, national framework)

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: outstanding

1. Children benefit from highly effective early help delivered by skilled professionals who identify and respond swiftly to emerging concerns. The establishment of early help multi-agency hubs in areas of greatest need has helped professionals to work more closely together to provide a robust preventative response to vulnerability and risk. As a result, children receive the right support at the right time, preventing harm from escalating and enabling progress. Step-up and step-down arrangements between early help and social care are effective and well coordinated.
2. The daily 'Pitstop' meeting, led by police and attended by key partners, reviews police contacts where there are no specific identified safeguarding concerns. This enables timely information-sharing and decisions about early help, ensuring that families receive support promptly, preventing escalation of need.
3. When children need help and protection, referrals are made to Compass, Shropshire's 'front door' service. The quality and timeliness of partner referrals are consistently high, with parental consent routinely recorded by most professionals. Initial screening within Compass is robust and effective, ensuring that children and families are swiftly directed to the most appropriate service. Experienced senior social work practitioners make confident, timely and proportionate decisions. Parental consent for multi-agency checks is appropriately obtained, and practitioners understand when to override consent to safeguard children. Practitioners make effective use of children's histories to inform their decisions, ensuring timely access for children to the right level of support. Decisions are well documented and supported by strong management oversight.
4. Managers have embedded a culture of professional curiosity and rigorous practice within Compass. This provides a firm foundation for high-quality assessment and targeted intervention. Team managers systematically audit practice to check that children are receiving the right level of support, taking

¹ The areas for improvement have been cross-referenced with the outcomes, enablers or principles in the [Children's Social Care: National Framework](#). This statutory guidance sets out the purpose, principles for practice and expected outcomes of children's social care.

action when they are not, fostering continuous improvement and excellence in service delivery.

5. Social workers in the assessment team recognise and respond quickly and effectively to risk. They see children alone, and their records capture children's wishes and feelings. Workers use a range of tools to engage with children and reach a deeper understanding of their lived experiences. Non-resident fathers' views are actively sought to inform assessments.
6. Social workers in the assessment, case management and court teams make good use of research to inform their understanding of the impact of abuse and to help parents understand professional worries for their children. This helps parents to engage in services and make the changes needed for their children. Relationship-based practice shines through children's records.
7. Social workers' assessments are thorough, timely and child centred. They lead to proportionate responses to risk and need. Practitioners engage sensitively with children and families, ensuring assessments accurately reflect the child's lived experience. Strategy meetings and child protection enquiries are comprehensive and include relevant agencies, ensuring a timely response and reduction in risk of harm for children. Children are seen alone when appropriate. Interventions begin promptly, supported by clear management oversight and effective supervision.
8. Child protection conferences are convened appropriately, where a protection plan is formulated to reduce risk and vulnerability for children.
9. Child in need and child protection plans outline clearly what needs to change and the support that children and parents will receive. Plans are focused, time-bound, and aligned to identified risks and needs, ensuring agencies understand what must happen. This helps to improve children's situations in timescales that are relevant to them.
10. Children's plans are reviewed regularly through multi-agency meetings with the professionals who are involved with them and their families. Family engagement and the views of children are reflected throughout, helping to give an accurate picture of the impact of intervention.
11. Information shared at child protection review conferences is thorough and child focused, including detailed analysis and evidence of progress made. Child protection chairs are effective in their challenge and oversight. They are instrumental in progressing children's plans and ensuring escalation when needed. Appropriate use of legal planning meetings takes place if plans are not effective in reducing risk.
12. When risks are not reducing, children are quickly escalated to the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline. Letters before proceedings are clear and are detailed in articulating social workers' concerns. Comprehensive parenting assessments help determine if parents are successfully able to meet

the needs of their children while receiving multifaceted support. Impact chronologies are integral to assessments and are used well to inform decision-making. An increasing number of children are successfully diverted from proceedings as appropriate.

13. Early help practitioners and social workers use an established tool to manage neglect well and take action when required. This tool is used alongside parents to help them understand where they need to make changes.
14. Children affected by domestic abuse benefit from a strong, coordinated multi-agency response. Social workers understand the impact of domestic abuse on children, and targeted work with parents helps to reduce risk. Where engagement with external services is limited, dedicated family practitioners work intensively with families and offer both group and individual consultancy to support social workers.
15. Swift and effective assessment and planning ensure that risks for unborn children are well understood and managed appropriately. Close partnership work with midwives through birth planning meetings ensures that agencies are working to a coordinated plan to safeguard the child.
16. Family group conferences or family network meetings are routinely considered and used well to consolidate the support network around the child. The early involvement of family members, alongside comprehensive parenting assessments and targeted intervention planning, helps identify the support families need to care safely for their children. This approach is contributing to a reduction in the number of children entering care. When risks escalate, timely and appropriate decisions are made, grounded in thorough, evidence-based assessments.
17. The repurposing of a children's home to provide short-term care and use of the short-breaks provision gives a safe base for children while intensive therapeutic and practical support with parents enables children to successfully return to their family home.
18. Family support workers and the highly effective Stepping Stones service provide practical and therapeutic support to help parents develop safe and appropriate parenting skills. Their work complements that of social workers in achieving positive change. A wide range of support services are available for families, including parenting programmes and interventions for male perpetrators of domestic abuse. These supports are helping families make sustained progress.
19. Disabled children receive highly personalised support from social workers who know them well. Children at risk are visited regularly and seen alone, with nonverbal children supported to communicate through appropriate tools or advocates. Detailed observations inform a dynamic assessment of need, with social workers ensuring that children's voices remain central to planning and decision-making.

20. The initial response to 16- and 17-year-olds presenting as homeless is timely and, for most, appropriate. Workers gather comprehensive information from partner agencies and consider the child's own views. Options for those at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness are thoroughly explored. However, advocacy is not consistently provided at the initial point of presentation.
21. Children living in private fostering arrangements are well supported. Thorough assessments and good management oversight help ensure the suitability of their care arrangements. The fostering service takes a proactive approach to raising awareness through social media, the council website, and by distributing information booklets to all schools in Shropshire.
22. Young carers are identified and visited, although workers' assessments of their needs and their subsequent support plans do not always address their needs well. Groups and activities have been established in some areas; however, provision is inconsistent across the county. Leaders are addressing this through aligning the service with early help.
23. Children at risk of exploitation or who go missing are supported through the TREES exploitation service. Interventions are dynamic and effective, with experienced specialist workers building trusted relationships with children. Comprehensive, targeted plans, underpinned by robust, analytical assessments, help to reduce the risk of harm.
24. Out-of-hour services respond appropriately to calls from professionals, members of the public, families and carers. Experienced practitioners respond effectively to the range of children's needs, supported in their decision-making by accessible senior leaders.
25. The local authority designated officer response to allegations against adults who work with children is highly effective and timely. Experienced and knowledgeable staff ensure continuity of practice. Appropriate action is taken when individuals working with children pose a risk of harm.
26. Effective information-sharing and joint working between relevant teams strengthen the oversight of children who are electively home educated or missing from education. Improved systems and processes enable the earlier identification of vulnerable children, allowing targeted support to improve home arrangements and school attendance.

The experiences and progress of children in care: outstanding

27. Children in care in Shropshire receive an outstanding service that significantly improves their life experiences and outcomes. The edge-of-care service, Stepping Stones, works proactively and creatively alongside social workers, parents and extended family members to prevent the need for children to enter or to remain in care wherever possible. Family group conferences and family network meetings are routinely and effectively used early in the child's journey

to identify potential carers and support within family networks, ensuring children remain safely connected to their families.

28. When children come into care, their needs are already thoroughly understood through comprehensive social work assessments. These assessments inform clear and detailed care plans that demonstrate measurable impact. This provides a firm basis for achieving timely permanence, enabling most children to live in stable, long-term homes where they can thrive. Where appropriate, children live with their brothers and sisters, with additional support provided to manage any risk of placement breakdown.
29. Reunification is consistently considered at each stage of care planning. Strong management and leadership oversight ensure that decisions to reunify children with their parents are informed by thorough, robust social work assessments and detailed risk analysis. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) also play a crucial role in ensuring these decisions are only made when in the child's best interests. Intensive intervention and support for parents and children before, during and after the child's return home help to promote the sustainability of these arrangements. When reunification is confirmed to be successful, workers make timely applications to revoke the care order.
30. Children are continually encouraged and supported to see their family and friends, which helps them to retain a sense of belonging. Parents are well supported to manage this family time in a way that meets their child's needs.
31. Children in care have stable, trusting relationships with their social workers, who know them well and understand their individual needs. Social workers invest time in building significant, long-lasting connections with children, carrying out direct, personalised work using a range of tools tailored to each child. These strong relationships help children to feel safe, ask questions and explore their early life experiences. Social workers respond with empathy, sensitivity and language that makes children feel valued, understood and genuinely cared for.
32. Effective children in care reviews help workers evaluate children's progress and identify next steps. A very high proportion of children attend their reviews and are well supported to express their views and influence their plans. Reviews are held within required timescales and maintain a consistent child-centred focus. IROs build relationships with children and craft review minutes in a way that thoughtfully reflects each child's voice, helping them to feel seen and heard. The IRO footprint is clearly evident in children's records, including regular visits to children between reviews, ensuring that children's views continue to inform and shape their care plans.
33. Skilled, nurturing workers engage children in impactful life-story work, helping them understand their experiences and the reasons they are in care. This work is carried out with considerable care and sensitivity, resulting in detailed life-

story records that help children make sense of their journey and provide an important resource for the future.

34. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive effective support; workers demonstrate a good understanding of children's rights and support them in navigating the legal processes related to their immigration status. Care plans are comprehensive and tailored to each child's individual circumstances. Wherever possible, consistent interpreters are provided for children.
35. The response when children go missing from care is highly effective in reducing risk and repeat episodes. Return home interviews (RHIs) thoroughly explore each incident, identifying key factors to inform assessments and analysis. Workers discuss findings in supervision to guide their decision-making and safety planning. RHIs also assess placement suitability and consider alternatives when needed, ensuring that care plans reflect the child's views.
36. Disabled children in care benefit from workers who understand their complex health needs. Practitioners skilfully coordinate input from multiple professionals to ensure both children and their carers receive effective support. Strong partnership working enables children's needs to be met promptly and appropriately.
37. Children's health needs are comprehensively assessed, well understood and met. Emotional health support for children is readily available and wraparound support from children's mental health services helps children and their carers to manage any difficulties, such as self-harm. Effective multi-agency meetings coordinate health support.
38. Workers and carers actively support children to get involved in a wide range of activities that reflect their individual interests and promote their well-being. For children who are returning to live with their parents, there is a clear commitment to ensuring that this continues seamlessly after they return home. Additionally, children are encouraged and supported to attend residential activity holidays, where they participate in sports and recreational experiences that contribute to their development and enjoyment.
39. The Children in Care Council, facilitated by the virtual school, plays a central role in shaping services that affect children. Their contributions include developing a guide for social workers on respectful and child-centred communication, for example, referring to 'child in care reviews' as 'child in care meetings'. They are actively involved in recruitment, participating in interviews for key roles, and redesigning the virtual school website to ensure it is accessible and relevant. Children's achievements are consistently recognised through an annual awards ceremony and personalised letters, cards and certificates throughout the year.
40. The virtual school provides high-quality support that promotes children's educational attainment and progress. Children in care make good progress from

their starting points. Workers' tenacity in ensuring children have access to suitable educational provision is notable. Schools value the support the virtual school provides. Workers closely track and monitor the attendance of pupils. Primary attendance is positive; however, leaders rightly recognise that more needs to be done to improve attendance for older pupils.

41. Unregistered children's homes are used for very few children and only when other options have been exhausted. A very small number of children with complex health needs are placed in two settings that provide the required medical care. There is strong consistent oversight and monitoring of these arrangements.
42. Foster carers feel well supported and valued by a responsive and ambitious leadership team. Better recruitment and retention are increasing capacity, and carers speak positively about the respect shown for their role. However, there are some inconsistencies in accessibility to training, the quality of recording, and embedding children's voices in foster carer recruitment, assessment and review.
43. Adoption services are provided through the local authority's arrangements with the regional adoption agency (RAA), Together4Children. The relationship between the local authority and the RAA is strong. Leaders and managers have a clear vision for the service and have invested in the recruitment and retention of adopters. Adopters are well supported through the assessment process and the placement of a child.

The experiences and progress of care leavers: good

44. Care leavers report feeling safe and secure in their living arrangements, including those placed outside Shropshire. They highlight unwavering support from their personal advisers (PAs), valuing deeply the enduring, trusting relationships they have developed with them over several years, and describing their PAs as reliable sources of guidance, assistance and reassurance. This robust support network significantly reduces their anxieties and fosters their confidence and independence.
45. While they are new initiatives whose impact is yet to be seen, the recent recruitment of a care leaver ambassador and the opening of a new central hub for care leavers reflect a clear commitment to enhancing participation and inclusion.
46. Care leavers are carefully and thoughtfully matched with PAs best suited to engage with and support them. This matching occurs in time to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood, marking the start of a supportive relationship to ensure that young people's needs are met.
47. Care leavers receive regular, purposeful visits from their PAs, often in their homes, to assess the suitability, safety and appropriateness of their

accommodation. This consistent contact helps to build strong, trusting relationships.

48. The current pathway plan format was developed by care leavers in response to feedback from the previous inspection. The result is a clear, accessible document with a summary section outlining actions for both the PA and the young person. Plans are generally of good quality, completed in partnership with young people, and reflect their views well. Most are aspirational and empowering, supporting young people to achieve their goals. Management oversight is evident, with managers often including personal messages of encouragement to the young person.
49. The local offer meets the needs of care leavers. They understand their entitlements and know how to access them. Some support, such as driving lessons, is provided based on individual need. The local authority holds engagement events, including an annual barbecue, which care leavers have requested be held more frequently.
50. The local authority funds an app that offers a range of online resources to support young people's mental health. When care leavers experience mental health challenges, PAs support them to access their GP, who can make referrals to universal services. There are no specific face to face support services accessible to care leavers to help provide immediate emotional health support.
51. Care leavers are supported to access their records, with clear communication to manage expectations around the redaction of sensitive third-party information. Ongoing life-story work is provided to help them make sense of their experiences and understand their journey into and through care.
52. Former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are supported by an experienced PA with expertise in immigration, alongside a dedicated support worker who is themselves a former unaccompanied asylum-seeking child and care leaver from Shropshire. Both bring valuable insight and empathy to their roles, recognising the need to build trust with young people who may initially be hesitant to engage with professionals perceived as government representatives.
53. Support for care leavers who are parents is delivered with compassion and understanding, focusing not only on the needs of their child but also on helping the young person to recognise and address their own needs.
54. When a care leaver is in custody, PAs maintain regular communication and work closely with probation, prison and housing colleagues to plan ahead and support rehabilitation arrangements. PAs also ensure that young people receive their entitlements while in custody.
55. Care leavers live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs. Joint working with housing services helps to ensure appropriate and well-matched

housing provision. The homeless support worker brings extensive knowledge of housing legislation and availability across Shropshire.

56. Care leavers' independence skills and readiness for adulthood are considered within pathway plans. The local authority provides financial support for private rentals when required. Care leavers benefit from a range of housing options, including trainer flats, temporary accommodation and commissioned supported housing. Young people spoke positively about their housing experiences.
57. Care leavers living outside Shropshire continue to receive consistent support from their PAs, who maintain regular contact and actively help them secure and sustain appropriate accommodation. PAs ensure care leavers receive their entitlements and provide practical assistance, including support with registering with local GPs and accessing emotional health services in their area.
58. When care leavers travel abroad, many do so without support to consider potential risks or develop contingency plans in case they encounter difficulties.
59. Care leavers are supported to find and sustain employment, pursue their future goals and attend university. They are also assisted in accessing apprenticeships and work opportunities. The support provided by the virtual school is having a positive impact. Overall, young people are achieving well academically and benefit from tailored support to meet their individual needs. Former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are encouraged to pursue diverse career paths and vocational training. Senior leaders recognise the barriers faced by some former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in accessing education and training and are actively working to address these challenges.
60. Care leavers aged 21 and over who are allocated a PA receive tailored support based on assessed needs, continuing up to age 25. Some also receive support beyond 25.
61. For care leavers no longer allocated a PA, in-touch arrangements are variable. This inspection identified that annual contact with care leavers closed to the service, as required by statutory guidance, had not been in place. Senior leaders have responded swiftly to address this shortfall. A data collection exercise is under way to identify and track this cohort, and a new process has been introduced to improve contact. This includes plans for care leavers who are not receiving an active service to receive a birthday card and newsletter outlining updates to the local offer, along with a voucher.
62. Many older care leavers who are no longer in regular contact with the service reconnect with their PAs when they require support. This demonstrates the enduring relationships PAs build with care leavers. Additionally, those who have more recently ended their involvement receive a detailed assessment and analysis of need that informs the collaborative decision to conclude support.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: outstanding

63. Children's social care is led by a highly experienced and credible director of children's services (DCS), whose leadership is both visible and influential. Working closely with the senior leadership team, she has established a strong and ambitious culture where children are consistently regarded as 'our children' and supported to feel genuinely loved and cared for. This child-centred ethos is embedded across the workforce and strongly reflected in the commitment of the wider multi-agency partnership.
64. Following the focused visit in November 2023, senior leaders responded transparently and proactively engaged external supports, facilitating rapid improvements with positive outcomes for children and families. Identified areas for improvements have been addressed effectively. Family group conferencing delays are resolved, and multi-agency responses to domestic abuse are well coordinated. Strategy meetings and child protection conferences take place promptly with rigorous IRO oversight. Children's plans are clear and relevant and include meaningful family input. Pre-proceedings are timely, and letter quality has improved. Local placements and emotional health services for children in care are well managed and accessible. Management oversight is robust, supported by thorough supervision records and clear senior leadership decisions. A comprehensive quality assurance framework drives ongoing practice improvements. Staffing and leadership capacity are strengthened through effective recruitment and retention.
65. Corporate leadership is strong, demonstrated by the council's political and financial support of children's services. With children's services at the heart of the council, the chief executive and DCS have prioritised early help and prevention, securing significant investment that improves children's lives.
66. Elective members are well informed about the priorities and challenges facing children's services and have expressed a continued commitment to improving outcomes for children and care leavers.
67. The improvement board, recently rebranded the Children's Ambitions Board, chaired by the chief executive, ensures robust oversight, drives improvement and fosters cross-party collaboration. Leaders recognise the need to strengthen the participation of children and care leavers in these strategic forums.
68. Corporate parenting is underpinned by strong leadership and a clear, values-led vision. Senior leaders actively champion their responsibilities, working with partners to promote a shared ambition to be the best possible parents for children in care and care leavers. Children and young people report that workers and their managers are genuinely proud of them and their achievements.

69. The Corporate Parenting Board, co-chaired by the lead member and a care-experienced young person, has delivered improvements in health assessments, emotional and mental health support, and the role of IROs. Care leavers are granted protected characteristic status, giving them priority access to housing and employment opportunities within the council.
70. Leaders and managers prioritise embedding the child's voice. The introduction of an AI tool reduces administrative workload, allowing practitioners to spend more time with children and families and improve the quality of written records. Direct work is well developed, ensuring children's views inform assessment, planning and decision-making. However, while the child's voice is very well established at an individual level, involvement in the strategic planning, development and evaluation of services, while evident, needs strengthening.
71. Leaders demonstrate detailed knowledge of local communities and use this insight to target support effectively, including for rural areas with pockets of deprivation. This has led to tailored services through locality hubs that reach those most in need.
72. A rigorous, strengths-based quality assurance framework underpins the delivery of high-quality services. Regular, comprehensive audit activity supports improvement and demonstrates steady progress in both quality and compliance. This approach supports learning and is driving improvements in practice and outcomes for children and families.
73. The introduction of information management tools has strengthened leaders' ability to identify and respond to emerging trends through effective data analysis.
74. Research-based practice is firmly embedded. Leaders promote a 'do with, not to' relational approach, fostering a culture of effective relational practice where trust and meaningful relationships with children and families are central, resulting in transformative change.
75. Shropshire is an ambitious learning organisation where staff are supported at all levels to develop their knowledge and skills. Comprehensive programmes, such as the Social Work Apprenticeship and assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE), equip practitioners with the skills needed for successful careers and help reduce attrition rates.
76. Managers provide consistent, supportive and reflective supervision, ensuring effective progression of children's plans, with clear management oversight and documented decision-making.
77. Workforce stability benefits children and care leavers by maintaining long-term relationships with workers who know them well. Staff enjoy working for Shropshire, feeling valued and supported by visible senior leadership.

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