



Date: Thursday, 11 December 2025

Time: 10.00 am

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

Contact: Tim Ward, Committee Officer
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COUNCIL

TO FOLLOW REPORT (S)

13 Children's Services Annual Report (Pages 1 - 312)

Report of the Service Director – Children and Young People is **To Follow**

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Committee and Date

Council

10 December 2025

Item

Public



Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Services Annual Reports 2024-25

Responsible Officer:	Sonya Miller Service Director Children and Young People		
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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Cllr Ruth Houghton		

1. Synopsis

This report summarises the Annual Reports 2024–2025 for Children and Young Peoples Directorate, highlighting council roles, statutory duties, and corporate parenting for children in Shropshire, including those in care.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report includes as attachments the Annual Reports for 2024 – 2025 for Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Services. A full suite of reports is provided so there is a clear 'end to end' picture of the work undertaken across the services. It enables Council Members to evidence their governance and oversight, whilst also enabling questions to be asked, and the breadth of the statutory functions to be acknowledged.
- 2.2 The list below is ordered chronologically, and it is recommended they be read in the order laid out below.

Early Help Annual Report 2024 – 2025 – our early help services.

Local Offer Annual Report 2024-2025 – children with Special Educational Needs

Compass & Assessment Annual Report 2024 – 25 - The 'front door' to children's social care.

Trees Annual Report 2024 – 2025 – Councils Response to Child Exploitation

Court and PLO Annual report 2024 – 2025 Overview of court work and pre-court intervention

Parenting Team Annual Report 2024-25 – work of the team that undertake parenting Assessments

Stepping Stones Annual Report 2024 - 2025 – the team that work to stop children coming into care and support children who have come in to return home.

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2024/2025 – the work of the teams that work with the children we look after who can't live with their parents.

Independent Review Unit Annual Report 2024-2025 – child protection conferences and Looked after children's reviews.

Quality Assurance Annual Report 2024-2025 – learning from audit and QA work

LADO Annual Report 2024 – 2025 – Statutory role of the Local authority Designated Officer in managing allegation against those in a position of trust.

Children's Workforce Annual Report 2024-2025 – our workforce overview

Principal Social Worker (PSW) Annual Report 2024-2025 – overview of practice and work with the Safeguarding Board.

Shropshire Virtual School Annual Report 2024 – 2025 / Executive Summary

Shropshire Virtual School Annual Report 2024-25 – work of the Virtual school with children looked after and those with a social worker.

Fostering Annual Report 2024-25 – work of our fostering teams.

T4C (Adoption) Annual Report 2024-2025 – work of T4C our regional arrangements for Adoption.

Residential Service Annual Report 2024 – 2025 – an overview of our children's homes.

2.3 The Early Help Annual Report 2024–2025 sets out to:

- Align with key priorities from the Shropshire corporate plan, Economic Growth Strategy, and the Shropshire Plan.
- Describe how Early Help works with partners and communities to deliver the vision and priorities for Shropshire, focusing on enabling residents to live their best lives.
- Provide an overview of the transformation and realignment of Early Help Services, following an independent review, to address systemic issues, funding challenges, and improve service delivery.

2.4 The Shropshire SEND Local Offer Annual Report:

- Fulfills the statutory duty set out in the SEND Code of Practice. Local authorities must publish a Local Offer and annual report, providing:
- Clear, comprehensive, accessible, and up-to-date information about available provision across education, health, and social care for children and young people with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities).
- A mechanism for making provision more responsive to local needs and aspirations by involving disabled children, young people, parent carers, and service providers in its development and review

2.5 **The Compass & Assessment Report 2024–2025 is designed to:**

- Provide an overview of the work and outcomes of the Compass and Assessment Teams for the year. These are the Front Door Services that support the community, families and partnerships to deliver their statutory duties in relation to safeguarding children and early help provision.
- The two teams on receipt of the information assess and identify the right service at the right time, including early help, child in need, child protection and children looked after.
- Information is received from children, young people and their families, partners, the community and any other stake holders
- A robust Front Door is crucial to support demand management and ensure that children and their families are accessing the right service at the right time.

2.6 **The TREES Annual Report** documents the work of the TREES Team, which focuses on reducing and addressing child exploitation and missing children. The report aims to:

- Provide an overview of staffing, operational developments, and partnership working.
- Analyse trends and outcomes in exploitation and missing children cases.
- Inform senior leaders and members, as well as partners about progress, challenges, and priorities for the coming year.

2.7 **Public Law Outline and Care Proceedings** annual report explains how Shropshire Children's Services applies the Public Law Outline (PLO – pre court proceedings work) and Care Proceedings and the outcomes achieved during 2024 – 2025. Its aim is to:

- Outline the significant changes made to both processes in the service to improvement timeliness, compliance and outcomes for children and young people.
- Demonstrate the positive impact on children and families, ensuring timely and appropriate outcomes with less delay.
- Provide transparency and accountability for practice and outcomes achieved.

2.8 **The Parenting Team Annual Report**

- outlines service delivery to parents/carers and professionals, evaluates performance against previous years, and highlights the impact of staffing changes on service capacity and delivery.

2.9 The Stepping Stones Annual Report sets out to:

- Provide an overview of the Stepping Stones Service, which delivers individualised, intensive, wrap-around support to children and parents in Shropshire.
- Align with the Shropshire Plan's goal of "Breaking Generational Cycles," focusing on a trauma-informed approach that addresses the impact of adverse early life experiences.
- Demonstrate how the service aims to break cycles of abuse in families, reducing the number of children and grandchildren entering care.
- Report on the service's expansion, including increased capacity to support children on the edge of care, those at risk of exploitation, and those in need of reunification with families or step-down from residential care to foster or family settings.
- Evidence the service's contribution to cost avoidance by preventing children and young people from needing to become looked after, and by supporting timely, safe reunification or step-down from residential care.

2.10 The Corporate Parenting Annual Report provides an update on how Shropshire Council's corporate parenting responsibilities and activities are being delivered. Its core purpose is to:

- Demonstrate the collective responsibility of the local authority to actively promote the life chances of children in care and care leavers, treating them as if they were our own children.
- Update on delivery and progress: The report details how the council and its partners are supporting children and young people in care, and care leavers, to have high aspirations and achieve their full potential.
- Evidence oversight and accountability: The report highlights the role of the Corporate Parenting Board, which brings together elected members, senior agency representatives, practitioners, and representatives of children looked after and care leavers. The Board ensures that the local authority and its partners are discharging their responsibilities towards these young people, including those transitioning to adulthood.
- Chart progress and challenges: It provides a record of achievements, barriers, and plans for the year ahead, supporting transparency and continuous improvement in corporate parenting practice.

2.11 Independent Reviewing Unit (IRU) Annual Report

- Purpose is to review and summarise the work and impact of the IRU in ensuring effective oversight, safeguarding and improved outcomes for children in care during 2024- 2025. Work focuses on the Child Protection process and the IRO's (Independent reviewing officers) who independently oversee the progress of children's care plans when they are looked after.

2.12 Quality Assurance Annual Report

- Purpose is to summarise quality assurance activities across children's services, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement, and ensure services for children and young people are effective, safe and continuously improving.

2.13 LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) Annual report

- Purpose is to review how allegations made against adults working with children are managed in Shropshire, ensuring compliance with safeguarding standards, and highlight key activity and improvements made during the year.

2.14 Children's Workforce Annual Report

- Purpose to review workforce development, highlight achievements and challenges, and support continuous improvement in practice and service delivery and outcomes for children and families.

2.15 PSW Annual Report

- Purpose: To review and report on the quality, consistency, and development of social work practice, highlight workforce trends and achievements, and support ongoing improvements in line with national and local good practice frameworks.

2.16 Shropshire Virtual School Annual Report

- To review and illustrate the achievements, challenges and impact of Shropshire Virtual School in supporting the education, progress, and wellbeing of children in care, previously looked after children, and those with a social worker, ensuring they have excellent opportunities to fulfil their potential during the year.

2.17 Fostering Annual Report

- This report provides an overview of the fostering service activity, highlighting progress and ongoing challenges, and informing future service developments and improvements to support children in care that require stable homes in a variety of potential settings, including with their family and friends.

2.18 T4C (Adoption) Annual Report

- Purpose of this report is to review the activity and performance of the Together4Children (T4C) Permanency Partnership Adoption Agency. Including progress in adoption recruitment and support and demonstrate how the partnership improves outcomes for children needing adoption across the region and specifically for Shropshire's Children.

2.19 Residential Service Annual Report

- The purpose of this report is to: Provide an overview of Shropshire Council's Children's Homes for the year 2025.

- Summarise the operation of six children's homes, each with its own Statement of Purpose, as part of a broader strategy aligned with children's services and the local authority's key priorities for Shropshire children.
- Explore key areas for each home, including vision, mission, values, and the interdependency framework (Prevention, Planning, Permanency, and Progression).
- Highlight how the service aspires to ensure all children have the opportunity to live in a home that enables them to achieve their full potential, with nurturing environments and a focus on care, achievement, and positive outcomes.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Council acknowledge the content of the reports attached and the positive impact and outcomes that services are achieving for children and young people.
- 3.2 That Council acknowledge the breadth of statutory requirements being successfully delivered and achieving good outcomes for the children and young people in Shropshire.
- 3.3 Where Council wish to influence progress and development opportunities this can be incorporated into the plans of the Ambitions Board which will be driving forward the services continuous improvement plan.
- 3.4 That Council recommend that it receive the Annual Report and resolve that Childrens Safeguarding training becomes a mandatory requirement for all elected Members in order that they are well equipped to fulfil their role as corporate parents.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1 Children and Safeguarding Services is continuously improving, this ensures that risks in the system can be quickly identified, responded to quickly and can be addressed timely and collaboratively across the service areas.
- 4.2 The risks outlined below are consistent focus areas for the reasons identified below.
- 4.3 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

<p>Placement capacity and homes for children and young people not meeting need.</p> <p>Outcomes for children and young people deteriorate. Practice standards and statutory timeliness (the activity of the service), deteriorate.</p>	<p>people's long-term homes quickly including adoption was evidenced through the inspection.</p> <p>Performance and demand tracking that is embedded across the system evidence 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Our vision 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.</p> <p>The implementation of the Families First Programme nationally, 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>A continuous improvement approach of high expectations, 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</p>
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5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 Shropshire Council continues to manage unprecedented financial demands and a financial emergency was declared by Cabinet on 10 September 2025. The overall financial position of the Council is set out in the monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. Significant management action has been instigated at all levels of the Council reducing spend to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all reports to Members provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers and/or Portfolio Holders review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. All non-essential spend will be stopped and all essential spend challenged. These actions may involve (this is not exhaustive):
- scaling down initiatives,
 - changing the scope of activities,
 - delaying implementation of agreed plans, or
 - extending delivery timescales.

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.
- 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 In recent years the Annual reports have been presented to Council each Autumn to ensure that there is a clear line of governance, accountability and oversight of work of Children's Social Care and enabling Members to act as Corporate Parent in line with their duties as Council Members. These reports are being presented to ensure members are undertaking their Corporate Parenting role and are aware and assured about the impact they can have as Corporate Parents and the services impact for 2024 – 25 for children and young people.
- 7.2 Every member as corporate parents has a duty to engage actively with corporate parenting and children's safeguarding training annually to ensure they have accessed the skills and knowledge required to effectively undertake their roles.

- 7.3 These reports should enable members to ensure themselves that services are being effective.
- 7.4 Where services have developed through investment (spend to save initiatives) annual reports evidence the impact on children's outcomes as well as financial savings.
- 7.5 Statutory functions being discharged affectively are evidenced through the Annual Reports of each area, these are wide ranging. High performance being achieved and maintained relies on each part of the system working effectively and the interface between teams and services being efficient to ensure that performance is maintained across the system.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 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, July 2025, report published August 2025. These reports above both inform and corroborate those findings and will ensure the services have clear next steps identified to ensure continuous improvement is sustained.
- 8.2 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 and young people of Shropshire. This is achieved through child focused decisions that demonstrate value for money and cost effectiveness. The focus is that children live in family settings wherever possible and where it meets their needs.

Background Papers:

OFSTED ILACS report 12 August 2025 gives the inspection overview of the service.

Local Member: All

Consultation with Local Member – Please consider the Local Member Protocol (see page E60 onwards of part 5 of the Constitution) and determine whether it is necessary to consult with the local member over the proposal set out in this report. This may not always be applicable (eg where the proposal affects all of Shropshire) but it should always be a consideration and in some cases a necessity so as to comply with the spirit of the Protocol.

Appendices [Please list the titles of Appendices]

Appendix 1 - Early Help Annual Report 2024 – 2025
Appendix 2 - Local Offer Annual Report 2024-2025
Appendix 3 - Compass & Assessment Annual Report 2024 – 25
Appendix 4 - Trees Annual Report 2024 – 2025
Appendix 5 - Court and PLO Annual report 2024 – 2025
Appendix 6 - Parenting Team Annual Report 2024-25
Appendix 7 - Stepping Stones Annual Report 2024 - 2025
Appendix 8 - Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2024/2025
Appendix 9 - Independent Review Unit Annual Report 2024-2025
Appendix 10 - Quality Assurance Annual Report 2024-2025
Appendix 11 - LADO Annual Report 2024 – 2025
Appendix 12 - Children's Workforce Annual Report 2024-2025
Appendix 13 - Principal Social Worker (PSW) Annual Report 2024-2025
Appendix 14 - Shropshire Virtual School Annual Report 2024 – 2025
Appendix 15 - Fostering Annual Report 2024-25
Appendix 16 - T4C (Adoption) Annual Report 2024-2025
Appendix 17 - Residential Service Annual Report 2024 – 2025

Early Help Annual Report 2024 - 2025

Link to key priorities of the corporate plan, Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy 2022-2027 and the Shropshire Plan

Shropshire living the best life.

Our purpose:

To work with our partners and communities to deliver the vision and priorities for Shropshire

Service Realignment

After an independent review in February 2023, Early Help Services were aligned with Children's Social Care in the People's Directorate as of April 3, 2023. Leadership was strengthened by seconding the Principal Social Worker and Service Manager for Quality Assurance into the Service Manager for Early Help role to lead a transformation programme.

Systemic Issues

The review found the Early Help service structure to be 'top heavy' with managers and lacking sufficient case-holding staff. This led to significant waiting lists and delays. Additionally, there had been no partnership-owned Early Help Strategy since 2018.

Funding Challenges

Much of the Early Help service is grant funded, mainly through the Supporting Families Programme. In 2022-2023, Shropshire achieved only 73% of its potential grant, despite support from external consultants.

Recommendations

Increase Targeted Family Support:

To achieve future grant targets, Shropshire should increase the number of families receiving targeted support (family support).

Rebalance Staffing

Address the 'top heavy' structure by increasing case-holding staff and reducing management layers to improve service delivery and reduce delays.

The Early Help Transformation Programme

Took place from May 2023 to June 2024, was led by experienced staff from the Office of the Chief Executive and Early Help Service. The initiative tackled multiple workstreams, such as strengthening partnerships, refining strategies for youth, SEND, and families, improving the service 'Front Door', supporting families, and developing Family Hubs and the workforce. Over seventy teams and organisations—including voluntary partners—shaped the Early Help Strategy, known as "How Can I Help?". Broad consultations were held, notably with over 2,000 young people

contributing via a Youth Survey and the design of a new Early Help website. The Department for Education partnered Shropshire with Staffordshire, offering mentorship and emphasising the value of strong data practices. Ultimately, the programme resulted in a more efficient structure with increased frontline staff, clearer management, specialist roles, and sufficient budgeting for all necessary posts.

Structure and changes to enhance practice

A revised front door for children's services, including the Early Help and Support Team (EHAST), was introduced on 06/09/2023. This ensured that all families and professionals contacting children's services received appropriate support, with specialist roles such as Domestic Abuse Engagement Leads and a Lads and Dad's Worker. As a result, contacts to Early Help rose by 297%, significantly reducing the need for social work intervention. Fewer than 20% of families engaged by EHAST required further support from Targeted Early Help.

The new Early Help Strategy, titled 'How Can I Help?', was formally launched on 16/07/2024, with well-attended sessions for partners and schools.

The introduction of a new practice framework and standards led to the average Targeted Early Help intervention dropping from 444 days in 2022-2023 to 147 days in Q4 2023-2024. There was an 83% increase in families supported compared to the previous year. The re-referral rate to Targeted Early Help was under 10%, and escalation to children's social care reduced from 11% to 1% in 2023-2024.

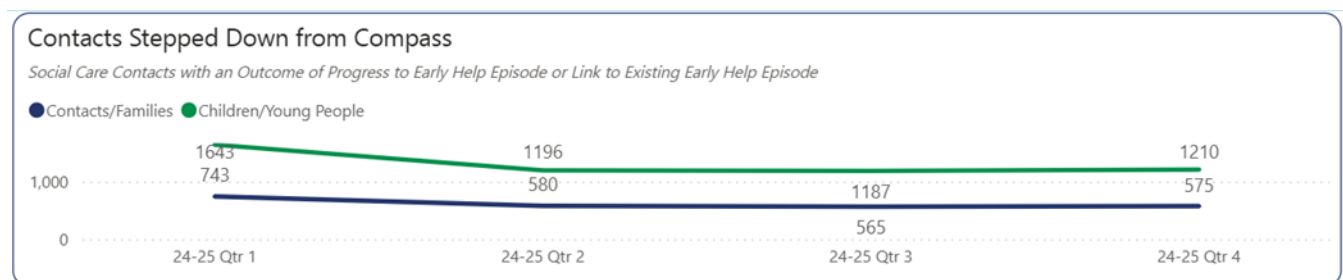
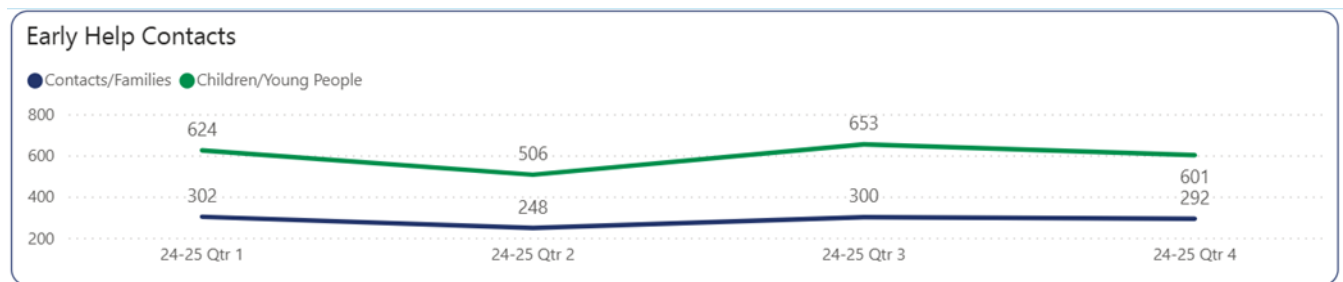
Despite shorter intervention times, parent satisfaction improved significantly, with 73% rating the service 9 or 10 out of 10 in Q4 2023-2024, up from 57% the previous year.

DATA what does it tell us

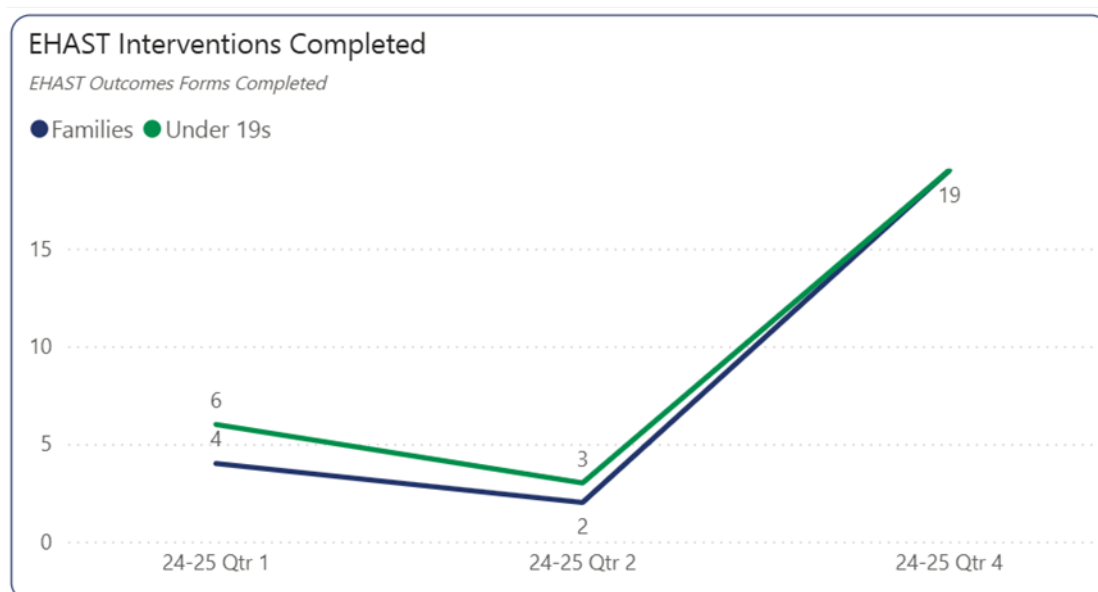
- Potential grant funding for the year 2024-2025, we exceeded the target of 456 and managed to achieve a total of 536 so an achievement of 118% of the funded target.



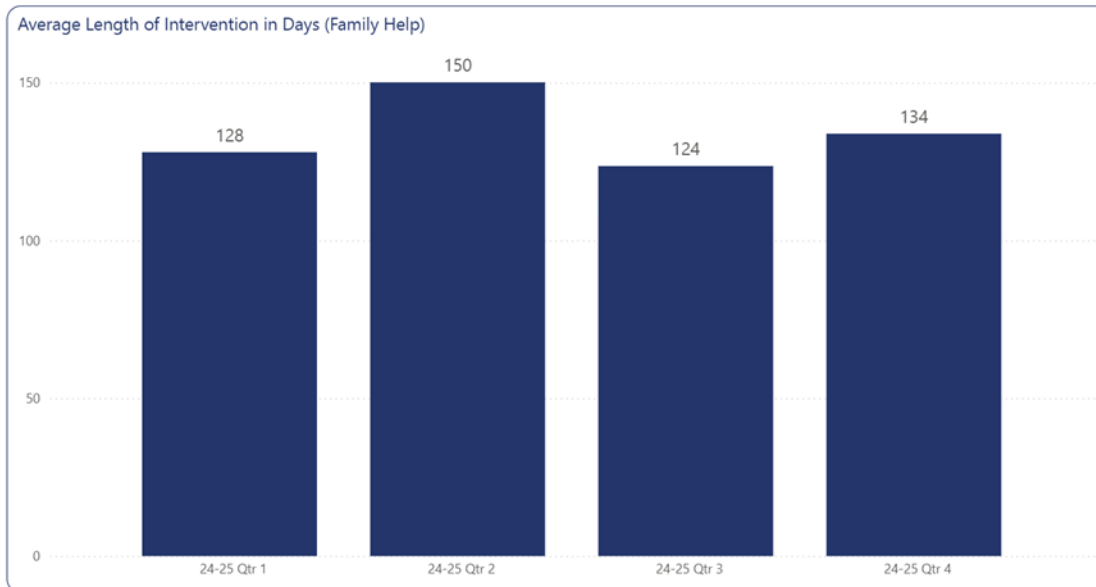
Early Help contacts totalled 1142 compared to 2463 from compass. We do not have the figures from 2023-24 to compare to due to the way recording changed following the EH transformation & recording.



EHASt have worked with 667 families of which 25 stepped up to TEH with is only 3.75% of the cohort with an average intervention of 9 days.

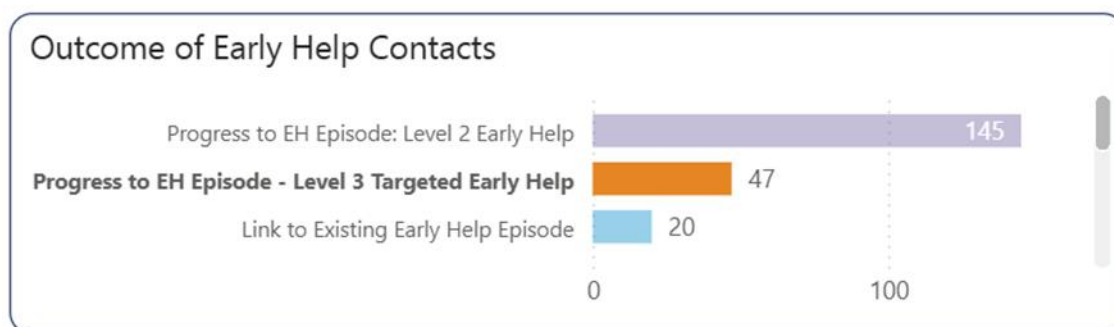


The average length of TEH interventions has reduced slightly, averaging out at 134 days per intervention over the year 2024-25.

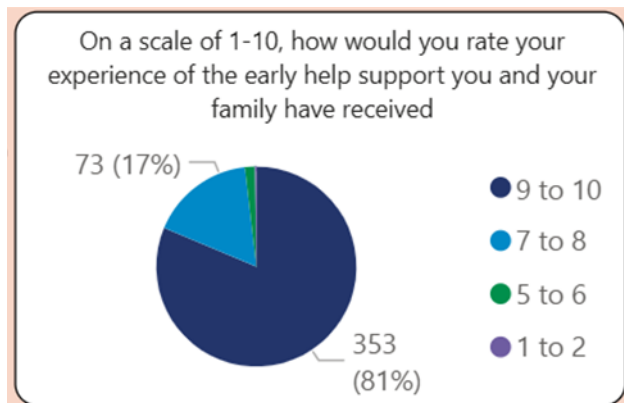


There has been a 31% increase in families worked with in TEH compared to the previous years' increase of 83% (however, this increase is expected to be due to process changes following transformation and the figure should level out over the coming years).

Re-referrals / repeat contacts into TEH are 47 of 239 repeat contacts so re-referral rate is 19.6%. This has increased however, repeat contacts into Social care is still at 1% with only 3 of 239 repeat contacts requiring escalation to Level 4.



81% of parents rate the services at 9 or 10 on a 10 scale which is a big increase from the previous year's 73% in 2023/24 and 57% from 2022/23.



Early Help and Support Team: EHAST

The Early Help and Support Team (EHAST), operating the Early Help Front Door, play a pivotal role in aligning local services. This approach is designed to place families at the centre of support, ensuring that their needs are identified early and addressed proactively. EHAST's commitment to prevention and early intervention is reflected in its robust strategy for signposting both families and professionals to the most suitable pathways of support.

By working in partnership with statutory and voluntary sector organisations, EHAST ensures that families experience a seamless journey through the support system, reducing duplication and improving outcomes.

EHAST Front Door serves as a single point of access for families and professionals seeking help, advice, or intervention. This service is designed to be accessible, responsive, and supportive, offering a gateway to a spectrum of services tailored to the individual needs of families. The front door not only provides information and guidance but also acts as a triage system, directing families to appropriate pathways such as early help, social care, or specialist services, depending on their needs.

Preventive opportunities are at the heart of EHAST. By identifying issues at the earliest possible stage, EHAST can intervene before problems escalate, helping families to build resilience and maintain stability. This approach reduces the need for more intensive statutory intervention and supports the government's vision of empowering families to thrive within their communities.

Role of the team members within EHAST offer short-term, targeted interventions to families identified through triaging. Their work is grounded in the principles of focusing on building trusting relationships, empowering families, and facilitating access to wider support networks. Interventions may include practical advice, emotional support, parenting guidance, and help with accessing community resources.

These interventions are outcome-focused, with clear goals established in collaboration with families ensuring families are equipped with the tools and knowledge needed to sustain improvements. Where appropriate, families may be signposted to additional services or support.

Pilot Child In Need Support Team Overview

The Child in Need (CIN) Pilot Programme, initiated on 1st October 2024, aligns with the updated 'Every Child Matters' guidance, permitting Early Help services to manage CIN cases. This initiative is designed to enhance service efficiency and effectiveness, ensuring that children and families receive timely and appropriate support. The families transferred to the Pilot already have already had an assessment completed by a social worker who has identified the need for a Child In Need plan (CIN). Cost and Time Efficiency

By enabling Early Help services to manage CIN cases, the programme aims to reduce the demand on statutory social work services, thereby achieving cost savings and improving service delivery times. The CIN Pilot represents a strategic effort to optimise resource utilisation, enhance service delivery, and improve outcomes for children and families. Through careful planning, adherence to statutory guidelines, and ongoing evaluation, the programme aims to provide high-quality support within a framework that meets regulatory expectations and serves the best interests of children in need. This pilot also supports the implementation of the national reform Family First Partnership.

Youth Support Team

Key Areas of Work

Youth Voice & Participation: Enabled young people's input on local projects (e.g. Market Drayton skatepark, media initiatives), conducted a Safe Spaces Report with 500+ participants, and promoted discussions on identity, digital pressures, and trust. Notable rise in youth co-facilitation.

Community-Based Youth Work: Delivered detached youth work in high-need areas (Ellesmere, Oswestry, Market Drayton), engaged vulnerable groups (Bulgarian, Afghan youth), and reached 1,471 young people in 164 sessions during Q4.

Strategic Development: Drafted Youth Strategy, planned Youth Partnership Trust, and transitioned to a locality-based model for tailored delivery and early intervention.

Monitoring & Performance: Launched recording system aligned with Youth Work Outcomes; data now better informs deployment and supervision, though improvements needed in written observations and impact evidence.

Successes

Innovative Projects: Youth-led Market Drayton Skatepark improvements, collaborative Toilet Project addressing exclusion and health, McDonald's partnership for NEET engagement, and a youth-led safety media project.

Professional Development: Assistant Youth Workers achieved Level 3 Youth Work Practice qualification.

Peer Learning & Engagement: Oxfordshire Peer Review participation, stronger relationships with schools and councils, creative use of community spaces, and the EmpowerHER group's positive outcomes.

Challenges

Staffing & Capacity: Ongoing vacancies and reduced FTE, especially in Shrewsbury and South; managers stretched with face-to-face delivery.

Safeguarding & Complexity: 129 Q4 sessions involved safeguarding or wellbeing issues; recurring themes include emotional dysregulation, trauma, and inconsistent engagement.

Data & Systems: No suitable case management system and inconsistent staff recording practices.

Coverage & Reach: Teams overstretched across localities; community profiling for 18 areas adding to workload.

Next Steps

Complete community profiling for Youth Partnership planning.

Finalise and consult on Youth Strategy (including youth-friendly version).

Embed the locality-based working model.

Advance the Youth Partnership Trust.

Enhance data recording and monitoring.

Strengthen early intervention with schools.

Expand inclusion work for marginalised groups.

Develop consistent referral and signposting pathways.

Impact

Greater youth engagement in community decisions.

Improved wellbeing through targeted youth work.

Empowerment of young people as active citizens.

Safer, more cohesive communities.

The Local Youth Transformation Pilot (LYTP)

This is a Shropshire Council initiative running from September 2025 to March 2026, designed to reform youth services countywide. It uses targeted grant funding to address gaps and build a sustainable, integrated youth support system.

Key findings highlight:

Severe underfunding—98% cut since 2010; only £3 per head spent in 2023/24 vs. £34 nationally.

Fragmented provision and limited collaboration between local authorities, VCSE, schools, and councils.

Majority of young people (8 in 10) have never accessed a youth club; high unmet needs in mental health, careers advice, and anti-bullying support.

Barriers include rural isolation, poor transport, cost, and lack of awareness.

Workforce shortage and inconsistent training/safeguarding.

Project Design & Use of Funding

The LYTP will deliver seven integrated projects aligned with pilot objectives:

Culture Change: Embed statutory youth duty and system leadership through training and a Youth Provider Charter.

Youth Governance: Establish a three-tier model to ensure youth voice shapes decisions, coordinated by a Youth Democracy Worker.

Partnership Development: Launch and scale Local Youth Partnerships (LYPs) with a new Foundation to guide countywide provision.

Infrastructure: The Foundation will offer governance tools, training, evaluation, and coordination for sustainability.

Workforce Development: Strengthen and expand the youth workforce, deliver cross-sector CPD, and train at least 150 staff.

Youth Work in Schools: Pilot three school-based hubs to deliver groupwork, drop-ins, and 1:1 support.

Programme Management: A dedicated team ensures accountability, evaluation, and system alignment.

Funding prioritises frontline delivery, infrastructure, staff training, and robust monitoring.

Strategic Alignment

The project supports Shropshire's strategic goals in children's participation, family services, education, safeguarding, and public health. It advances prevention, inclusion, and resilience, dovetailing with national objectives.

Expected Outcomes

1. By August 2026, Shropshire aims for:
2. Youth voice embedded in governance.
3. Countywide Youth Partnerships and a supporting Foundation.
4. Improved workforce pathways.
5. School-based youth work tested and ready to expand.
6. A co-produced Youth Offer Plan guiding future investment

Parenting team

Collaboration with BeeU Crisis Team

Referrals to the Parenting Team Helpline increased by 17 since June, driven by direct calls from parents/carers via the crisis team and the 'Waiting Well' scheme.

The team now provides proactive support calls to parents/carers, moving beyond simple signposting to more active engagement.

Understanding Your Teen Workshop

Delivered to 34 parents/carers at Meole Brace secondary school.

All participants (100%) found the workshop beneficial, with 86% rating it as very beneficial.

Positive feedback highlighted increased patience, understanding, and practical parenting strategies gained from the session.

Early Help Introduction Training

Training was delivered to a multi-agency audience and is now scheduled to occur bi-monthly, supporting ongoing professional development and partnership working.

Group delivery: Understanding Your Child and Sleep Tight

Offer of groups, including specific SEND groups continues to be delivered Shropshire wide. A mixture of face to face as well as virtual groups, co-delivered with schools as well as BeeU.

Play Practitioners

Interventions are provided to support children and families who have experienced trauma, with a focus on understanding and managing emotions. Practitioners also use Portage to support families with children with SEND

Solihull Approach professional training

Training delivery to a multi-agency cohort, on average 6 times a year to approx. 12 professionals continue to embed the parenting strategy and the Solihull Approach across all services and professionals working with children, young people and families across Shropshire. Ensuring a common framework, language and way of working with families when supported on a multiagency basis.

Strategy

Shropshire Council's Parenting Strategy is closely aligned with national frameworks and the Foundations Practice Guide, emphasizing trauma-informed, evidence-based approaches (notably the Solihull Approach).

Workforce Capacity: There are pressures on the team's ability to provide individualized support, especially for Level 1–3 families. Consideration should be given to expanding practitioner roles and capacity.

Service Gaps: Opportunities exist to strengthen links with GPs, maternity, and antenatal services, and to provide consistent face-to-face support at Family Hub Drop-Ins.

Accessibility: Lack of childcare during group sessions is a barrier for some families. Exploring solutions could improve engagement.

Continuous Improvement: Recommendations include further training in coaching techniques for practitioners, enhanced male engagement, and ongoing quality assurance through supervision, feedback, and outcome tracking.

Parenting team review to be initiated in line with the national reforms Family First Partnership

These achievements reflect a strong focus on proactive support, effective partnership working, and positive outcomes for both parents/carers and professionals.

Family Information Service (FIS)

The Family Information Service (FIS) continued to carry out its statutory function of providing information, advice and support to parents of children and young people aged 0-19 years. The service celebrated 25 years of delivering information since first being introduced in Shropshire in the year 2000.

The FIS responded to over 600 direct enquiries from parents but delivered information to many more through its digital channels.

The FIS social media posts reached 837,266 accounts, and follower number increased to nearly 10,000.

The online directory of local, regional and national services, organisations and events had 112,809 views and 71,146 users and continues to be a popular route through which parents are accessing information.

Subscriber numbers to the FIS monthly newsletter continued to grow, with over 800 parents receiving information through this route.

We produced in house a new video introducing the FIS and explaining the support all parents can access through the service.

The FIS undertook research with Shropshire parents to understand more about their current information needs and anticipated information needs. The results of this research will help the service to develop and continue to meet the needs of families in Shropshire.

Plan to move forward

A service development plan will be completed to respond to changes in legislation and local need, this will include an enhancement to our digital offer, exploring emerging technologies and utilising the skills within the team.

A new corporate directory system will be launched at the beginning of April 2025, which will also include the FIS online directory. The team will need to ensure information is migrated accurately as part of this implementation, and that parents can continue to access the information they need.

SEND Local Offer

The SEND Local Offer continued to carry out it's statutory function of providing information, advice and support to parent carers of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

The SEND Local Offer website hits show that it is being well used, with over 30,000 visits at the end of the year and with over 100,000 pages viewed. The Local Offer also provides information through although routes, such as social media, and an electronic newsletter, which is issued every half term and has close to 5,000 subscribers.

The SEND Local Offer also meets with parent carers in the community and attends the regular Meet and Chat SEND drop in sessions, Understanding your child with SEND groups, and SEND coffee mornings organised by partner organisations.

We have monthly meetings with parent carers to co-produce the Local Offer and the work is guided by a termly multi-agency project group.

We have been continuing to push forward with a local offer specifically for young people and hope to secure some funding for this.

The year has been a challenge as we have been without the part time Local Offer Development Officer, who was seconded to support another team.

Plan to move forward

A new corporate directory system will be launched at the beginning of April 2025, which will also include the SEND Local Offer online directory. The team will need to ensure information is migrated accurately as part of this implementation, and that parents can continue to access the information they need.

We will prepare the Local Offer for the SEND inspection, ensuring that it is complaint and we demonstrate the work which has been undertaken to meet the needs of parent carers.

We hope to be able to stabilise the staffing resource for the Local Offer so that further development and the day-to-day maintenance of the directory can be guaranteed.

We responded to a total of 604 enquiries, processed 183 applications for All In membership. There are 1164 members of All in as at the end of March 2025. Our social media posts reached 837,266 accounts We have a following of 9,600 accounts across our social media channels

112,809 views to our online directory

71,146 users of our online directory

831 subscribers to the FIS newsletter

1,018 subscribers to the Early help Newsletter

4,984 subscribers to the SEND newsletter

[SEND Local Offer website year-end figures](#)

Year-end total

Visits 30,649

Page Views 100,134

Unique visitors 14,936

Returning visitors 1,824

[Early help website year-end figures](#)

Year-end total

Visits 10,679

Page Views 42,018

Unique visitors 5,425

Returning visitors 772

[The Participation Impact Board](#)

This was instituted in August 2024 and was co-chaired by Siobhan Hughes (Early Help Service Manager) and Donessa Gray (Assistant Director) and co-ordinated by the Early Help Participation Lead, Becky Wells, who started in post in June 2024.

The board has been held bi-monthly. It has been well attended by a range of local authority officers from across Early Help, Childrens Social Care, the Virtual School,

Commissioning, Adult Social Care, Health, as well as external providers, such as Shrewsbury Colleges Group, Shropshire's Parent and Carer Council (PACC) and SYA (Voluntary Youth Sector)

The terms of reference for the groups was to create a participation strategy, assess current levels of participation through self-assessment as a group. Identify where participation is working well and where there are gaps and a need for improvement, have an oversight of participation related work happening within Shropshire as a whole, not only that happening in our own areas. Create collaboration and connections between participation services across the local authority. For the group to be a safe space to share and develop ideas and receive support from others in similar roles. By the end of 2024-25 the Participation Strategy had been agreed by the group and the Lundy model of participation adopted, which identifies four key areas of focus:

Space: Ensuring children have the physical and social environments to express their views with consideration given to their needs. This demonstrates respect for their wishes and feelings, creates trust and provides an environment where they can speak as freely as they wish to.

Enabling children to articulate their opinions and perspectives and allowing their voices to be heard on issues that are important to them.

Providing an audience for children's views and making sure they are heard by the right people.

Ensuring that children's views have an impact on decision-making processes by taking them seriously and holding decision makers accountable for the inclusion of their feedback.

As the board developed it was clear that there is a range of participatory activities that take place across the partnership, from children and young people being involved in the creation of social care plans, to the Virtual School Council, the Children in Care Council, and that it is embedded within the practice of our Youth Support Team, and that greater co-ordination was required.

In addition to co-ordinating the IMPACT board and carrying out a range of research tasks to support the development of the strategy, Becky Wells, the Participation Lead in Early Help had, at the end of 2024-25:

With the support of staff from The Virtual School, carried out the first recruitment training with 6 young people, with the aim of running it monthly. Three of the young people had diagnosis of ASD, two of them attended a specialist education provision, and two young people were involved with part of the Virtual School

Held the inaugural Parent Advisory Group, drawn from parents who had expressed an interest in having a say in the way services are designed and delivered.

Family and Community Hub Offer –

Central Team:

Top Achievements

Early Help Service Promotion: Visited 5 secondary schools in central Shrewsbury, focusing on schools with weaker links. Promoted Early Help (EH) services, including hub delivery, integration panels, Team Around the School, Lead Professional roles, and EHM training.

Outcomes: Increased referrals to Integration Consultation Panels, two school teams completed EHM training, improved school understanding of EH services.

Next: Further school visits with EHAAT, allocate Family Support Workers (FSWs) by area, strengthen school relationships.

Community Drop-ins: Established monthly “Coffee & Chat” at Meole Community Hub with partners (SDAS, DWP). Attendance doubled from Q1 to Q2. Sunflower House weekly sessions maintained strong attendance.

Next: Monitor attendance, collect feedback, deliver themed sessions, review locations for accessibility and growth.

Reduced Intervention Length: Average intervention reduced from 260 to 115 days (Q1) and 191 to 110 days (Q2) through monthly supervision, 4-week plans, and regular audits.

Next: Continue monitoring and refining intervention strategies.

Top Challenges

Low Attendance at Integration Panel Meetings: Decline in partner agency attendance due to capacity and funding issues.

Next: Promote panels in EHM training/network meetings, engage partners for consistent attendance.

Key Progress and Challenges

Reduction in Intervention Length: Average period reduced to 110 days (Q2), moving towards a 12-week model. Actions include monthly supervisions, regular audits, and a focus on continuous improvement.

Learning from Audits: Audit findings and best practice shared in meetings. Focus on capturing the child’s voice, involving non-resident parents, and maintaining SMART family plans. Q2 audits graded 85% Good (up from 50% in Q1).

Capacity to Expand Service Delivery: Challenges balancing hub expansion with caseloads (FSWs manage 26–30 children). Support sought from the 0–5 Team, recruitment underway, exploring volunteer support and Families First Programme.

South Team

Overview of Effective Interventions

In 2024/25, the Early Help South Team maintained timely, impactful interventions, with an average duration of 16 weeks. This approach reduced family disengagement from 8 cases in Q2 to 1 in Q3. Tailored support addressed complex issues such as mental health, domestic abuse, and school attendance, resulting in improved family relationships, emotional well-being, and safety. Reflective supervision and peer reviews enhanced the quality and consistency of interventions.

Community Engagement & Increased Footfall

The team expanded its presence in community spaces, notably in Ludlow and Bridgnorth, leading to increased family engagement through events such as stay-and-play sessions and open access clinics. The Ludlow Hub operated five days a week with volunteer support, although venue changes affected collaboration. Greater engagement has fostered trust and improved access to support, despite ongoing challenges with space and staffing.

Conclusion

The team achieved significant progress, improving intervention timeliness and family engagement, and embedding audit learning into practice. Their work supports the Savings Plan via place-based and volunteer-led initiatives, despite staffing and infrastructure constraints. Continued leadership support and strategic focus on hub stability, partnership development, and broader access are essential for sustaining and building on these successes in line with the Shropshire Plan.

North Team –

Significant progress: Improved efficiency, engagement, and outcomes for families as part of an ongoing transformation.

Episodes of Targeted Early Help (TEH): 390 families supported (↑17% from previous year), demonstrating increased reach.

Level 2 Partner Episodes: 340 episodes (↑0.6%), indicating stable partnership engagement.

Intervention Timeliness: Average intervention duration reduced by 46% (from 230 to 123 days), enabling quicker support.

Hub Activity: 740 contacts (↑44%); Health Visitor contacts at 262. Increased footfall due to Stay and Play sessions and better data capture.

Service User Feedback: 90% of parent carers and 85% of children rated services very highly (9/10 or above).

Case Closures: 229 total closures; 64.6% achieved all outcomes, reflecting intervention effectiveness.

Quality Assurance: 22 audits completed; 68% rated 'Good', 4.5% 'Outstanding', showing improved coverage and quality.

Transformation Impact: Enhanced data capture, increased engagement, improved planning and supervision, and strong user satisfaction.

Summary

The North Early Help Team has delivered notable improvements in service delivery, intervention speed, and user satisfaction. Sustained focus on robust data, partnership working, and hub engagement will continue to drive positive outcomes next year.

O-5 Offer

Covering the whole county

With 4 FTE Family Support Workers (which equates to 5 FSWs) and a Lead.

Supporting at level 3 'Families who need more help' – to be consistent with the hub teams and recognising that our partners can and do provide level 2 support for 'Families who need help'.

Health Visitors – attending Health Visitor team meetings, regular meetings with Health Visitor lead, supporting families together.

Midwifery services – attendance at midwife Safeguarding Multi Disciplinary Team monthly meetings, delivering 'Introduction to Early Help' sessions to midwives, attending Midwife team meetings, meeting with Midwife leads, supporting families together.

Perinatal Mental health - meetings with Perinatal Mental Health Lead to share what our services offer, Lead to 0-5 team meeting, supporting families together.

Neonatal Team – meeting with Neonatal team lead, attending Neonatal team meeting and visit to ward, supporting families together and Early Help being part of the discharge plan.

Early Years settings – attendance at Early Years Network meetings termly, and other Early Years training sessions or focus meetings e.g. SEN, DSL, supporting families together.

BeeU Vig – sharing what our services do at 0-5 team meeting, supporting families together

Within the Early Help service, there are ten dedicated teams operating across Shropshire, each specialising in delivering preventative interventions and comprehensive, tailored support to families in need. These teams work collaboratively with local communities, schools, health professionals, and social care agencies to identify families who may benefit from early intervention. By addressing concerns at the earliest possible stage, the Early Help teams aim to prevent issues from escalating and to promote positive outcomes for children and young people.

Each team is composed of skilled practitioners who provide bespoke support packages, which may include parenting advice, assistance with accessing education or health services, and help in managing challenging circumstances such as financial hardship, housing instability, or mental health concerns. The teams are strategically located to ensure coverage across both urban and rural areas of Shropshire, enabling them to respond promptly and effectively to local needs.

Over the past year, the Early Help service has continued to strengthen its partnership work, sharing expertise and resources with a wide range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations. This joined-up approach enables families to receive coordinated support, reduces duplication, and ensures that interventions are both timely and effective. As a result, the Early Help teams have played a critical role in improving the wellbeing and resilience of children, young people, and their families throughout the county.

Author of report: Donna Ward Service Manager

06/11/25

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Shropshire SEND Local Offer

Annual Report

April 2024 – March 2025

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The Statutory Duty

The SEND Code of Practice sets out the statutory duty upon local authorities to publish a Local Offer and annual report.

Local authorities must publish a Local Offer, setting out in one place information about provision they expect to be available across education, health and social care for children and young people in their area who have SEN or are disabled, including those who do not have Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. The Local Offer has two key purposes:

- To provide clear, comprehensive, accessible and up-to-date information about the available provision and how to access it, and
- To make provision more responsive to local needs and aspirations by directly involving disabled children and young people and those with SEN and their parent carers, and service providers in its development and review.

How have we developed the Shropshire Local Offer over the past year?

Section Updates

Changes are made to content on a regular basis. This includes information updates but also changes to the structure and layout of information, to continue to ensure it is easy to navigate.

We have a Local Offer content tracker which documents pages, content owners and when a review of the information is required (every 6 months) however some content owners will contact us as and when the content needs updating.

It can sometimes be a challenge to get updated content for some section owners, but with the support of the SEND Quality and Assurance Group (QAG) we have reviewed the section owners and will be contacting them to request reviews of the content.

A lot of work has been undertaken on the Preparing for Adulthood (PFA) top level category, as part of a multi-agency PFA workstream established to undertake a larger scale review of the preparation for adulthood processes for education, health, and social care. The aim of the group is to review and provide easy to navigate PFA processes and information to young people, families and practitioners.

Membership includes education, health, social care, Shropshire's Parent and Carer Council (PACC) and a young person by experience. The group also links in with other workstreams and an employment forum. The work is informed by surveys, legislation, reports and personal experiences.

As part of this workstream the Local Offer content and ease of navigation has been reviewed. Several development areas were identified including duplication of links, old content and difficulties with navigation due to the lack of section clarity or requiring pages to be split into easy-to-read formats and placed into a different section. As a result, the PFA pages have been re-designed and are now [live](#).

Further work to inform the Local Offer is on-going including mapping PFA pathways, reviewing the Transition Protocol and pathway guidance document and creating an overarching PFA strategy and transition plan for young people.

New Service Directory

Shropshire's Local Offer has two elements, an information section and a directory section. We have focused on enhancing the accessibility and usability of our service directory to ensure that families can easily find relevant information and resources and are due to launch the new directory on 1st April 2025.

This new online directory includes comprehensive details about available services in education, health, social care and the voluntary sector, tailored to the needs of children and young people with SEN and disabilities, and their families

Work has taken place to compile and categorise these services, providing clear descriptions, contact information, and guidance on accessing support.

The directory is designed to be user-friendly, allowing parent carers and professionals to search for services based on specific needs and preferences. Additionally, the directory brings together directories from elsewhere within the Local Authority and therefore enhances the information available.

Young People's Local Offer

For several years, we have been working with young people to design and develop a Local Offer specifically for young people, and continued with this project during 2024-2025. Based on the information they told us, we designed template webpages, including a homepage, and information pages, and asked for their feedback. We also involved them in the naming of the new website with them preferring Shropshire Youth Zone as the name.

We spoke to Shropshire Council's digital services about building the new website but unfortunately, the design template used on the Shropshire Council website can't accommodate the young people's designs.

The audience of the Shropshire Youth Zone is young people with SEND, it is quite unique compared to typical users of the Shropshire Council website, and as such the standard template is not going to appeal and meet their needs. The solution would be to build a sub-site – where the design and functionality are more flexible, but this comes at a cost.

Events in the community

We have had the opportunity of working with colleagues from the Early Help and wider partners and have been attending various events to promote the SEND Local Offer to parent carers.

These events have included:-

- Early Help hosted SEND Meet and Chat – these drop in sessions have been taking place throughout the county where parent carers had the opportunity of talking to a number of

professionals, including members of the SEN team, the Designated and Associate Clinical Officers for SEND, a Psychologist, Neurodiversity practitioners, members of our Early Help team and representatives from PACC. Autism West Midlands, SEND IASS, and the Family Information Service were also in attendance at some of the sessions.

- Understanding your child with SEND – we attended two sessions attended by parent carers to introduce the Local Offer and support available. These sessions were held face to face and virtually. We were able to show the Local Offer introductory video and spoke about our 5 social media sites, many of those attending followed the pages there and then. We also highlighted the newsletter for parent carers of children with SEND and all participants gave their email address to sign up for the newsletter.
- Early help and community drop ins - a number of drop in events are hosted by Early Help for all parent carers to access information and support. These drop ins take place within communities throughout Shropshire, giving parent carers access to early help workers, and support for their families. The SEND Local Offer attends various drops ins to promote the information available.

Attending sessions like this gives us the opportunity of gaining insight into the current information needs of parent carers, so we can make sure information is available and support then in accessing that information. They also give us the opportunity of gaining meaningful feedback directly from parent carers about the Local Offer, and also their views on how the Local Offer could be improved.

Co-produced newsletter

The Local Offer co-produce a newsletter with the Parent Carer Council (PACC), NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and partners from education, social care and the voluntary sector. This newsletter is issued each half term to a distribution list of over 5000 parent carers and professionals.

The contents are based on topics parent carers have told us they want information on and news and updates from services. Copies of the newsletter can be viewed on the Local Offer.

Social Media

We use social media extensively to communicate with parent carers, ensuring they are informed about the SEND Local Offer and available support. Our presence spans Facebook and Instagram where we regularly post updates, events, and valuable information.

By consistently evaluating the reach and impact of our social media posts, we gain insights that inform the planning of future campaigns. This data-driven approach helps us tailor our messages to better suit the needs and preferences of parent carers, ensuring they receive timely and relevant information.

In addition to organic posts, we have trialled Facebook adverts to broaden our reach. These targeted adverts proved to be highly successful, increasing engagement and driving traffic to the Local Offer.

The success of these adverts underscores the importance of utilising a variety of channels to reach our audience effectively. By monitoring the performance of these campaigns, we can refine our strategies and continue to improve our efforts.

Below shows the insights from one Facebook advert, which ran for two weeks.

- Reach (number of people the advert was seen by): **7402**
- Link Clicks (number of people who clicked through to our page): **192**
- Post Shares (number of people who shared the post): **5**
- Post Reactions (number of people who click the like, love, care post buttons): **19**
- Post Saves: **7**
- Post Comments: **2**
- Total engagement: **220**
- Total spend: **£28.50**

Local Offer Project Group

The Shropshire Local Offer Project Group met again to look at the future development and to give feedback. We really value this group and the support they provide. The group has representation from education, health, social care, the voluntary sector, parent carers and from within Shropshire Council. The group meet each term.

Local Offer regional group

We attended a West Midlands Regional Local Offer meeting, which brought together the Local Offer leads for the West Midlands region. There was also an update from the West Midlands strategic lead. The meeting allowed for the exchange of ideas, good practice and learning from one another and those attending found the meeting to be very productive. Common challenges were discussed and solutions suggested. The group will meet again in the summer term.

Feedback – Parent Carers

Feedback – EHCP Process

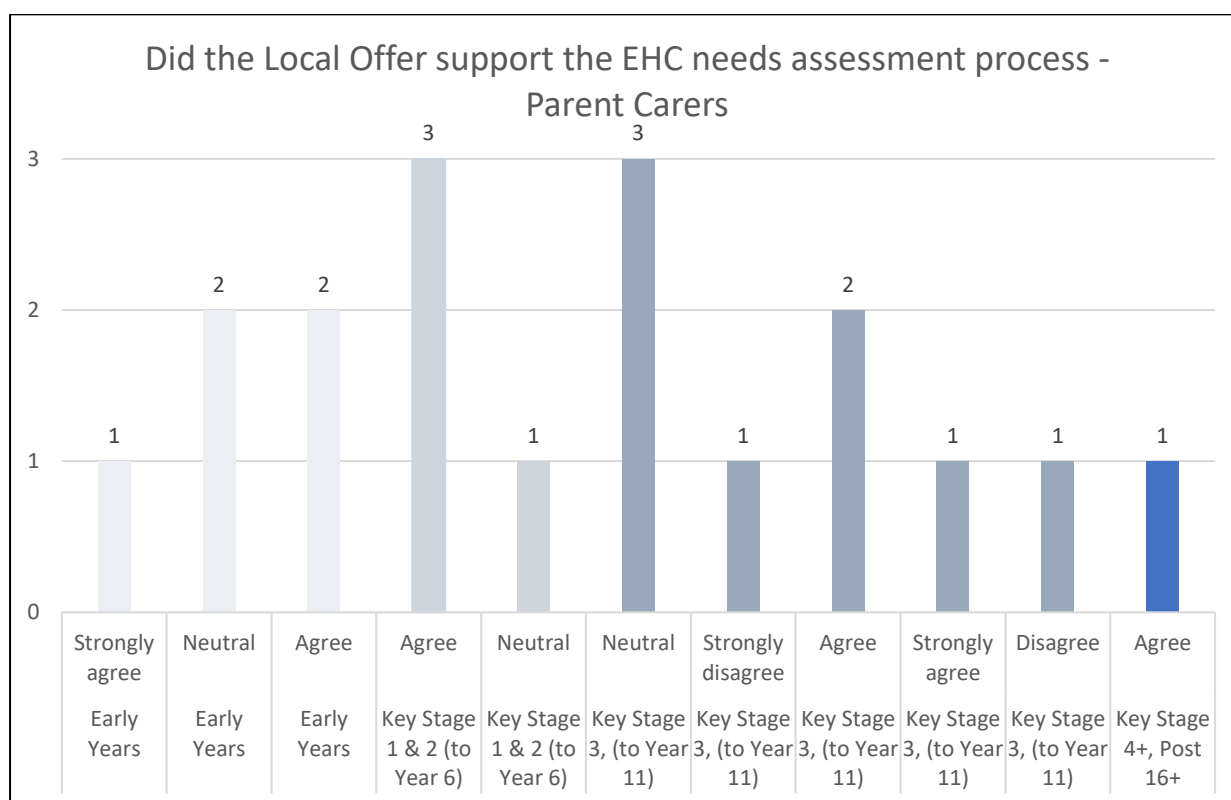
When a parent carer has been through the EHCP process they are asked for their feedback. One of the questions in that feedback asks how the Local Offer supported them.

Q - The information on the SEND Local Offer supported you to understand the EHC needs assessment process

Although the response rate was low, 18 replies for 2024, there is still some useful information from the responses.

The graph below shows if parent carers agreed or disagreed with the above question, based on the age groups of their children, from early years to key stage 4 post 16+. Although there are 2 responses

who disagree or strongly disagree, the majority agree that the Local Offer did support them to understand the EHC needs assessment.



Feedback- Preparing for Adulthood Survey

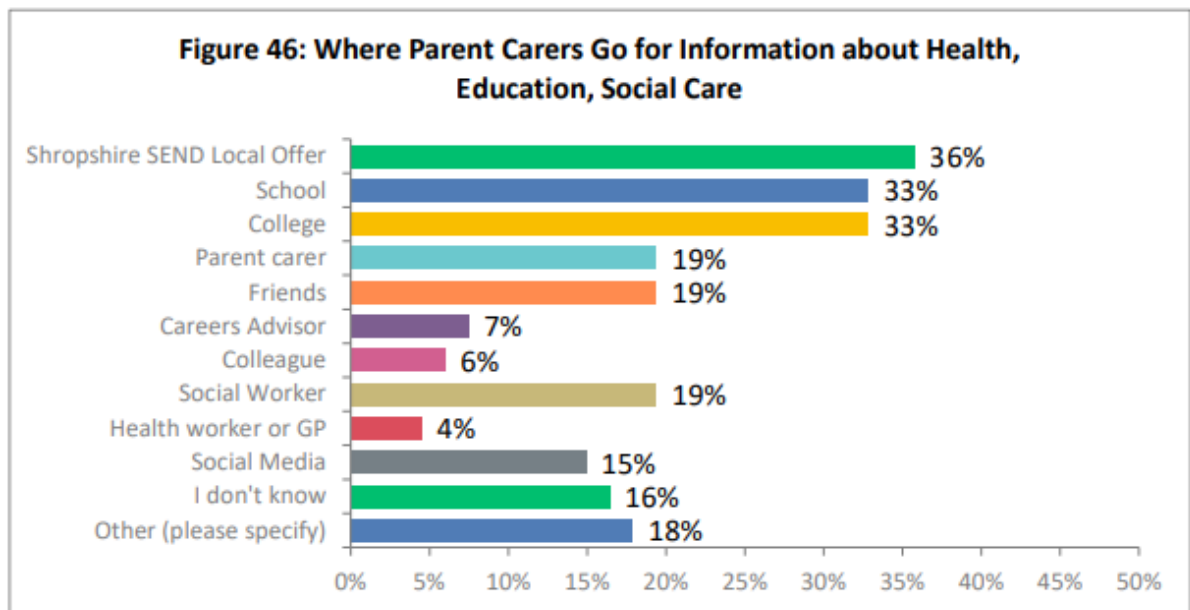
Shropshire Council undertook research between mid-August and the end of October 2024 to understand more about the experiences of people with SEND when preparing for adulthood and completing education. The research considered the views of children and young people from year 9 upwards, parents and carers and professionals.

There were 207 responses to the survey and there were 3 surveys, one for parents and carers, one for young people and a survey for professionals. Table 1 below shows the overall response total for each survey.

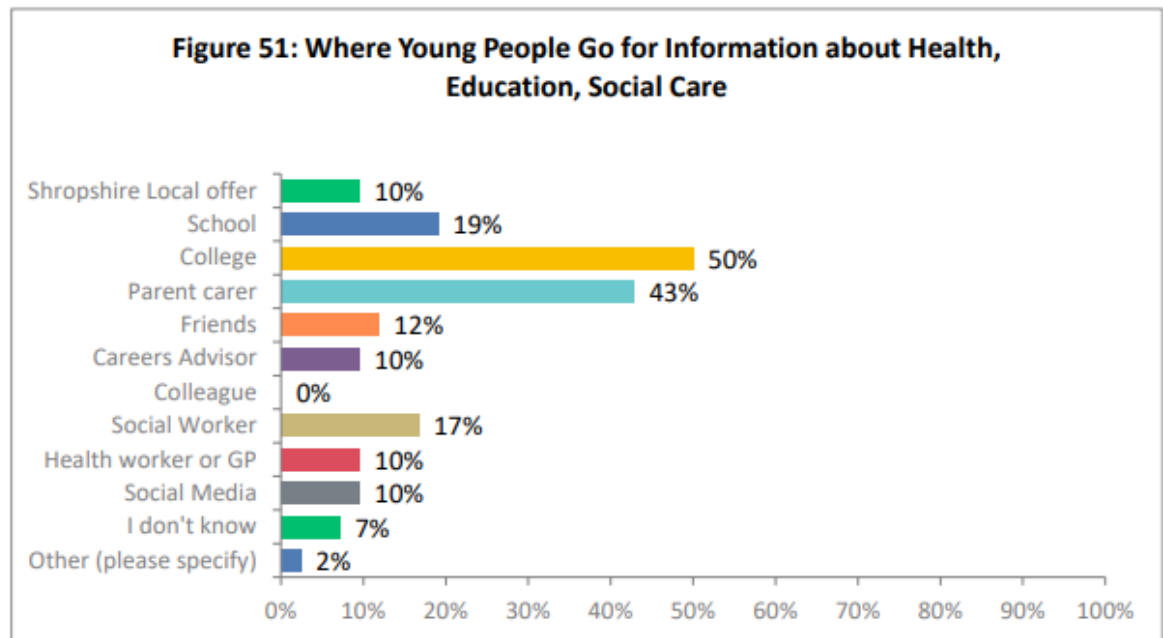
Survey and Audience	Number of respondents
Parents and Carers	88
Young People	46
Professionals	73
Total	207

One of the questions in the survey asked where respondents go for information about health, education, or social care, with the opportunity to tick as many options as applied to them.

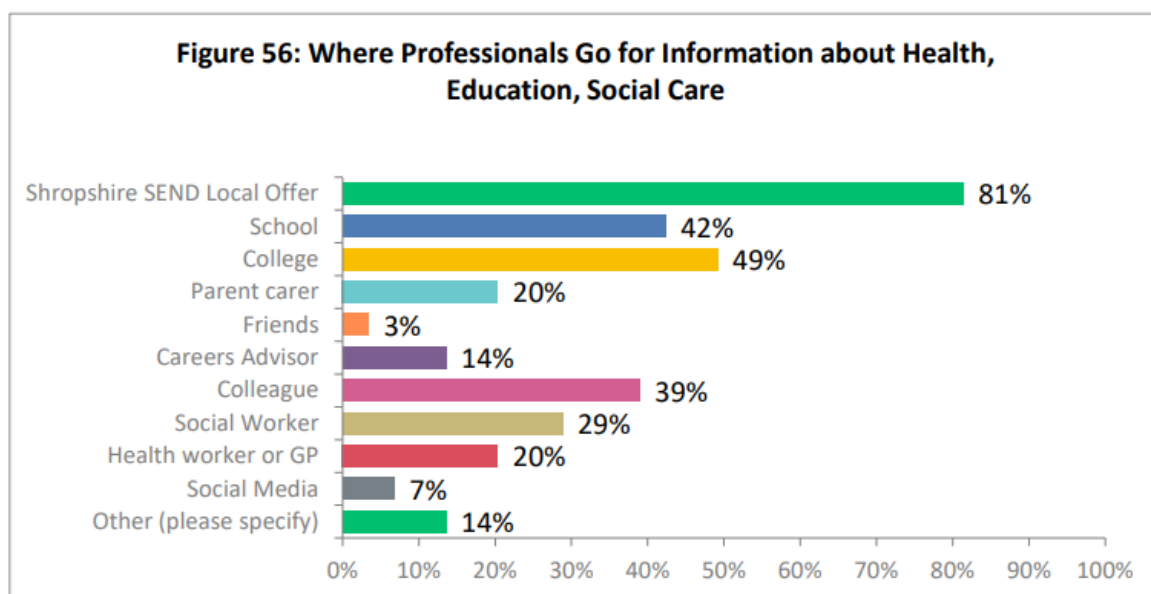
The graph below demonstrates that for over a third of parent carers responding, the Shropshire SEND Local Offer is an information resource. Around a third of respondents also said that school or college are resources for this information.



When asked about where they are likely to go for information about health, education, and social care, children and young people were most likely to say their college, school, or parent carers, as shown in the graph below. These sources are unsurprising, as they represent the most common authority figures in the lives of children and young people. However, 10% said the Local Offer.



Most professionals (81%) said that they visit the Shropshire SEND Local Offer for information about health, education, and social care, as shown in the graph below.



Feedback- Local Offer Feedback Form

We have a specific Local Offer feedback survey, which is regularly promoted through social media, newsletters, and email footers. The survey results help us understand if the information on the website is accessible, what users like and dislike, and if there are any gaps that need addressing.

In 2024-2025 we received 9 completed questionnaires, and although all feedback is helpful, it is disappointing that we haven't received more. Eight of those received were from parent carers of a child with SEND and one was a young person.

How did you hear about the Local Offer?

As part of the feedback form, we ask those completing it, where they heard about the local offer.

- Another parent x 2
- Social Media x 2
- Internet Search x 2
- Health Professional x 1
- Educational Setting x 1
- Shropshire Council SEN Team x 1

It is good to see that some of these are from recommendations, either from other parent carers or practitioners.

What information were you looking for?

Only 8 responded to this question, with the following replies

- How to apply for an EHCP
- Information on Child in need assessment, direct payments and supported living
- Access to support and services
- Activities for my daughter and support for me.

- EHCP, the SEND team, activities and newsletter
- Activities
- Advice
- Education, health, EHCP

As you can see a number of parent carers were looking for information on activities, support for parent carers as well as information on EHCPs.

How would you rate your experience of using the Local Offer?

Only 7 responded to this question, with the following replies:-

- Very satisfied x 1
- Satisfied x 3
- Neither satisfied or dissatisfied x 1
- Very dissatisfied x 2

Of those who were very dissatisfied, the comments were

1. make it more accessible across the whole of Shropshire
2. I couldn't find information or signposting links for ADHD. The neurodiversity section could do with more info and links on it. Knowing how to get support for ADHD including diagnosis path would be helpful.

Comment one related to activities in Shropshire and not the Local Offer website.

Comment two is something to have a conversation with NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin about, as the request was for the neurodiversity section of the Local Offer to link to the Healthier Together website.

How could the Local Offer website be improved?

- Well, it's just information on how things are supposed to work, but they don't work like that do they. Just because a child legally should have all this support doesn't mean they do. Where you live plays a huge factor as professionals will literally tell you it's ok far to travel if you live outside of Shrewsbury. All services are based in Shrewsbury, everything.
- There are no support or activities outside of Shrewsbury. It's an absolute waste of time if you live outside of Shrewsbury.
- Activities or support for me in Ludlow.
- Any useful information, anything about legislation, limited information on processes

Some of these comments don't relate to the Local Offer website but to activities and accessing SEND services.

Feedback from Partners

Clive CE Primary School

Reference to Shropshire Council's Local Offer is a permanent feature of our weekly newsletter that goes out to all parents, staff and governors and published on our website. Additionally, FIS is promoted through the same publication every week. The Local Offer also features largely on the SEND page of the school website which then has the school's SEND Information Report as an attached document.

Referrals to external agencies frequently make reference to whether parents are aware of the Shropshire Local Offer and these are always noted during referral meetings with parents.

The school became involved with the Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) at the end of the 2023/24 academic year. In the current academic year, we have received whole staff training around Neurodiversity and also Mental health and wellbeing. Staff have been asked to trial strategies in class that would particularly benefit ND children (eg movement breaks) but would also be of benefit to all children. At the time of writing, these strategies have yet to be evaluated for impact. The training for staff, whilst delivered by our ND partner for PINS, will be rolled out to two further schools in the MAT in the near future. Additionally, the school has organised, in conjunction with PACC, a number of parent-carer forums. Whilst low in attendance these have been really useful to share experiences and ideas. As a school, we hope to continue these in some form, perhaps inviting speakers to come along and chat with the group.

In addition to PINS, the school has received support for individual children from an ND Partner from The Educational Psychology Service. It has been a great benefit to have the same individual supporting our PINS work.

Dave Watts

Administrator and SENCo

Clive Church of England Primary School

Shropshire SENDIASS

Shropshire SENDIASS recognises the Local Offer as a vital resource for families and professionals, providing key information across education, health, and social care. We continue to signpost families through direct conversations, emails, and social media to ensure they can access relevant support.

Over the past year, positive developments have included improvements to the Personal Budgets section and streamlining of pages, making navigation easier. Regular updates have also helped keep families and professionals informed.

However, gaps remain. Families struggle to find clear information on Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) and alternative provision. While the local authority is developing its EOTAS approach and has shared a draft for feedback, ensuring this is clearly reflected in the Local Offer will be

essential. Specialist placements are another frequent enquiry; currently, the Local Offer lists LA-maintained schools but does not cover all available specialist provisions in Shropshire.

The EHCP process remains a major concern for families. While a dedicated section exists, clearer guidance on communication with the EHCP team would be beneficial. Transport information is another area where parents seek clarity.

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is an area of increasing need. While resources exist on the Learning Gateway, including them within the Local Offer would improve accessibility.

SENDIASS has contributed to the Local Offer newsletter, which remains a valuable communication tool. We see opportunities to improve accessibility by adding videos, such as an introductory guide to the Local Offer. A dedicated section for young people with SEND—beyond 'Preparing for Adulthood'—could also provide targeted support on school anxiety and emotional well-being. Families have also raised questions about the 'Right to Choose' pathway, and making this information clearer would be helpful.

We remain committed to collaborating with the Local Offer team to ensure it continues to be a comprehensive and accessible resource for families, young people, and professionals across Shropshire.

Carrie Choudhary

Shropshire SENDIASS Manager

Reporting

Website Statistics

We use a system called Site Improve for website analytics, this provides useful information on page hits, devices visitors are using and the source route for visitors.

This table compares website data to the previous two years, showing an increase in overall numbers compared to the previous year, showing the Local Offer is being well used.

	Page visits	Page views	Unique visitors	Returning visitors
1 st April 2024 to 31 st March 2025	30,649	100,134	14,134	1,824
1 st April 2023 to 31 st March 2024	28,910	76,109	12,567	1,939
1 st April 2022 to 31 st March 2023	39,745	80,669	27,603	1,704

Page visits - A visit is defined as a series of page requests from the same uniquely identified visitor with a time of no more than 30 minutes between each page request.

Page views - A page view is a count of how many times a page has been viewed on a website or the chosen group within the chosen period of time. All page views are counted no matter how many times a user has visited the website in the chosen period of time.

Unique visitors - The total number of unique visitors during the selected period.

Returning visitors - A returning visitor is a user that has visited our website prior to the selected period and is now returning.

Most popular pages on the Local Offer – Year End

The table below shows the pages with the most views and visits during 2024-2025. The highest ranking pages are those linked to EHCP and education. This is similar to previous years. Travel and transport also always ranks highly.

	Title and page	Page views	Page visits
1	The SEND local offer https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/	6,214	3,531
2	Education, health and care plan (EHCP) https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/education/how-is-sen-funded-in-schools/education-health-and-care-plan-ehcp/	3,339	1,732
3	Education https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/education/	2,490	1,119
4	How do I apply for an education health and care needs assessment (EHCNA)? https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/education/how-is-sen-funded-in-schools/education-health-and-care-plan-ehcp/how-do-i-apply-for-an-education-health-and-care-needs-assessment-ehcna/	1,986	1,045
5	Parent/carers https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/education/how-is-sen-funded-in-schools/education-health-and-care-plan-ehcp/how-do-i-apply-for-an-education-health-and-care-needs-assessment-ehcna/	1,925 2.6%	1,026 5.2%

	and-care-plan-ehcp/how-do-i-apply-for-an-education-health-and-care-needs-assessment-ehcna/parentcarer/		
6	Travel and transport https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/travel-and-transport/	1,428 1.9%	899 4.5%
7	Apply Transport https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/travel-and-transport/apply/	1,286 1.7%	753 3.8%
8	The Parenting Team https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/early-help/the-parenting-team/	1,148 1.5%	878 4.4%
9	Safeguarding https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/social-care/childrens-social-care/safeguarding/	1,137 1.5%	897 4.5%
10	Education services https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/education/education-services/	1,066 1.4%	457 2.3%
11	Special Educational Needs (SEN) Team https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/education/education-services/special-educational-needs-sen-team/	1,017 1.4%	523 2.6%
12	EHCP annual reviews https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/education/how-is-sen-funded-in-schools/education-health-and-care-plan-ehcp/ehcp-annual-reviews/	996 1.3%	614 3.1%
13	Contact the SEN Team https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/education/education-services/special-educational-needs-sen-team/contact-the-sen-team/	927	708

14	Early years https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/early-years/	910	408
15	Nurseries, schools, colleges and specialist provision https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/education/nurseries-schools-colleges-and-specialist-provision/	882	392

Social Media

Our use of social media has continued to be a success, with an increase in the number of followers, engagement with our audience, and the reach of our posts, which shows that parent carers welcome information being delivered through this particular channel.

As of 31st March 2024, the Local Offer has a total of **2225 followers** on Facebook and Instagram, which is an increase of 281 on the previous year.

	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	Difference to previous year
Facebook	1446	1784	2025	+241
Instagram	85	160	200	+40
Total	1531	1944	2225	+281

In July 2024 the Local Offer X/Twitter account was closed down, which saw a loss of 246 followers.

Our annual account impressions – which is the total number of times our contents has been shown on a person's screen is 300,899.

Our average **daily** account **reach**, which is the number of times our content has been seen by different people each day on Facebook and Instagram was **612**. We have written and published **520** posts and shared many more from partner accounts.







Post engagement, which includes people liking, commenting, clicking on links etc has increased over the last year. Hootsuite state that “most social media marketing experts agree that a good engagement rate is between 1% and 5%. Our engagement rate for Facebook is **1.98%** and **2.33%** on Instagram.

Our top three posts by clicks for the year were:-

From April 2024 – an update on how the BeeU service will be supporting children, young people and their families in the year ahead

From March 2025 – how to keep your child safe online, following the release of the Netflix drama, Adolescence

From May 2024 – the latest edition of the SEND newsletter







<p>View post</p> <p>sendlocaloffershropshire f 30 Apr 2024 11:14</p> <p> NEWS: Update on how the BeeU emotional wellbeing and mental health service will be supporting children, young people and their families for the year ahead. https://orlo.uk/zEkJB</p> <p></p>	<p>6 18 1</p> <p>13 259</p> <p>3.1K 3.4K 259</p> <p>8.89 10 CLICKS</p>
<p>View post</p> <p>sendlocaloffershropshire f 21 Mar 2025 12:55</p> <p> Have you seen the new Netflix series Adolescence? If so, you many be wondering how to keep your child safe online. Kooth, the online mental health and wellbeing service for young people, have just produced this short video for young people and their families https://orlo.uk/sZgTt If your...</p> <p></p>	<p>2 26 2</p> <p>0 154</p> <p>3.8K 4.5K 154</p> <p>4.08 2 CLICKS</p>
<p>View post</p> <p>sendlocaloffershropshire f 26 Nov 2024 18:01</p> <p> The latest SEND newsletter for parents, carers and families in Shropshire is now on the local offer here: https://orlo.uk/kFJjf #shropshiresendlocaloffer #sendlocaloffer #localoffer #sendnewsletter #shropshiresendnewsletter #shropshire #shropshireparents #SENDNE...</p> <p></p>	<p>1 12 3</p> <p>0 96</p> <p>1.8K 1.9K 96</p> <p>5.7 1 CLICKS</p>

The top 3 posts by reach for the year were:-

From 17th February 2025 – Information about the Meet N Chat SEND events hosted by Early Help

From 25th February 2025 – Information about the Meet N Chat SEND events hosted by Early Help

From June 2024 – Post about how young people can get involved in designing the Young people’s Local Offer

<p>View post</p> <p>sendlocaloffershropshire f 17 Feb 2025 15:01</p> <p> Meet n Chat SEND drop ins are a chance for families of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to get support with general SEND enquires. You can chat with people from Early Help, Education, Health and the Parent Carer Council (PACC). The sessions are free to attend...</p> <p></p>	<p>2 12 1</p> <p>0 3</p> <p>6.1K 6.7K 6.1K</p> <p>0.26 2 REACH</p>
<p>View post</p> <p>sendlocaloffershropshire f 25 Feb 2025 07:00</p> <p> Meet n Chat SEND drop ins are a chance for families of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to get support with general SEND enquires. You can chat with people from Early Help, Education, Health and the Parent Carer Council (PACC). The sessions are free to attend...</p> <p></p>	<p>4 14 2</p> <p>2 4</p> <p>4.1K 4.3K 4.1K</p> <p>0.56 4 REACH</p>
<p>View post</p> <p>sendlocaloffershropshire f 27 Jun 2024 17:01</p> <p> As you know we have the SEND Local Offer website https://orlo.uk/DtZx6 which is a single place for parent carers of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, to access information. We have also been working with young people to develop a Local Offer...</p> <p></p>	<p>1 5 3</p> <p>0 30</p> <p>4.1K 4.2K 4.1K</p> <p>0.86 1 REACH</p>

SEND Newsletter

The SEND newsletter was first issued in 2020 as a way of keeping families up to date and informed through the pandemic, but it was considered a valuable means of sharing information with families, and so continues to be issued. It is co-produced with Parent Carer Council (PACC) and Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin NHS and is issued every half term. It is primarily aimed at parent carers, although some professionals also subscribe. There are 4984 subscribers.

We are able to see from the data which articles are being clicked on, which is a useful insight to see which topics are of more interest to parent carers, and so helps to inform future editions.

The figures below are for each of the newsletters issued during 2024/2025. Those rows in bold, show the total sent, which is subscribers, the unique opens, which is those subscribers who opened the newsletter, and then Total opens which is the number of times the newsletter has been opened, which would include where subscribers have shared the newsletter to their audiences or where we have shared online.

	May 2024	June 2024	October 2024	November 2024	January 2025	March 2025
Total Sent	5,222	5,178	5,101	5,034	5,026	4984
Delivered	4,875 (93%)	4,893 (94%)	4,826 (95%)	4,756 (94%)	4,710 (94%)	4686 (94%)
Bounced	347 (7%)	285 (6%)	275 (5%)	278 (6%)	316 (6%)	298 (6%)
Unsubscribed	4 (0%)	3 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total opens	1,990	1,731	2,372	2,135	1,629	1830
Unique opens	1,178 (24%)	1,278 (26%)	1,370 (28%)	1,367 (29%)	1,076 (23%)	1270 (27%)
Total Clicks	146	2,364	1,365	936	368	1286
Unique clicks	138 (3%)	2,211 (45%)	1,323 (27%)	886 (19%)	326 (7%)	1111 (24%)
Number of links	38	54	51	82	35	47

Future Developments

Local Offer Development Officer Role

To maintain some stability within the Local Offer Development role, ensuring that the contracted 18.5 hours are worked, so day-to-day updates and future developments can continue.

Young People's Local Offer

Continue to work with young people to develop a Local Offer specifically for them. This requires funding to be able to implement a co-produced website which meets the needs of young people.

Section Updates

To contact content owners on the Local Offer content tracker to review the sections they have been assigned, ensuring content is provided and up to date.

Promotion

Although the website statistics show that the Local Offer is well used, research and feedback also show that there are still a significant number of families who are not aware of the Local Offer. We need to ensure greater promotion to parent carers and also practitioners who support families, so they can promote the Local Offer to families.

DRAFT



2024/25 ANNUAL REPORT

Compass & Assessment Teams

**Author: Jeanette Hill, Service
Manager, Compass, Assessment Teams, and TREES**

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Contacts

Contacts	QTR1			QTR2			QTR3			QTR4			Total
	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	
EHM Contact Record	1035	1032	982	881	622	894	858	911	909	1022	860	961	10967
LCS Contact Record	9	2	1	4	8	5	3	0	5	2	5	3	47
Total	1044	1034	983	885	630	899	861	911	914	1024	865	964	11014

Analysis:

From the above data we can see that at the end of Quarter 1 we had received 3,061 contacts (which is a 4.16% decrease on the previous year), end of Quarter 2 we had received 2,414 contacts (which is a 13.1% decrease at the same point in the previous year), end at Quarter 3 we had received 2,686 contacts (which is a 2.58% decrease compared to the same point in the previous year) and end of Quarter 4 we had received 2,853 contacts (which is a 0.11% decrease compared to the same point in the previous year).

Looking at the month by month data, April, May and January were the busiest months in term of demand into Compass and is likely a result of school's reopening following a period of closure. September, whilst was busier compared to August, is unusually in line with most of the year (we normally see a spike following the 6 week summer holidays).

Overall, there were 571 fewer contacts received over 24/25 as compared to 23/24 equating to a 4.93% decrease.

Sources of referrer:

In line with the previous year the top 3 referrers, remain the same with schools accounting for the highest number of contacts at 2582, health services were second at 1786 and individuals were third at 1,569. This is the second year running that Police have not featured within our top 3 referrers (they were fourth at 1,444 contacts).

Outcome of contacts: of the 11,014 contacts received just 1,446 progressed to children social care this equates to 13.12 % (this is slightly increased from the previous year which was **11.8%**) this is the first year within the last 4 years we have seen this increase. The highest proportion of contacts are stepped down to early help (5700 equating to 51.75%), which is in line with our practice principle of right intervention, at the right time.

Referrals

Referrals	QTR1			QTR2			QTR3			QTR4			Total
	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	
New Referral	89	108	148	116	94	109	89	105	111	132	103	106	1310
Re-referral (<12 Mths)	18	24	26	11	9	15	8	22	13	10	25	13	194
Total	107	132	174	127	103	124	97	127	124	142	128	119	1504

Analysis:

Referrals are converted from contacts, so all the above data relates to the contact data reported in table 1 above. From this data, we can determine that overall we received 1504 referrals which is lower (1.25% **decrease**) than the previous year which was 1523. June accounts to the highest number of referrals accepted over the year and is in line with a high number of contacts received in May this is also consistent with the previous year where we saw 162 referrals in June 23.

In regard to re-referrals, we received 194 and this equates to (12.90% of the total referrals) which is a very slight decrease on the previous year where we received 200. Shropshire's re-referral rate remains lower than statistical neighbours and the national average. This is most likely due to effective support and intervention being put into place by Children's Social Care, meaning when children and families step out and down from Children Social Care into universal or level 2 and 3 support provisions, this is timely and appropriate. We also now have EHAST in place which identifies families at an earlier point, offering additional help, support and advice. All Local Authorities see some children re-referred back into service, so it is not unusual or unsurprising when this happens and our continued low re-referral rates remains reassuring, as always.

Strategy meetings:

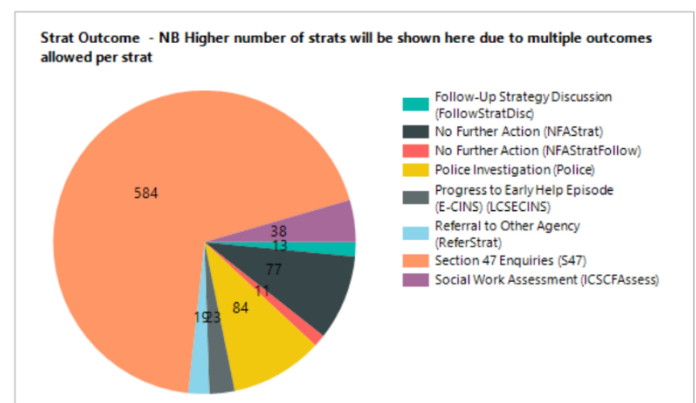
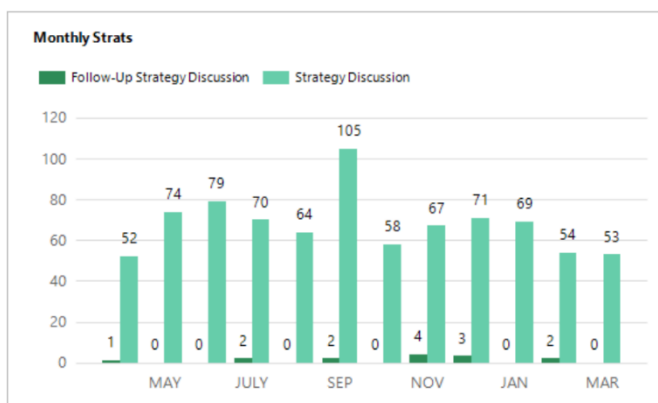
Strats	QTR1			QTR2			QTR3			QTR4			Total
	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	
Follow-Up Strategy Discussion	1	0	0	2	0	2	0	4	3	0	2	0	14
Strategy Discussion	52	74	79	70	64	105	58	67	71	69	54	53	816
Total	53	74	79	72	64	107	58	71	74	69	56	53	830

Analysis:

Overall there were 830 strategy meetings held (including follow up strategy meetings) within Compass, this is lower than the number held in the previous year which was 1004 and represents a **17.3% decrease**. This decrease has now been seen for 3 years running.

September was clearly busiest month (107) , following a period of school closure.

The breakdown of strategy meetings in regard to outcomes is as follows:



As we can see from this data, 584 strategy meetings led to a s.47 enquiries (child protection investigation), which is the biggest proportion of all outcomes, as we would expect to see, given the threshold of ‘reasonable cause to suspect significant harm’ being the trigger for a strategy meeting. The high proportion leading to investigation indicates good application of this threshold.

Often these investigations will be conducted jointly with police, where there is concern of serious harm and offences having been committed such as physical harm, sexual abuse or neglect. The data shows a reduction (**3.63% decrease**) on the previous year which saw 606 strategy meetings leading to s.47 enquiries. We have undertaken a lot of focus over the 12 months on strategy meetings, ensuring that only where necessary and proportionate do we take such action, as it can be seen to be oppressive in nature and where we have parents showing insight and willingness to engage in an assessment and social work intervention we prefer to work restoratively as this often improves the outcomes for children. This is in line with feedback from the Warwickshire peer review held in July 2024 and the principles set out in the Social Care review (Josh MacAlistair).

s.47 child protection investigations:

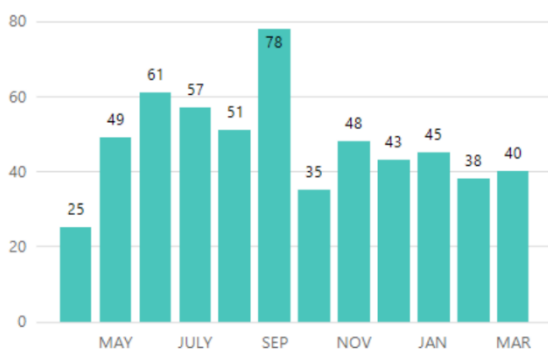
S47	QTR1			QTR2			QTR3			QTR4			Total
	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	
Total	25	49	61	57	51	78	35	48	43	45	38	40	496

Analysis:

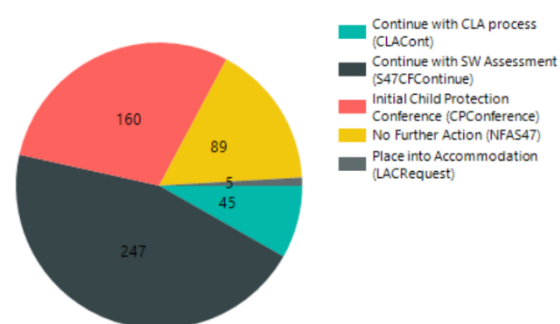
Of the 830 strategy meetings held, 584 resulted in a s.47 investigation, 496 of which were completed within 24/25 (some will roll over to the next financial year and data therefore will be shown in Q1 of the next financial year).

The outcomes of the s.47 investigations are recorded as follows:

Monthly S47 Completed



Outcomes



As we can see from the above chart, the biggest proportion of s.47 investigations were stepped down to s.17 SWA (247 representing 42.3%). We can also see that 5 children (0.9%) became looked after through the course of the s.47 (therefore not requiring an ICPCC) which is a reduction on the previous year which accounted for 6.4% of the total number. As a service we continue to reassure ourselves that we are not disproportionately investigating children and families through regular auditing activity. As discussed above this is a current area of focus, only 27.4% of the total number led to an ICPCC.

Initial Child Protection Case Conferences:

ICPC	QTR1			QTR2			QTR3			QTR4			Total
	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	
In Timescale	23	10	27	29	22	20	0	3	0	7	18	39	198
Out of Timescale	12	19	13	4	3	7	22	15	10	21	2	0	128
Total	35	29	40	33	25	27	22	18	10	28	20	39	326

Analysis:

There were 326 children subject to an initial child protection case conferences held in total through the year, which is an increase **(27.8%)** to the previous year, this will be in regard to all children across the services and not necessarily just new children entering into children's social care, for example these will also include children stepping up from Child in Need plans. June 2024 saw the most conferences at 30. 128 children subject to a conference were held outside of the 15 day timescale which equates to 39.26% which has been a worsening position for the fourth year running (**23.92% - 23/24 and 15.06% - 22/23, and 11.30% - 21/22**) there has been a focus on this area of performance as monitored through the regular ChAT reporting and you can see an improvement in the data from February 25 onwards.

s.17 Social Work Assessments:

SWA	QTR1			QTR2			QTR3			QTR4			Total
	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	
In Timescale	28	23	41	25	31	29	32	35	47	61	78	85	515
Out of Timescale	0	20	12	22	55	21	35	21	18	18	19	19	260
Total	28	43	53	47	86	50	67	56	65	79	97	104	775

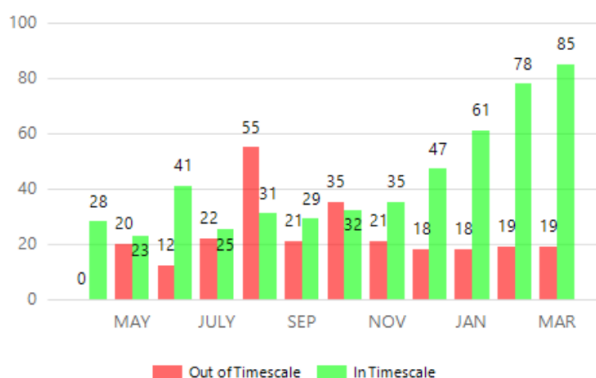
Analysis:

There was a total of 775 s.17 Social Work Assessments fully completed throughout 24/25, which is **224.27% more** than the previous year (379). This is due to a focus on updated social work assessments across the system as reported in last year's annual report we had seen a big decline in this performance as a result of LCS implementing a CLA review report (rather than

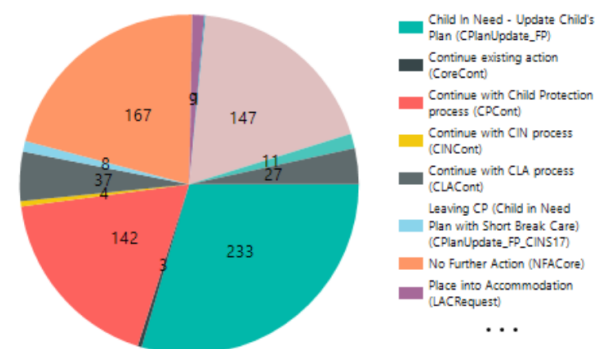
an updated SWA), our data is now much more in line with previous years. March saw the highest number of assessments having been completed which collaborates with the focus on updated assessments ahead of our ILACS inspection. 260 SWAs (33.5%) were completed outside of the national 45 working day timeframe, which for the first year in five years is an improved area of performance despite the massive increase in overall numbers of assessments completed (previous year was 164 SWAs (43.3%) completed outside of timescale).

The outcomes of the SWA are recorded as follows:

Monthly SWA Completed



Outcomes: NB Higher number of assessments will be shown here due to multiple outcomes allowed per assessment



The above data shows that 142 of SWAs (109 last year), equating to 18.3% (fewer than previous year at 28.8%) led to no further action, which evidences better thresholding at the front door.

Staffing position:

The staffing position across Compass, Assessment Teams and TREES has largely remained stable. There has been some movement of staff, as can be expected.

Compass:

6 FTE Senior Social Workers

1 PTE Social Worker

4.5 Information Coordinators

1.5 Team Manager

Business support

Multi-agency co-location within Compass:

Multi- Agency Safeguarding (MAS) Nurses

***Harm Assessment Unit (West Mercia Police) are no longer co-located within Compass as a result of their Management of Change and have now formed one single Vulnerability Unit (as opposed to 4 separate Harm Assessment Units in each of the 4 Local Authority areas that West Mercia Covers).

Assessment Teams

North:

1 Team Manager

5 Social Workers

2 Senior Social Workers

1 x full time Family Support Worker

South:

- 1 Team Manager
- 5 Social Workers
- 2 Senior Social Workers
- 1 x full time Family Support Worker

Multi-agency partnerships:**Developments:**

Compass Steering Group continues to meet on a quarterly basis, this includes Children Social Care (lead), West Mercia Police, Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service, Probation NPS, Probation CRC, Youth Justice Service, Housing, Midwifery, SATH, PHN and Education. This meeting provides an opportunity to discuss any issues pertinent to the front door (Compass), sharing of data and strengthening relationships across the partnership. Meets quarterly.

Joint Decision Making Panel is a fortnightly panel held with Youth Justice Service, Children Social Care began to participate in this panel from 1st November 2019 and have continued to contribute on a fortnightly basis. This panel affords the opportunity to discuss young people who are committing offences to access early help and support this can divert young people from the criminal justice process which otherwise may impact on their life chances. Children Social Care attending and contributing to this meeting means that we are able to provide key information that provides a broader understanding of the child's lived experiences so that they are not just perceived as offenders/perpetrators but that often they were victims foremost of abuse, neglect and exploitation.

NSPCC bi monthly telephone consultations are held between Jeanette Hill and NSPCC this offers an opportunity to jointly dip sample any children who are

subject to repeat referrals to NSPCC and to ensure all referrals from NSPCC to Compass have been followed up and outcomes provided to the NSPCC.

Wolverhampton and Telford Private Law Sub Group – held on a quarterly basis, provides an opportunity for Shropshire Children Services to influence and contribute to developments and improvements around private law. Jeanette Hill represents the region at these meetings (first attended in November 2020). We are working on a project across the region to implement ‘pathfinders’ which will launch in November 2025 and see a radical overhaul of private law proceedings which will hopefully see a reduction in s.37 investigations and the implementation of a new Child Impact Report (replacing s.7 reports).

DCT triage meets as and when is required (dependent upon demand), the group consists of CSC, Disabled Children’s Team Manager, TEH and health. The group is focused on requests for assessment for a child with disabilities. The group will consider the child’s needs, the parents desired outcomes and how these will be best met and by which service.

Pitstop – This is a police led meeting that has replaced the former Domestic Abuse Triage and Multi Agency Triage Meeting. It was implemented at the end of Q4/beginning of Q1 2024. It discusses all police led contacts including domestic abuse, child incidents and intel. It meets daily (virtually) and is chaired, facilitated and minuted by police. It is multi agency and there are a number of partner agencies committed to attending this meeting including LA, Police, Probation, YJS, SRP, Adult Services, Housing.

Annual Report prepared by:

Jeanette Hill

Service Manager

Compass, Assessment Teams, and TREES

October 2025

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2024/25 ANNUAL REPORT

TREES Team

(Child exploitation and missing children)

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Staffing position

TREES:

CE and Missing Operational Lead
CE and Missing Co-ordinator
CE and Missing Business Support (Part time – 22.20 hours)
3 full time Family Support Workers
1 Exploitation Senior Social Worker
2 Exploitation Social Workers
Young Person's Substance Advisor

There are no current vacancies within the TREES team, and all positions are permanently recruited to.

Exploitation:

Overview of developments of Exploitation Responses:

January 2020 – regrade of the Exploitation Operational Lead post to Team Manager (in view of additional responsibilities and increase in work volume since launch of the exploitation pathway in Sept 2019).

November 2020 – Exploitation Social Worker seconded from mainstream children's social care team, this position became permanent and uplifted to Senior Social Worker as part of the **April 2021** growth.

March 2021 – 2 x 22.2-hour Family Support Workers (FSW) and 1 x 22.2 business admin – because of funding transferred from an early help (vacancy) in order to take on additional responsibilities around return home interviews, (children who go missing from home/care), and bespoke exploitation direct support work.

September 2021 – growth agreed to increase FSW to 3 x full time, additional 2 social workers and 1 x young person's substance misuse worker

2022 – TREES now produces a quarterly newsletter which is widely distributed across the partnership. This has been highly acclaimed to be one of the best in the country by the National Working Group (NWG).

2023 – TREES were awarded the Directors Recognition Award at the Annual Staff Awards Event

July 2025 – Shropshire win a Home Office BID to pilot our own National Referral Mechanism (NRM) devolved decision making panel.

Shropshire's response to exploitation and missing children is briefly outlined as follows:

- **Child Exploitation and Missing Power BI reports** are maintained; this enables us to capture key information that informs the profile of Shropshire's missing and exploited children, helps to target services and consider disruption across the county.
- **Exploitation triage** is held twice weekly in Compass, led by Clare Jervis (CE and Missing Operational Lead), the meeting includes colleagues from Police, Education, Health, YJS, Targeted Early Help Lead, Drug and Alcohol Services (We Are With You), Children's Society (CLIMB) and Branch Project. Triage will consider all new exploitation risk assessments, review risk assessments and police intelligence, assessment/judgement of risk is formed and actions agreed across the partnership.
- **Child Exploitation (CE) Panel** – held monthly, chaired by Jeanette Hill (Strategic Lead for CE and Missing Children), very well attended, looks at the profile of exploitation and missing across Shropshire, identifies actions across the partnership in regard to disruption and support, and considers all children identified as being at high risk of exploitation. A monthly report is prepared by Clare Jervis Team Manager, which covers all new referrals over the month, and any patterns and trends that are formulating.
- **Locality Meetings** – held across the county as and when required, convened in response to localised concerns around exploitation and held in areas of low referrals. Involves all key partnerships.
- **Mapping meetings** – held as and when the need is identified through either strategy meetings or case planning meetings and looks at specific children where exploitation is a feature, with the aim of identify associates and links where actions can be taken to reduce risk and keep a child safe.
- **Disruption meetings** - held county wide, led by Clare Jervis, targets and focused on multi agency response to concerns of exploitation and how these can be disrupted.
- **Children exiting gangs protocol** - held under s.47 of the Children Act 1989 – child protection response, consider risks when a young person is voicing they wish to exit/leave the gang, as this will increase risk to young person, their family and connections, so careful considerations needs to be given.
- **Professional consultations** – monthly consultations offered to all practitioners working with young person who want to discuss/reflect on concerns – consultation panel held by Children's Social Care (CSC), We Are With You, Targeted Early Help.
- **SSCP Tackling Exploitation Meeting** – led by Shropshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership, (SSCP), and chaired by Police, considers exploitation for both children and adults at a strategic level.
- **Missing Intervention Meetings** – held about children who have been reported missing 3 times in a 90 day period, ensuring an appropriate missing trigger plan is formulated to reduce the risk of child going missing again – looking at push and pull factors to reduce risks.

Data:

Exploitation

Q1

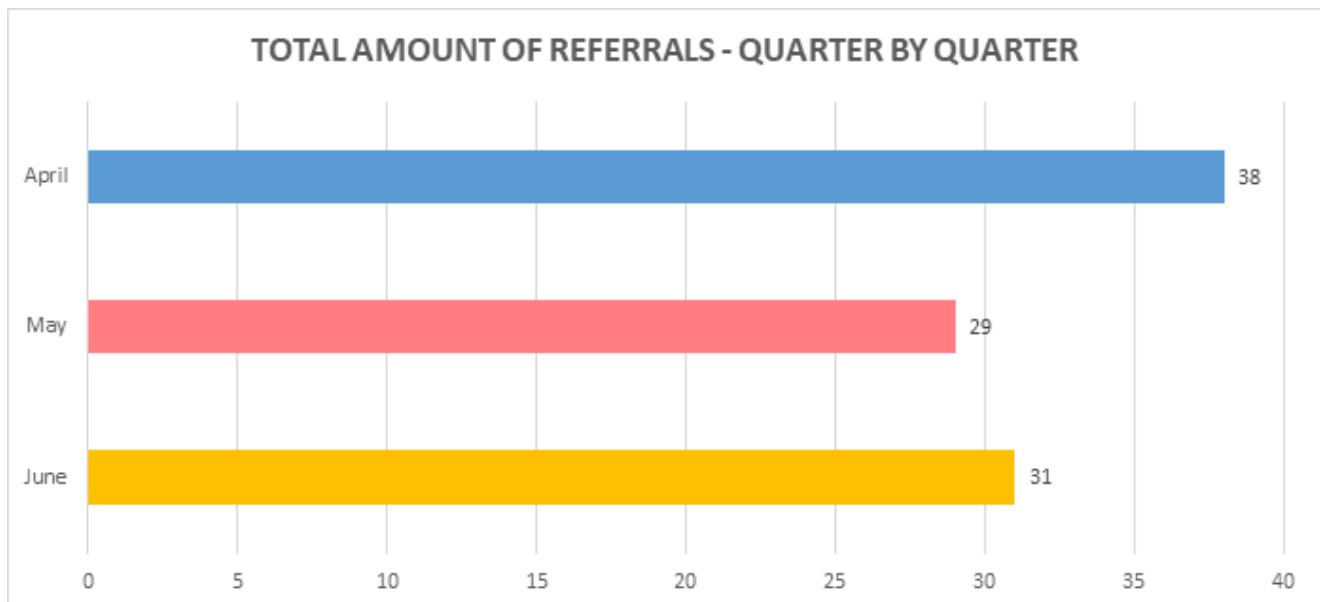
April 2024 – June 2024

Total Amount of Referrals

Total amount of referrals this quarter: 98

Type of Referrals

New referrals:	38
Re-referrals:	19
Reviews:	41



Q2

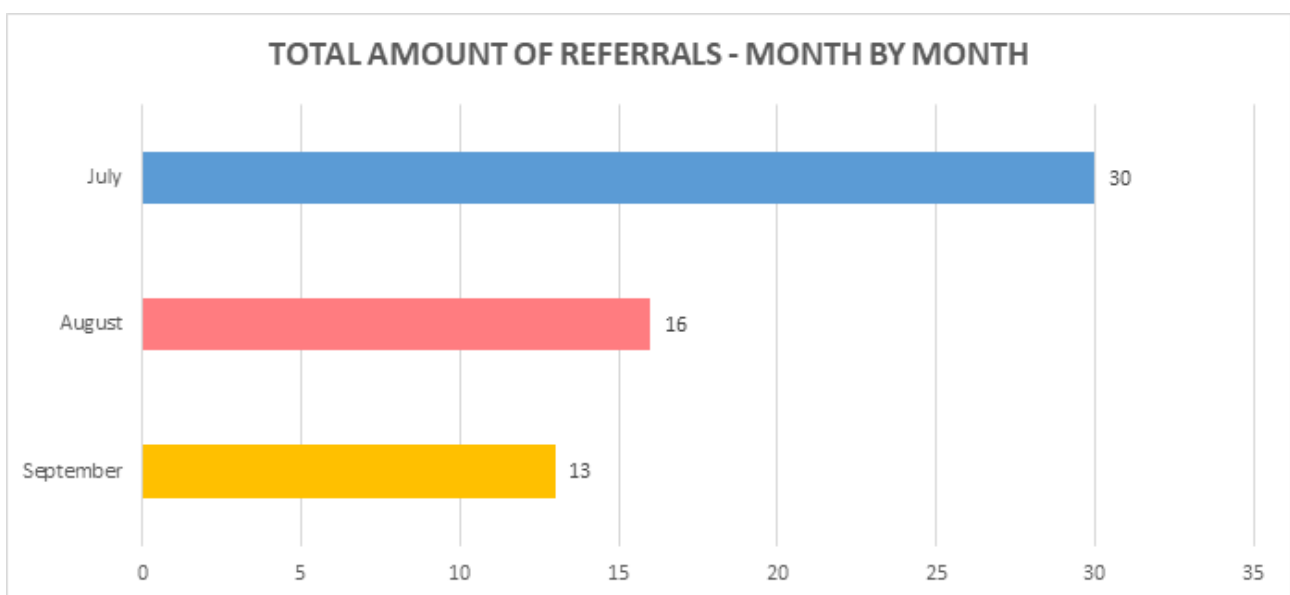
July – September 2024

Total Amount of Referrals

Total amount of referrals this quarter: 59

Type of Referrals

New referrals:	30
Re-referrals:	12
Reviews:	17



Q3

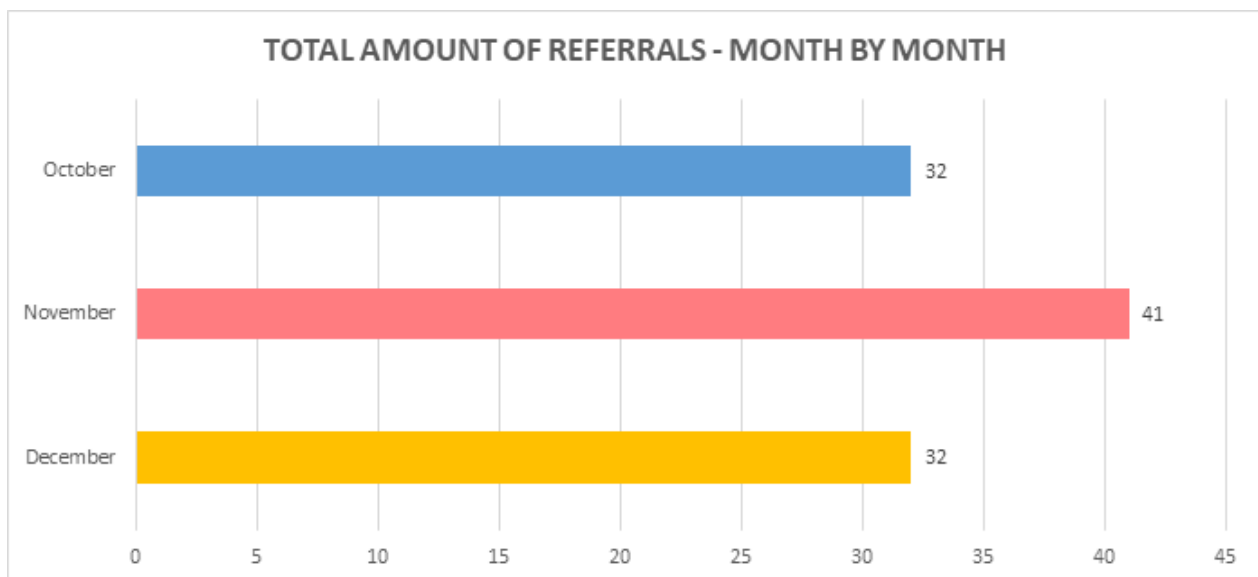
October – December 2024

Total Amount of Referrals

Total amount of referrals this quarter: 105

Type of Referrals

New referrals:	52
Re-referrals:	17
Reviews:	36



Q4

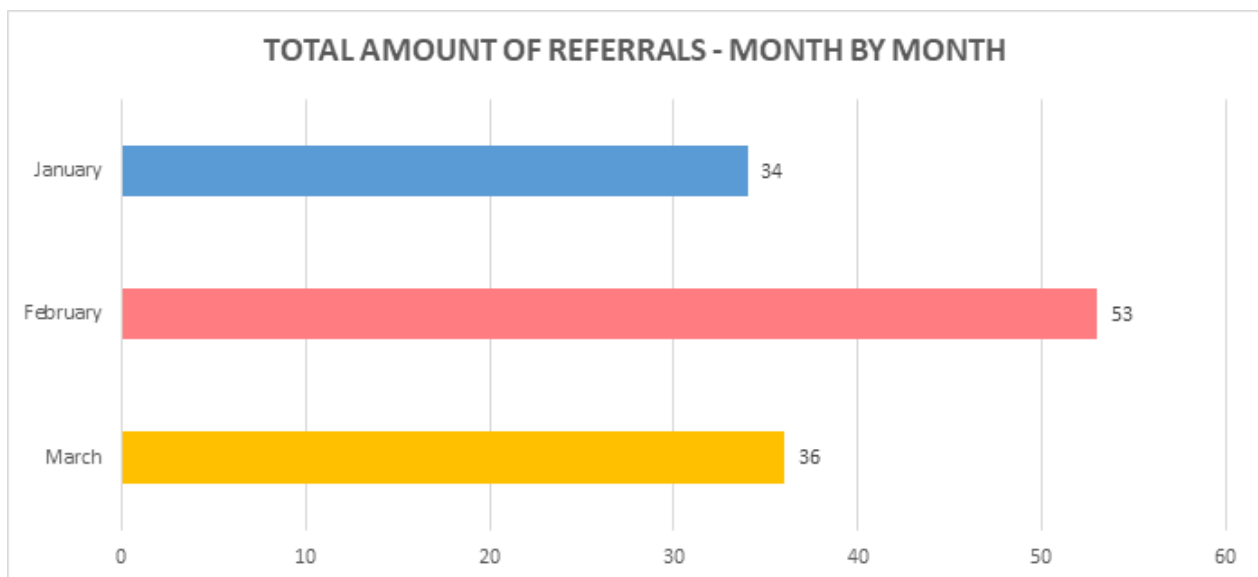
January 2025 – March 2025

Total Amount of Referrals

Total amount of referrals this quarter: 123

Type of Referrals

New referrals:	64
Re-referrals:	26
Reviews:	33



Missing children (from home and from care):

Q1

April 2024 – June 2024

Total missing episodes: 77 (not including OLA children)

Total number of children who went missing: 42

Gender

Male: 18

Female: 24

Return Home Interviews

Q1

CLA Return Home Interviews

Completed RHIs: 44

Declined RHIs: 20

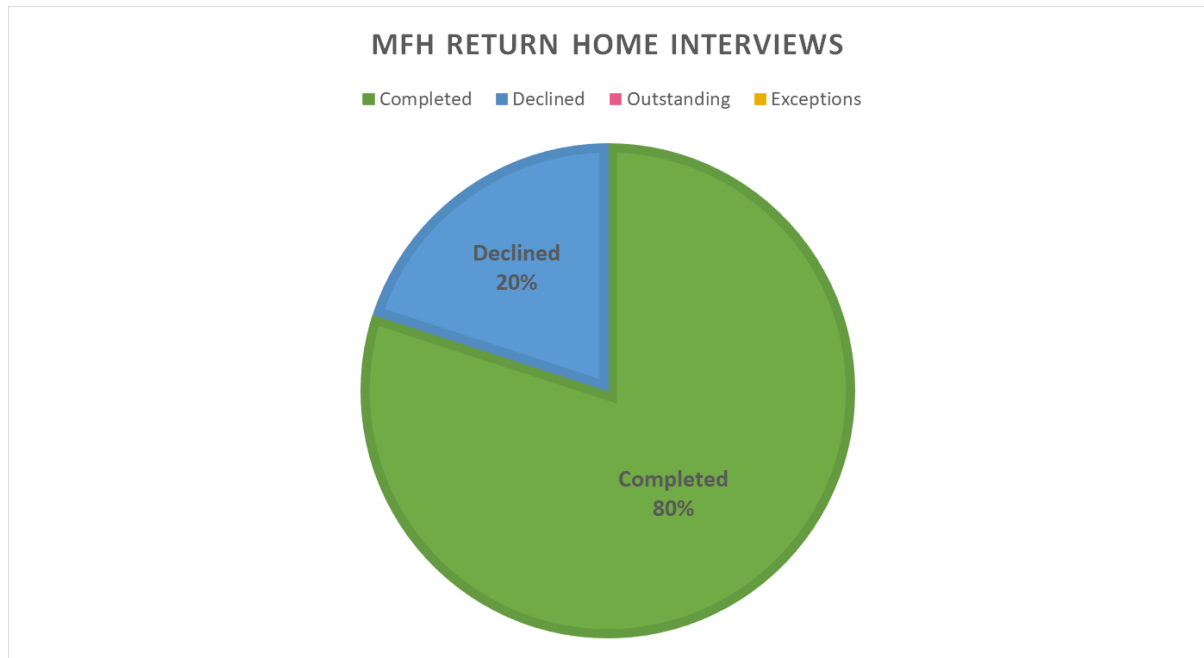
Outstanding RHIs: 0

Exceptions: 0



MFH Return Home Interviews (total episodes for Shropshire children missing from home: 33)

Completed RHIs:	24	Outstanding RHIs:	2
Declined RHIs:	7 (1 by parents)	Exceptions:	0



Q2

July – September 2024

Total missing episodes this financial year (not including OLA children): 63

Total number of children who went missing: 43

Gender

Male:	20
Female:	23

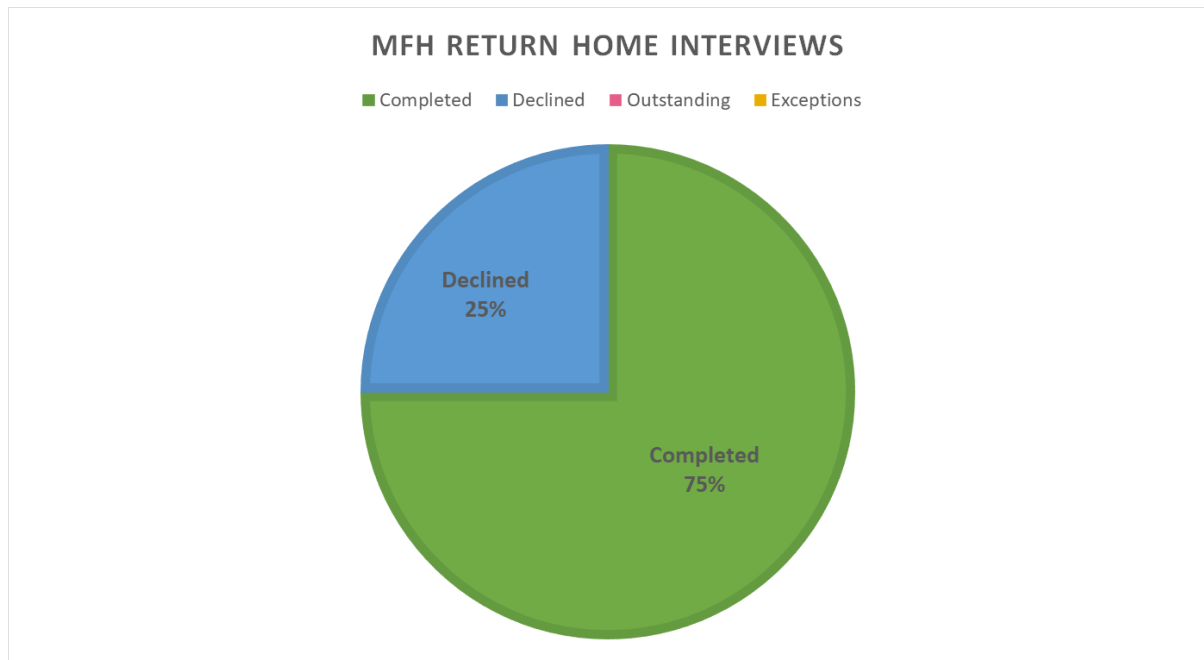
CLA Return Home Interviews (total episodes for Shropshire children missing from their placement: 43)

Completed RHIs:	27	Outstanding RHIs:	3
Declined RHIs:	13	Exceptions:	0



MFH Return Home Interviews (total episodes for Shropshire children missing from home: 20)

Completed RHIs:	15	Outstanding RHIs:	0
Declined RHIs:	5	Exceptions:	0



Q3

October – December 2024

Total Amount of Missing Episodes

Total amount of missing episodes this month (not including OLA children): 90

Total number of children who went missing: 50

Gender

Male: 25

Female: 25

CLA Return Home Interviews

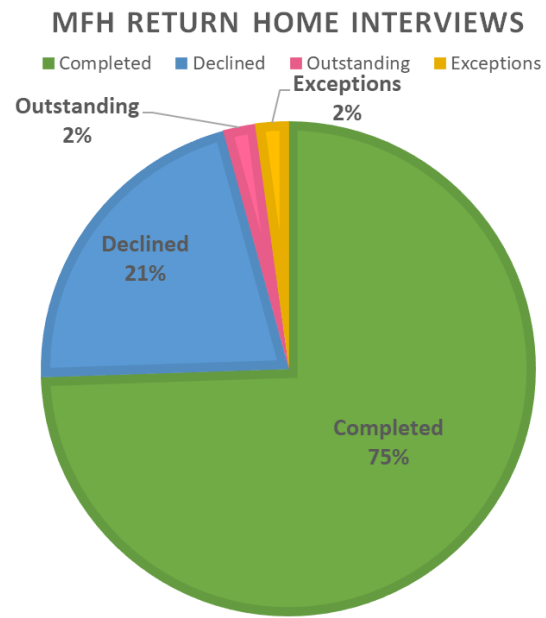
Completed: 27 (18 in timescale) Exceptions: 0

Declined: 15 Outstanding: 1



MFH Return Home Interviews

Completed:	39 (24 within timescale)	Exceptions:	2
Declined:	4	Outstanding:	1
Declined by parents:	1		



Q4**January – March 2024****Total Amount of Missing Episodes**

Total amount of missing episodes this month (not including OLA children): 83

Total number of children who went missing: 53

Gender

Male: 34

Female: 19

CLA Return Home Interviews (total episodes for Shropshire children missing from their placement: 36)

Completed RHIs:	29	Outstanding RHIs:	1
Declined RHIs:	6	Exceptions:	0

MFH Return Home Interviews (total episodes for Shropshire children missing from home: 47)

Completed RHIs:	35	Outstanding RHIs:	1
Declined RHIs:	10 (4 by parents)	Exceptions:	1

Overall Analysis

In brief during the year of 2024 and 2025, we have received a total of 385 risk assessments all of which have gone through our triage process, this is an increase of 4.6% on the previous year where we received 368 risk assessments in total. These risk assessments are made up from new referrals (84), re-referrals (74) and review of existing risk assessments (127). Quarter 4 (Jan – March 25) was the busiest in terms of most numbers of new referrals received at 64.

Breakdown of types of exploitation:

Q1

Type of Exploitation (number includes 18 cases where both CSE & CCE are occurring)

Number of CSE referrals: 43

Number of CCE referrals: 73

Q2

Type of Exploitation (number includes 10 cases where both CSE & CCE are occurring)

Number of CSE referrals: 26

Number of CCE referrals: 43

Q3

Type of Exploitation (number includes 27 cases where both CSE & CCE are occurring)

Number of CSE referrals: 44

Number of CCE referrals: 88

Q4

Type of Exploitation (number includes 25 cases where both CSE & CCE are occurring)

Number of CSE referrals: 45

Number of CCE referrals: 103

We can see from the above data that Child Criminal Exploitation is the prevalent risk within Shropshire with 307 children identified within this risk category, this makes up 66% of the total number.

In regard to gender: Males account for the biggest proportion at 223 compared to 162 females, quarterly breakdown as follows:

Q1

Male:	55
Female:	43

Q2

Male:	32
Female:	27

Q3

Male:	59
Female:	46

Q4

Male:	77
Female:	46

The TREES team has continued throughout the year to address exploitation within the county, work in partnership with multi agencies and support young people as appropriate. A brief breakdown of their work has included:

Quarter 1:

George Davies & Clare Jervis completed an internal audit of the Substance misuse pathway.

Method; random dip samples of YPs and professionals attending the weekly consultations.

Findings - to be improved.

- Professionals taking too long to complete action to refer to WAWY.
- Missed opportunities when referring early on
- When referred cannot see attached form so hard to track open cases.

Findings - positive.

- Timely and thorough response from WAWY when referred, good outcomes when working with WAWY.

- Pathway followed in every sample and WAWY action recommended consistently.
- No evidence of SMA involvement until meet & greet completed/WAWY offered in first instance.

Recommendations:

- Possible implementation of substance misuse 'flag' on LCS/EHM for ongoing SM issues to be reviewed quarterly and track open SM cases.
- Where substance misuse is identified early – invite to consultation.
- Ensuring pathway is utilised sooner to avoid 'drift and delay' to the young people and prevent further CE escalation.
- Be more specific around standardising WAWY referrals are completed whenever a SM issue is mentioned.
- Recommend SMART implementation during consultation process to action targets in a timely way.
- WAWY attendance consultations could improve referrals – potential for Sonya Jones Service Manager WAWY to visit End to End, have a clear voice to senior managers by the time they get to consultation there are missed opportunities.
- To address the delay between consultation and WAWY referral - create form for LCS for Smarter Screening tool to reduce delay between referrals.

Quarter 2:

This quarter, the TREES Exploitation and Missing Team focused on several key areas to address child exploitation and missing children. Their efforts included:

Early Identification and Intervention: The team worked on identifying children at risk of exploitation early and intervening to prevent risks from escalating. This involved close collaboration with social workers, family support workers, and schools to ensure timely referrals and support.

Multi-Agency Collaboration: The team emphasized the importance of multi-agency collaboration, working closely with social care, police, educational institutions, and health services. This collaboration was crucial in providing comprehensive support to vulnerable children and addressing the complex nature of exploitation.

Disruption Activities: The team conducted disruption activities in high-risk areas identified as hot spots for exploitation. This included executing warrants at local businesses involved in illegal activities, such as selling vapes and alcohol to young people, and addressing concerns about unexplained money transfers linked to drug-related activities.

Support for High-Risk Children: The team provided targeted support to high-risk children, including those with multiple missing episodes and those involved in criminal activities. This support included harm reduction work, counselling services, and educational re-engagement programs.

Addressing Substance Misuse: The team addressed the high levels of substance misuse among exploited children, providing education and support to reduce the risks associated with drug and alcohol use. They worked with substance misuse advisors to gather information on local trends and provide targeted interventions.

Community Engagement: The team engaged with the community to raise awareness about the risks of exploitation and the importance of early intervention. This included working with local businesses, community groups, and parents to identify and address potential risks.

Data Analysis and Reporting: The team analysed data from referrals and missing episodes to identify patterns and trends. This analysis helped inform their strategies and interventions, ensuring that resources were targeted effectively to address the most pressing issues.

Overall, the TREES Exploitation and Missing Team's work this quarter focused on early identification, multi-agency collaboration, disruption activities, targeted support for high-risk children, addressing substance misuse, community engagement, and data analysis. Their efforts aimed to provide comprehensive support to vulnerable children and address the complex and multifaceted nature of child exploitation.

Quarter 3:

Children whose risk levels have reduced.

Out of the 43 children reviewed over the three months, we have seen a total of 22 children's exploitation risk levels reduce from medium risk to Low risk. Additionally, 2 children's risk levels reduced from High risk to Low risk.

- **Positive Changes:** 29 young people's plans/interventions have affected positive change, reducing their risk levels.
- **Re-engagement with Education:** 6 children are reported to have re-engaged back into education, including alternative education and higher education.
- **Improved Relationships:** 4 young people's relationships with their parents/carers have improved.

Analysis of where plans have been successful: The decrease in risk for certain young people can be attributed to several key factors and interventions, including the intense support offered by family support workers within the TREES team. The use of CE pathway tools and assessments ensured that risks were identified and responded to promptly, helping to mitigate risks before they escalated. Completing the national referral mechanism in a timely manner and responding quickly once a conclusive grounds decision was made ensured that appropriate actions were taken without delay. Regular updates to the Single Competency Agency (SCA) assisted in their decision-making process, ensuring they had the most current information to act upon. High-risk children being presented at panel ensured that their cases received the necessary attention and scrutiny, leading to more targeted interventions.

Ensuring that the child's voice was evident through each agency case file meant that the young people's perspectives and needs were considered in all decisions and actions taken. Regular updates to and involvement of the British Transport Police (BTP) in strategy meetings where necessary helped in addressing risks related to transportation and movement, which are critical in cases of exploitation. Reviewing the CE risk assessment tool every three months or sooner if risks increased ensured that any changes in the young person's situation were promptly addressed.

Outstanding evidence of multi-agency working, with clear evidence that CE risks were being routinely scrutinized, highlighted the collaborative efforts in addressing exploitation. Clear evidence that CE triage recommendations were followed up with SMART actions and recommendations to disrupt exploitation concerns ensured that the interventions were specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound.

Holding mapping meetings in a timely way and ensuring key professionals attended helped in coordinating efforts and sharing information, which was crucial in addressing and reducing risks. Family support workers within the TREES team played a significant role in reducing risks by supporting school attendance, engaging in harm reduction work, and providing consistent and reliable support, which helped in building trust and stability for the young people.

Quarter 4:

Children Whose Risk Levels Have Reduced

During Q4 2024-25, several children's exploitation risk levels were reduced. In January, 6 children's risk levels reduced from medium to low risk. Positive engagement with the TREES team, re-engagement in education, and improved

relationships with parents/carers contributed to this reduction. In February, 3 children's risk levels reduced from medium to low risk. The TREES team worked on re-engaging young people in education and improving relationships with parents/carers. In March, 2 children's risk levels reduced, with re-engagement in education, harm reduction work, and improved relationships with parents/carers.

Children Whose Risk Levels Have Increased

During Q4 2024-25, there were a few cases where children's risk levels increased. In January, 1 child's risk level increased from low to medium risk, and 1 child's risk level increased from medium to high risk. Concerns included ongoing missing episodes, police protection, and familial influences. In February and March, there were no cases where children's risk levels increased.

Annual Report prepared by:

Jeanette Hill

Service Manager

Compass, Assessment Teams, TREES and EHAST

13th October 2025

Annual Report 2024 - 2025

Children's Services Public Law Outline (PLO) and Care Proceedings.

Impact of practice and outcomes achieved.

Introduction

This report is about how Shropshire Children's Services use the Public Law Outline (PLO) process and how we work through our care proceedings. The report will evidence the significant changes we have made to both processes and the positive impact of these upon our children and families as they are now getting the right outcomes at the right time with less delay.

The Public Law Outline (PLO) is a process that happens before going to court. It is used when we are very worried about a child's safety or wellbeing. The aim is to give parents one last chance to make changes so that court action can be avoided. Parents get a letter before proceedings explaining the concerns and inviting them to a meeting. At the meeting, the Team Manager and Social Worker – on behalf of Shropshire Council – explain why we are worried and what needs to change. Parents are strongly encouraged to bring a solicitor (they are entitled to free legal advice when in PLO). We then agree a targeted time limited plan of action together and review this with regular meetings. If improvements are made, we are then able to successfully end PLO and avoid the need for court. If not, we may start care proceedings if our concerns remain high and we cannot manage the risks to the children any other way.

Care Proceedings are court cases where the LA asks a judge for legal orders to protect a child. The most common orders are:

- Care Order – we share parental responsibility and can decide where the child lives.
- Supervision Order – we support and monitor the child at home under a Child in Need Plan or a Child Protection Plan for the duration of the Order (typically 6 or 12 months).

The court only makes these orders if the threshold test in the Children Act 1989 is met in that the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm and the harm is because of the care they are getting (or not getting) or because they are beyond parental control. The Children Act 1989 sets out the law for child protection and care orders and the Children and Families Act 2014 says care proceedings should finish within 26 weeks (unless there are exceptional reasons).

Court

There continues to be clear progress in our court proceedings – children are escalating into court at the right time and are concluding on a plan of permanency swifter than in previous years.

How do we know?

- Of the applications made to court in the specific scrutiny period (Oct 2024 to end of March 2025) the court granted 83% of the Orders requested by the Social Work team (this equates to 16 children out of 78). For the remainder, the court made an alternative Order. On none of these applications did the court consider that the application should not have been made. It should be noted that of those 16 children where an alternative Order was made, the court granted the original Order requested on 3 several weeks later - conceding that the Social Work Team had assessed the circumstances correctly. We are therefore getting our thresholds right when we make the decision to commence court proceedings in order to keep children safe.
- The number of Legal Planning Meetings has significantly increased from 169 in 2022 to 192 in 2023 to 305 in 2024. This demonstrates increased senior management oversight as they were co-chaired by the Assistant Director Donessa Gray and Service Manager for Case Management and Court Amanda Beaufoy. More children are now heard at this meeting to ensure that plans are effective.
- Between October 2024 and March 2025, 78 children in 42 families entered proceedings. Between that same date, 134 children in 75 families ended proceedings. This demonstrates a high turnover of court work.
- Out of 134 children concluding proceedings in the scrutiny period (Oct 2024 to March 2025) – 43 children concluded within 26 weeks (meaning 32% of children concluded in timescales). The average length of proceedings is currently 42 weeks which demonstrates a continuous trajectory of improvements around compliance and timescales despite working with a higher number of children.
 - In Jan-Dec 2021, average week was 49 weeks (136 children concluded)
 - In Jan-Dec 2022, average week was 47 weeks (165 children concluded)
 - In Jan-Dec 2023, average week was 58 weeks (150 children concluded)
 - In Jan-Dec 2024, average week was 44 weeks (216 children concluded)

As evidenced above, the service concluded a much higher number of children in 2024 compared to previous years, yet the average number of weeks is the lowest in the 4 years. There are now weekly compliance meetings to ensure that the service is on track with meeting court directions in timescales and this will contribute to the continuing decrease in average weeks in proceedings – for 2025 thus far this is 41 weeks, and this is expected to be less by the end of the year.

- As of end of March 2025, there were 16 children in 63 families in live court proceedings.

PLO

The primary aim of our PLO (Public Law Outline) process is to prevent children needing to escalate into court. The secondary aim is to complete all appropriate assessments so that if ultimately children cannot be kept safe in their families, the court has all the information required at an earlier stage to make the final decisions around permanency – resulting in shorter lengths of proceedings.

As set out above, there is clear evidence that the length of court proceedings is reducing year on year and part of the reason for this is that our PLO process is becoming more effective.

Current data

- 67 children in 40 families entered PLO in the scrutiny period (Oct 2024 to March 2025)
- 74 children in 39 families concluded PLO in the same period – of these 17 families escalated into court proceedings and 22 families did not require further escalation, PLO therefore successfully ensured that 56.4% of families were able to keep their children safe.
- As of the end of March 2025 there were 63 children in 37 families in PLO.

Ongoing work in respect of Public Law Outline (PLO) and Care Proceedings

- Joint training around PLO delivered between Shropshire and Wiltshire to Social Workers on 17/01/25 and this is now being embedded.
- Trailblazer pilot between March 2024 and March 2025 involving all Local Authorities attached to the Wolverhampton/Telford Court (Shropshire, Sandwell, Dudley, Wolverhampton, Telford and Walsall) – this has resulted in Social Workers receiving training around the Parent Assess model, risk assessments and sexual harm

assessments (funded by the pilot). There have also been a number of excellent resources and guides created by the pilot which have been rolled out across the service to support Social Workers step by step in PLO and court.

- Initial PLO letter for families has been re-written following feedback from court experienced parents – this was launched 07/04/25 with an expectation that Team Managers quality assure every letter to ensure it fits the template.
- PLO Plan created using national guidance – this will ensure more robust management and tracking of children in PLO and will support multi-agency and CP Chair oversight of PLO alongside the Child Protection Plan. This was rolled out to all Social Workers for immediate implementation as of 14/04/25 with supplementary training offered.
- Continued emphasis on Family Group Conferences and Family Meetings (where a family may not agree to the larger, more formalised process) to support children remaining within their families – this question is explored in every Legal Planning Meeting and forms part of every PLO agenda.

The following outlines the demand and performance of the service, comparing 2023/24 to 2024/25. Demonstrating a full year's comparison that reflects the improvements in the service delivery. This is important as this shows the impact of the work outlined above and results in children and young people's plans and arrangements for their long terms care (permanence arrangements) being completed timelier. This enables children and young people to understand their forever family situations clearly and feel safer in those arrangements.

- There has been a 30.04% increase in legal planning meetings held since 2023, this shows a greater management oversight and thorough decision making by the teams, avoiding drift and delay in practice and securing the best outcome for children and young people.
- For children who were made subject of court proceedings, there was an increase of 15.82% in applications being submitted to the court compared to 23/24.
- The number of children where care proceedings were concluded in the period between 24/25 was 39.13% higher than the year before.
- The average number of weeks children were subject to care proceedings decreased significantly during 24/25 by 28.07% compared to 23/24.
- This outcome is a result of increased management oversight that is ensuring all court directions are complied with and not allowing timetables to drift off track, this also

ensured children secure their permanency quicker often meaning they are no longer children looked after.

- Oversight of the Service Manager has ensured that all court directions are complied with. This has resulted in fewer extension applications being submitted into the court, resulting in huge cost savings for the department.
- Children entering Public Law Outline (PLO), the process where we can work with families alongside lawyers to try and avoid care proceedings, if possible, has almost doubled in 2024/24 compared to 2023/24.
- This results in the service giving families additional support earlier in the process to avoid court proceedings.
- More children entering PLO allows work with the family to be frontloaded prior to any court application. This has supported families to step back into child in need, early help and community services more quickly, and decreased the length of time court proceedings when they are actioned due to comprehensive assessments and expected supports already having been in place to try and avoid the application.
- During 2024/25, 70 children were taken into police protection (PP), this is when police use their powers to be able to take children and young people to a place of safety for 72 hours maximum duration if they deem them to be unsafe in the circumstances they find them, usually this is supported by another family member or foster placement if available.
- There had been a spike in this number earlier during 24/25. This was addressed by a multi-agency audit with police and the Department for Education advisor. The learning from this resulted in a significant decrease in the numbers of children made subject to police protection from January 2025.
- 2024/25 Private law application matters where members of the public make applications to the courts directly, saw a significant increase by 61% for requests for section 7 reports.
- These are requests by the court for a social worker to assess a child, young person's wellbeing, usually relating to families separating or custody applications made by parents.
- There was also a 38% decrease for requests for section 37 reports. This is a request from the court for a social worker to undertake an assessment of risk in relation to children and young people's home circumstances and parental relationships and care. This can sometimes result in a referral to children's services and child protection or care proceedings being required.

- 8 children were made subject to Deprivation of Liberty Orders (DOLS). Usually these are applications made to the court following a significant period of intervention with children or young people where we require legal support to be able to keep them safe. This is a rigorous process reviewed regularly and required to have the Directors oversight.

Legal Planning Meetings (LPMS):

These are meetings held to determine what legal status the service has for intervening with the family presented. Usually, the Local Authority have been working with the family for a significant period and unfortunately the children's needs are not being met sufficiently, or there has been an incident of abuse that has required immediate intervention and the sharing of parental responsibility to ensure the children are safe.

LPMS are held with the council's Legal Team and Service Managers chair these meetings given their gravity and potential impact on the family going forward. We do hope that LPMS also enable families to make informed decisions alongside their lawyers/advocates about how they will progress with their children's care and what services we should be supporting them with to ensure the children are retained at home, if possible, safely.

Number held:

24/25: 290 (30% Increase)

23/24: 223

Outcomes of the LPMS 24/25:

- Issue proceedings: 107
- Enter PLO: 80
- Continue PLO: 23
- End PLO: 32
- DOLS: 4
- No Action/CP: 34
- Other: 10

Care Proceedings Initiated:

Care Proceedings are initiated by the Local Authority usually seeking to secure parental responsibility legally for children that have been found to be at risk of harm and suffering as a result. The Local Authority seeks an order from the court that will allow the Local Authority

to look after the child/children if needed to ensure their safety whilst we continue to work with the family to reduce any risks known and identify the safest long-term arrangements for children and young people as quickly as possible. This process requires significant assessment and potentially specialist opinions to inform the courts final decision making. Alongside the families views and the children and young people involved.

24/25: 183 children in 106 families (15% increase)

23/24 158 children in 97 families

Legal Status outcomes during proceedings.

- Children subject to Interim Care Order application: 168
- Children subject to Interim Supervision Order application 15
- 87 children subject to urgent court application
- 82 children were in PLO at the time of issuing

Care Proceedings concluded:

24/25: 224 children in 133 families concluded proceedings (39% increase)

23/24: 161 children in 89 families concluded proceedings

Legal Status final orders made by the court

- Care Order: 113
- Care & Placement Order: 26
- Supervision Order: 62
- Special Guardianship Order: 8
- Child Arrangement Order: 6
- Other: (non-agency adoption): 1
- No Order: 8

Timeliness of proceedings

National average is expected to be 26 weeks.

24/25- Average week in proceedings: 41 weeks (28% improvement)

23/24- Previous year- average weeks in proceedings: 57 weeks

PLO entered:

24/25: 148 children in 80 families (92% increase)

23/24: 77 children in 42 families

PLO ended:

24/25- 144 children in 83 families ended PLO (33% increase)

23/24- 108 children in 62 families ended PLO

Outcomes achieved:

- 75 children stepped up into court
- 69 children stepped down from PLO

Private law matters

Issue	23/24	24/25	% increase/decrease
Section 37	13	8	38% decrease
Section 7	13	21	61% increase

In conclusion

This report shows the significant progress made by Shropshire Children's Services in both the Public Law Outline (PLO) process and care proceedings over 2024/2025. The service has shown a clear commitment to improving outcomes for children and families, with robust management oversight, improved training, and streamlining processes resulting in more timely interventions and permanency planning.

Key achievements include a substantial increase in Legal Planning Meetings, improved compliance with court directions, and a notable reduction in the average length of care proceedings—even as the number of children supported has grown. The PLO process has become more effective at preventing unnecessary escalation to court, enabling the majority of families to keep their children safe without requiring court intervention.

Initiatives such as joint training between Shropshire and Wiltshire, the Trailblazer pilot, and the development of new court and PLO walkthrough resources have empowered social workers and strengthened multi-agency partnership working. These improvements have led to a decrease in non-compliance with court directions, significant cost savings in terms of costs for legal and ongoing placements, and—most importantly—better outcomes for children and young people.

Overall, the service's dedication to continuous improvement and best practice has ensured that children and families receive the right support at the right time. Shropshire Children's

Services is well positioned to continue delivering high-quality, timely, and effective safeguarding interventions, securing positive futures for those it serves.

Amanda Beaufoy

Service Manager

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Parenting Strategy

Annual Report

April 2024 to March 2025

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Overview

This report outlines service delivery from the Parenting Team, both to parents/carers and professionals. When comparing numbers with the previous year, staffing levels need to be taken in consideration as they differ significantly for the Parenting Practitioners. Last year we delivered our service with 5 Practitioners in the first half and 4 in the second half of the financial year. This year we had 1 Practitioner less for the whole year compared to last year. In addition, one new Practitioner only works 30 hours compared to previously all Practitioners working 37 hours a week.

We lost a Parenting Practitioner post through the Early Help restructure, meaning the team now consists of 5 instead of 6 Parenting Practitioners.

We started the year with 3 Parenting Practitioners and 2 vacant posts. These were recruited to in June 2024. One Practitioner started in July and was able to deliver groups and 121 support from September 2024. The other recruit went on maternity leave in August 2024 and is due to join our team in June 2025. She did not start in our team prior to going on maternity leave.

The Parenting Team has had one less Parenting Practitioner in the team over the past 2 years for a variety of reasons, however, has maintained and in some areas increased service delivery.

Note: *Equivalent data from 2023/24 report is shown in ()*

Data accuracy:

Data from groups and workshops delivered solely by a school is limited and cannot be captured on the PowerBI report. Data is also only as accurate as parents/carers volunteer to disclose and at times end of group evaluations are not completed.

Data on PowerBi is not accurate due to potential human error but also gaps in ability to pull data and ability to record information to enable data collation. This has been flagged and explored with the Reporting & Analytics Team. The Parenting Team keeps records and data separate and I am using mainly our internal data for this report. Therefore, data in this report might differ from PowerBi.



Understanding Your Child/SEND groups

Data

- Total number of Understanding Your Child groups = 15 (14)
- Total number of parents/carers who have completed a group = 82 + (90)
 - 10 (8) universal UYC groups
 - 9 delivered face 2 face, all but one were co-delivered with schools
 - 1 delivered virtually by 2 Parenting Practitioners
 - 5 (6) SEND UYC groups
 - 2 delivered face 2 face, co-delivered with BeeU
 - 3 delivered virtually by 2 Parenting Practitioners
- Retention

Our retention data for groups is 72% (78%). There is no difference between the retention between face to face or virtual groups. Both at 68%

I have liaised with the Solihull Approach to find retention data to compare to ours. A dip sample from the Solihull Approach using 18 groups showed a retention rate of 72.26%

Conclusion

Considering that the Parenting Team has had one Parenting Practitioner less, compared to last year's report, the numbers of groups and total numbers of attendees look very favourable. Especially as the numbers of 121 interventions has also almost remained the same (comparing the 2 years and considering the staffing level). Total numbers of parents have decreased slightly; however, this is most likely linked to offering more face to face groups. Virtual groups tend to have higher numbers than face to face groups.

Evaluation

Feedback remains positive, with only 2 parents feeling they had not improved in achieving their parenting goals set at the start of the group. Further information and data can be found here: [Parenting - Power BI](#)

Please note: as mentioned at the start of the report, the total numbers of groups and parents attending is incorrect in the PowerBi report. This is due to the inability to separate groups correctly that start on the same day. However, the collation of the goals, prior and after the group remains correct.

Parents/carers also complete an evaluation at the end with the 3 questions below:

Parents/carers felt the following had changed as a result of attending the group:

- Better understanding and how to communicate with my children
- I have a lot more confidence in myself as a mother
- Better clarity on my eldest daughter's difficulties and needs. Best way to manage them and keep family circle running smoother. Ideas to help me aid them the best way I can presently and in the future.
- Being more patient and taking a step back from a situation unlike before
- I'm noticing patterns and listening better to my son. Getting less stressed

Parents/carers felt they had learned the following from attending the group:

- I have learned that my child is acting this way because of how he is affected by Autism/ADHD.
- I have learnt a lot more about my son and his ways of thinking and how situations around him can affect him.
- Patience, coping strategies, that I am not alone, Parenting styles.
- What I need to do instead of getting angry with my children. Realising you need to repair the damage done after an argument.



- My understanding of my children's emotions

Other comments parents have made regarding the groups:

- Having people in the same situation and talking about the problems we experience was invaluable
- I am very thankful for this course and it has been a real eye opener and has helped me in so many ways that I can now put in place for my son but also myself as a parent
- Don't feel like I was being judged and very informative, friendly group
- I found the course very useful and have really enjoyed meeting up as a group and realising how common issues with children are
- I have enjoyed the course it's nice to know I'm not alone it is sad that this is the last session

Conclusion

The benefits of groups and the positive impact of social learning theory within groups is clearly demonstrated in the comments. Mentioning the benefit of meeting with other parents and getting a feeling of 'not being alone or the only one' would not be able to be replicated by 121 support, online courses or our PHSL.

Longer-term impact

Feedback from parents/carers

11 parents/carers gave feedback 6-9 month following their completion of the groups.

64% (70%) reported that they had either remained or improved with regards to the score they gave themselves for achieving their goals at the end of the group.

36% (30%) reported that they would score themselves lower for achieving the goals at the moment.

However, similar to last year, looking at the feedback in more detail it can be seen that these parents report a change in circumstances e.g. 'age and hormones', summer holidays which don't have the structure of school routine.

Most parent/carers commented on the benefit and importance of understanding feelings and one parent mentioned that they are still in touch with the other parents from the group.

During these calls, we remind parents/carers about key points of the group and the wider parenting and EH offer for support.

Feedback from schools

A new trial has started where Parenting Practitioners are connecting with schools 6 months after they have delivered a group. The Practitioner is exploring with the school, what impact the school has noticed on behaviour and engagement both, from the parent/carer who attended the group as well as the child/ren who attend the school. As there are parents/carers who attend groups at schools, without their children attending the setting and we rely on schools giving us the feedback which does not always happen, the numbers for this feedback are small. We are planning on growing the numbers by altering the way the feedback is collected slightly. Feedback was collected in March 2025 to discuss the impact of groups which were held in the Autumn Term 2024.

The following questions were asked:

Has there been a positive change in the child's behaviour following the parents/carers attendance of the UYG group?

- 3 yes
- 1 no

What positive change in the child's behaviour have you noticed?

- More settled, not as emotional
- Bit more calm
- X is very settled, all the children are happy in school



Has there been a positive change in the child's relationships with adults in the school following the parents/carers attendance of the UYG group?

- 4 yes

What positive change in relationships between the child and adults in school have you noticed?

- More able to regulate his emotions
- Working towards more positive interactions. Boxhall profile done behaviour plan in place
- Making progress with the adults
- Confident with the school staff to talk about any issues

Has there been a positive change in the child's relationships with peers in the school following the parents/carers attendance of the UYG group?

- 3 yes
- 1 no

What positive change in relationships between the child and their peers have you noticed?

- Plays more with others
- X is starting to play more with his peer
- Both older girls have good friendships groups and are caring

Has there been a positive change in the child's emotional and mental well-being following the parents/carers attendance of the UYG group?

- 4 yes

What positive change in the child's emotional and mental well-being have you noticed?

- Fewer emotional outbursts
- Slightly less reactive than previously
- yes, comes into school happier and morning drop off is easier
- Remained stable, X has been working on home life

Has there been a positive change in the parents/carers relationship with school/staff following them attending the UYG group?

- 4 yes

What positive change in the parent/carer's relationship with school/staff have you noticed?

- No reports of negative comments
- Appears to feel more able to talk to school. Feel they are not being judged as parent/carers
- Absolutely, communicates better, is more approachable and seems more relaxed, is happy to ask for support
- Approachable, will talk to staff, has shown good insight since the group

Has there been a positive change in the parents/carers emotional and mental well-being following them attending the UYG group?

- 3 yes
- 1 no

What positive change in the parent/carer's emotional and mental well-being have you noticed?

- Was interacting with group and was a social connection.
- Laura is more relaxed and open to ideas to support her and her children
- Katie is doing a good job and will ask for support if she needs it, has grown in confidence. Noticed a difference in friendships with other parents.

Any other comments:

- From school facilitator point of view, she feels she benefited from being part of the group as had been isolated due to language barrier
- Mum is working well with the school, she is attending another workshop

Conclusion

Despite this being a small sample, it illustrates the wider impact the group has. It does not only impact on parenting in the home environment but can have a positive impact on the child's emotional well-being and in turn behaviour at school and of course then attainment. The relationship between school and parents/carers is vital to supporting the child in a holistic way. It is very positive to see that parents/carers were more open to engaging with school by talking and sharing more as well as attending other

workshops, following the group attendance. This shows that the work with parents/carers in groups has a direct positive impact on their child/ren.

Sleep Tight groups

Data

- A total of 8 (6) workshops were delivered to a total of 39 (39) parents/carers.
- Retention 67% (76%)

Next year, quantitative data around how much parents/cares feel they improved in achieving specific goals following the attendance of the group should be available.

Evaluation

Feedback from parents and carers has remained positive. Data was collected from 38 parents.

Below are some comments from the parent/carer evaluation forms:

What has changed as a result of attending the workshop

- A more structured bedtime routine.
- Understanding that routines are important and my attitude and feelings towards bedtime for the children.
- My confidence
- I feel like I'm able to identify positive and negatives that affect bedtime so I can adjust our routine healthier
- X has started sleeping about 2 hours earlier that she used to

What do you feel you have learned in this Workshop?

- That others are in similar situations
- A structure of bedtime routine, that I am not alone, and that other parents struggle to
- A better understanding of what kind of things can affect kids at bedtime foods etc that can make them hyper
- That all routines are different and not all children have the same issues
- Many tips on consistency, noise, calming before bedtime, bedroom comfort, foods that help with sleep, positive phrasing and rewarding etc

Similar to the UYC groups, parents are able to identify specific areas they have learnt new things in. The mentioning of understanding that other families are struggling too and not being the only one, is also a key theme and shows the benefits and importance of group work.

Impact

Feedback has been collected from 38 (33) parents/carers. Improvement of specific goals is positive with 36 (32) parents/carers reporting they felt at the end of the group they have improved in achieving their specific goal. 37 (39) of parents/carers felt they had improved their confidence in managing their child's bedtime and sleep routines at the end of the workshop. The parent who had remained at their score, had scored themselves at 10 to begin with.

121 parenting interventions

All 121 parenting interventions remain around 3 months long. This includes making contact with the parent/carer, arranging dates and if needed venues for the weekly session and carrying out a 10 week

intervention. The intervention is structured by weekly sessions which are 45 minutes long or if a couple is accessing the sessions, they will be 1.5hrs long.

When total numbers are compared to last year, it needs to be taken into consideration that every term our group delivery numbers change due to demand and take up. This in turn means if we deliver fewer groups, we will have more 121 interventions and vice versa. No 'average' can be given.

The previous report only gave the total number of interventions carried during the financial year and the total number of appointments.

The below data unpicks the 121 intervention in more detail. To have a comparison and be better able to draw conclusions, I have included detailed data from the last 2 financial years

Data

2023 - 2024

Total of 70 referrals

An additional 8 referrals, which were submitted in the previous year had been allocated in this financial year

Translated into 71 allocations and

Total of 96 interventions as 25 121 interventions had been allocated the previous year but finished in this financial year

- 10 interventions continued into the next financial year
- 52 interventions with outcome achieved
- 6 circumstances changed meaning 121 intervention no longer appropriate
- 3 accessed a group or online course instead
- 25 disengaged
- Levels of need: 64 (66%) Level 4; 14 (15%) Level 3; 18 (19%) Level 2

2024 – 2025

Total of 60 referrals

An additional 9 referrals, which were submitted in the previous year had been allocated in this financial year

Translated into 50 allocations

Total of 60 interventions as 10 121 interventions had been allocated the previous year but finished in this financial year

- 14 interventions continue into the next financial year
- 36 completed interventions
- 1 circumstance changed meaning 121 intervention no longer appropriate
- 9 disengaged
- Levels of need: 48 (80%) Level 4; 5 (8%) Level 3; 7 (12%) Level 2



Conclusion

- 16 less interventions have been completed in 2024/25 compared to the previous year. This is linked to the team having had 1 full time Parenting Practitioner less in the team for the whole year.
- The number of allocations cannot easily be compared as this is not only influenced by staffing levels but also by the duration of each intervention (some will require less time e.g. if a parent/carer disengages and some might be more than 3 months, e.g. if the parent/carer has other important appointments which take priority over the weekly interventions or if it is felt that continuing with the intervention would support the ability to sustain change in the future). The number of groups delivered by each Parenting Practitioner impacts also on their capacity to carry out 121 interventions. Lastly, Practitioners are able to carry out more intervention if these are delivered virtually. If a Practitioner has to travel to meet a parent/carer for face to face sessions this can impact significantly on capacity, as travel, especially into the south east which hasn't got the Parenting Practitioner in post yet, can be very time-consuming for a small team covering the whole county.
- There were 10 fewer referrals received in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24. Please note the significant rise in referrals for Level 4 families. As the Parenting Team does not routinely work with Level 2 and 3 families on a 121 basis and any referrals for Level 2 and 3 families are managed considering the capacity within the team, the decrease in 121 interventions for families on Level 2 or 3 is a direct link to working with more Level 4 families instead.
- This demonstrates the flexibility in the team and also the good understanding of capacity within the team and an appropriate response with regards to carrying 121 interventions with Level 2 and 3 families.

Evaluation

Further details relating to 121 interventions including data collected through goal setting prior and following the intervention can be found here [Parenting - Power BI](#)

Please note: as mentioned at the start of the report, the total numbers of interventions is incorrect, however data on, if parents/carers feel they have improved in their parenting goals and their relationship with their child/ren has improved is still useful and indicates that the interventions are mainly successful to achieving set goals. Only 2 parents/carers (from all that have completed an intervention) felt their relationship had not improved as a result of the intervention

In addition to setting goals at the start and revisiting these at the end of the intervention, the parents/carers complete an evaluation at the end of a successful intervention.

What do you feel has changed as a result of attending the sessions?

- I now have a better understanding of my child's feelings and his behaviours, and why he behaves differently when he is having a good day.
- Not as stressed, a lot calmer. How to calm situations better.
- Family coming closer
- My understanding of child behaviour and how to respond to it
- Able to stand back and breath and deal with the situation

What do you feel you have learned from attending the sessions?

- I have learnt how to communicate with X better and how to manage her needs
- The benefits of play and the connection with my son and the importance of that for him and awareness of brain development
- How they mirror my overall behaviour

- How to help understand my son's feelings
- To make sure your head space is manageable in order to deal the situations.

Parenting Help and Support Line (PHSL)

The Helpline continued to run Monday to Friday.

Data

Specific data can be found here: [Parenting - Power BI](#)

253 (165) helpline consultations were carried out. This means that the parent/carer spoke to a Parenting Practitioner over the phone.

Note: this is not reflective of 253 different families, but 253 consultations which may include the same parent/carer calling more than once. This will be explored to be able to differentiate data for next year.

Wider context

The helpline is used by members of the public, who directly call into the helpline as well as by the EHAST team, who will gain consent from parents/carers, for a member of the parenting team to call them and then send an email to the parenting team requesting a call back.

Sometimes a parent/carer will call the helpline and not be able to speak to a Practitioner at this point, in this case, their details will also be sent to the PHSL inbox with details for a call back.

Discussions with BeeU are ongoing to create a pathway where families, who are on a waiting list with BeeU will receive a phone call from our helpline during this period, so support them further.

This means that the actual numbers of calls the Practitioners make are far higher than the number of consultations. If the practitioners are unable to reach a parent/carer in a call back they will try on 5 consecutive days, in different times to reach the parent/carer before stopping to call. It is being explored how to capture specific data for this for next year.

Engagement with fathers and male carers

It was identified that very few male parents and carers are accessing the helpline. Therefore, the Family Information Service (FIS) ran a specific ad campaign on social media targeting male parents/carers in November and December 2024. Further work with e.g. Men Sheds, Andy's Man Club and local football clubs is planned, to be able to widen our reach.

Number of male carers calling helpline:

Q1 – 3

Q2 – 2

Q3 – 7

Q4 – 7

Areas of development

Data collection to include:

- numbers of parents/carers who have not been reached after 5 attempts
- number of parents/carers who have received a consultation in addition to number of total consultations
- how many calls are answered directly
- how many are not able to be answered directly and need a call back
- how many call backs are requested through email from other services incl. BeeU and EHAST

On-line Solihull Approach courses for parents

Shropshire has renewed the multi-user license for the on-line Solihull Approach courses which enables all residents of Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin to access these free of charge. The cost has remained the same for the 7th year running (£8000), with further course being added regularly. It proves to be good value for money as it can be used in a variety of ways with families across all levels of need. Some courses have dedicated translations, however all courses, including the webpage can be translated into more than 100 languages using Google translated which has been added as a feature by the Solihull approach.

All 17 courses on offer can be found here [inourplace | Solihull Approach – Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin | inourplace](#)

In this financial year 935 (1065) learners have registered to access any of the on-line courses. Learners continue to report a decrease in conflict and increase in closeness with the child/ren.

Please see below highlights report produced by the Solihull Approach.



Shropshire, Telford &
Wrekin Annual Report

Note: 'learner' describe parents, carers or young people

Solihull Approach training for professionals

Data

A total of 14 (17) trainings have been delivered to a total of 134 (217) professionals across Shropshire.

- Breakdown of trainings:
 - Foundation – 5 (8)
 - Facilitation – 2 (0)
 - Refresher – 0 (0)
 - Trauma 2 – (0)
 - Attachment 1 – (0)
 - Bespoke session for Baby Room staff – 3 (5)
 - Teenage Brain for Adopters – 1 (2)
- 57 (110) professionals completed the 2-day Solihull Approach Foundation Training
- 31 (60) professionals completed the session for Baby Room staff
- 7 Adopters have attended a Teenage Brain Seminar

Evaluation

The drop in number of trainings delivered this year is due to capacity. This accounts for the Feedback remains very positive on all training offered.

Every training delegate is requested to complete an anonymous evaluation form which is shared with the Solihull Approach as part of their quality assurance framework, however some professionals do not.

Therefore, numbers of attendees will not match numbers of evaluations.

Relevance to their work:



88% (80%) highly relevant

12% (20%) relevant

0% (0%) not relevant

How engaging the training was:

83% (58%) very engaging

17% (40%) engaging

0% (2%) not engaging

94% (78%) of attendees found the presentation by the trainer excellent

6% (20%) of attendees found the presentation by the trainer good

0% (2%) of attendees found the presentation by the trainer needs improving

List of services attending training has not changed:

- Early Help
- Stepping Stones
- Children's Placement
- Trainee Social Worker
- Public Health Nursing Service
- BeeU
- Health Visitors
- Occupational Therapy Team
- U&I counselling
- Residential Care Workers
- Social Prescribing
- Schools
- Shropshire Educational Psychology Services
- Early Years settings

Comments from delegates:

- Great to take part in a training session where other attendees are so involved. Feel like I've actually learned something that can actually be implemented in school and make a real difference. Thank you.
- This has been a recap session for me and I have found that having worked in the service for 2 and a half years this session has been more beneficial to me as it has made more sense and I have been able to relate it to my work.
- This has been brilliant training, I've loved it. Nadine is passionate and very knowledgeable. I wish every parent could be given this information at their antenatal classes!
- Lots of really interesting discussion and points made that relate to my practice.
- This will help me with my overall work with the young people in residential care.
- Very good information and helps understand the approach in detail. Really makes you think about your interactions with everyone from children, parents to staff.

Spotlight on schools and early years settings

Note: Training records go back to approximately 2017, however the period before 2020 is not fully recorded electronically and will therefore any time before this will be referred to as prior to 2020.

Primary schools

- 1 or more staff from 56 Primary schools have trained in the Foundation Training in the past
- 1 or more staff from 18 primary schools have trained in Group Facilitation training following the Foundation Training

The pandemic brought school attendance at training to hold. However, in 2022 a surge in training requests happened. Data from this financial year shows an increase in training attendance:

- 1 or more staff from 14 primary schools have trained in Foundation Training in this academic year. Making up $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total number over the years
- 1 or more staff from 7 primary schools have trained in Group Facilitation training following the Foundation Training. Making up a $\frac{1}{3}$ of the total numbers over the years

Co-facilitation with school has increased as can be seen by the group numbers above.

Secondary Schools:

- Oldbury Wells has trained 1 staff member in the Foundation Training in Oct 2024
- Severn Dale and William Brooks have trained in 2021
- 8 have trained prior to 2020
- Severndale Academy has trained 7 staff in 2021 in Group Facilitation

Engaging with Secondary Schools around delivering Understanding Your Teen workshops will be a focus in the next financial year.

Early Years settings:

Only 2 Early years settings trained staff in the Foundation training prior to 2020 and 2 more trained in 2022. However 6 more trained in this financial year.

4 settings have also trained in group facilitation.

Beverly Jones, Quality Improvement & Learning Co-ordinator, who supports early years settings, has seen a positive impact of where baby room staff have accessed the Solihull Approach bespoke session for baby room staff. She reports that staff are more aware of containment and the dance of reciprocity when caring for babies.

Conclusion

Last year's numbers included a project with the Early Year Sector, BeeU and Educational Psychologists, to boost interest and training attendance in the Early Years and school sector and BeeU, to ensure the Solihull Approach remained embedded in the wider partnership across Shropshire. This project was successful with more training and attendees than usual. This financial year was about maintaining numbers as well as delivering Facilitation training and the enhancement seminars, which hadn't happened the year before.

The number of Foundation Trainings delivered have decreased and are back to the average number per year (5) to enable the delivery of the Attachment Seminar and Trauma Seminar. The bespoke sessions for the Baby Room staff have also decreased. It was introduced last year and it was agreed that thereafter 3 sessions a year are enough to maintain the offer.

These changes have mainly accounted for the drop in numbers of overall professionals accessing training this year.

Plans to work together with the Solihull Approach to engage more with primary as well as secondary schools are being made for the next financial year.

The Solihull Approach Foundation Training as well as all other training offers remain well attended and feedback shows that the training is well received and benefits to the delegate's practice can be seen.

A trial to gain feedback from delegates 6 months following the completion of the training was launched last year, sadly no responses were received following an email to all delegates.

The Foundations report 'Parenting through adversity' suggests that regular refresher training of the approach used, should be attended by practitioners and workers. The last time Solihull Approach Refresher training was delivered to EH Hub staff as well as partners was March 2024. Consideration should be given to make attendance of a refresher training between 2-3 years following the Foundation Training mandatory for all EH staff. This would ensure the approach continues to be delivered in its integrity and practitioners remain confident in utilising the approach in their practice.



Play Practitioners

All 3 Play Practitioners have completed Portage training and are now able to use this in their 121 interventions as well as delivering portage groups. The groups are coordinated and evaluated by the Team Manager for the 0-5 team.

1 trial group has been carried out with 1 parent attending.

Data

- 57 (63) families in total have accessed a play intervention
 - 21 (44) interventions completed with outcomes achieved
 - 22 (13) families still open to our service
 - 14 (6) families declined the intervention, or received alternative provision

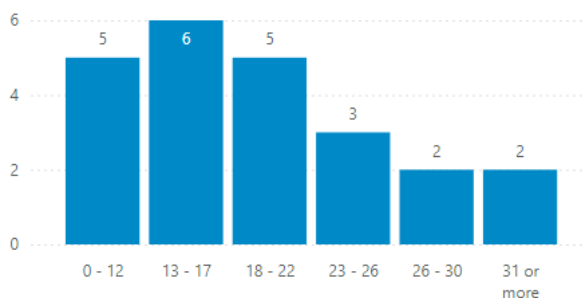
23 families have data on PowerBi. A change in data collection which has not been picked up by EHM has led to the difference in total numbers.

In the next financial year quantitative data on positive progress through the intervention, should be available.

Feedback remains good, with most families stating an improvement in their goals through the play intervention and 82.6% felt their relationship between them and their child/ren had improved. No family felt their relationship had worsened, the rest felt it had stayed the same.

The 14 interventions which were not completed, were either declined by the family after allocation, social care had become involved, and the intervention was not appropriate at this moment in time or a different service e.g. Stepping Stones or BeeU were carrying out similar work.

Total Number of Weeks of Intervention



[Open in Power BI](#)

Parenting

Data as of 11/05/25, 14:05

Thrive Assessments

Not all children will receive a Thrive Assessment, this could be because they have SEND or it is a piece of work of relationship without any identified trauma which would indicate a Thrive assessment.

10 children were at age-appropriate stages when assessed. This still gives a plan to the practitioner to work from.



5 assessments were carried out and did not have a follow up assessment. This is most likely due to the family disengaging or the practitioner not being able to get assessment information from family and or school to complete a follow-on assessment

A further 10 assessments were carried out which also had 1 or more follow up assessments. These all showed an improvement in the stages of emotional and social development.

Completion of a developmental stage is linked to a score of 63% or higher in the assessment.

1. 5 children's emotional and social development improved by 1 stage by the end of the intervention
2. 3 children's emotional and social development improved to being at the age-appropriate stage by the end of the intervention
3. 2 children's emotional and social development improved by 4 stages by the end of the intervention

Referral process

Referrals for play interventions exceeded the capacity of the team in this financial year and the service is therefore having a growing waiting list. This is being explored with Jo Cox and the next report will most likely show a slightly different service delivery to work in a more effective timescale.

One challenge that has been identified is the length of time between the closure of the Targeted Early Help support and the start of the play intervention. One contributing factor is the time from allocation to TEH and the referral for a play intervention.

A sample of 28 families showed that 17 were closed within 4 weeks of making the play intervention referral. 8 referrals were made and the case closed to TEH within less than 1 week of making the referral

Closure within:

- 1 week: 8
- 2 weeks: 3
- 3 weeks: 2
- 4 weeks: 4
- Longer: 11

A sample of 37 families showed that 26 play intervention referrals were made more than 2 months after allocation to TEH

Referrals made within:

- 2 weeks: 1
- 3 weeks: 2
- 4-5 weeks: 6
- 2 months: 2
- More than 2 months: 26

This will be discussed with Team Managers to find ways that play intervention referrals are made at the earliest possible time during the TEH intervention.

Feedback

Comments from families about the impact of the play intervention:

- 'X is now a different girl and so much easier to manage. I feel that X has a better hold on her emotions now and that is largely due to the work Early Help and the play practitioner have completed with X'
- 'The relationship with X has definitely shot up to about 9 now' (6 was pre score)
- 'X has enjoyed doing activities on how she is feeling and managing her emotions and is now better at talking about her feelings and emotions.'



- 'I really felt that my concerns were listened to and received without judgement. All the activities have been beneficial in helping X and I get back to where we both live in harmony again.'
- 'Been amazing, the kids have loved you coming round and us all playing together and now get on much better together which is lovely to see. Father's relationship with X is much better now and we are a happier household.'

Below is feedback from a school, where a Play Practitioner supported a child
I am writing to let you know that Helen Wyn Owen has been working with a pupil at St. Mary's CE Primary School, Bucknell for a number of months.

I would like to let you know that Helen has had a huge impact on this child. When she first started working with him, he was refusing to leave his mother and go into class. He was becoming more and more physical to the extent that staff had to be trained to use physical intervention in case it was needed. The staff also had training in Attachment Disorder to help us further understand the child and his needs.

Helen came in on a Monday morning to support the child at the beginning of the week as this was especially difficult. Over the time she has gained the child's confidence and he really looked forward to sessions and is proud of himself at the end. Helen has also worked closely with the child's mother and has gained her confidence enough to offer her guidance and support.

With the support of other strategies that have been put in place, the play therapy sessions have played an important role in regulating the child. He now goes into school willingly and is positive about all aspects of school life. He feels listened to and was able to form a trusting relationship with another adult as a result of Helen's gentle and caring approach.

Below is feedback from a family where a Play Practitioner carried out an 8 months intervention. The children had experienced multiple, severe traumas and were supported by Stepping Stones at closure. The father stated that the intervention had been fantastic, it had helped his daughter so much, she is now more confident to speak to him about her feelings when she is struggling. She will ask to speak to him in private which seems to work well for her.

The family as a whole are getting along better, the children play nicely usually lead by his daughter. The father explained that when his son becomes dysregulated then he finds it hard to manage this and it impacts on all the family but outside of these incidents things can run smoothly.

The daughter stated that she had had so much fun with the play sessions and that she would miss them. She said 'Thank you for always being there for me Sue.'

Notes from last report

Updates from this year are green

- 7 members of the BeeU team have completed the 2-day Solihull Approach Foundation training with a view to co-facilitate in Autumn 2024 - **2 Understanding Your Child SEND groups have been co-delivered with professionals from BeeU**
- A bespoke group to connected carers, delivered by the Parenting team and adoption/fostering team is in discussion – **the group was planned and organised however only 2 carers attended. The Adoption Team worked with these 2 carers and will get back in touch with the Parenting Team should they want to try another group.**
- Co-facilitation of toileting workshops with school nurses will start from April 2024 Workshops have been delivered – **please see section 9.1 for further details**
- Solihull Reconnect meetings have started. They are scheduled 3 times a year – **meetings continue**

Other projects and service delivery

Bladder and Bowel workshop

This is a fantastic example of co-working with another service. The school nursing service acknowledged that they are the experts in supporting families with the physical side of bowel and bladder issues but that there is also an emotional/parenting side that goes along this. This partnership has worked extremely well with both services supporting families in a cost-effective and sustainable way.

Discussions are being held to add another workshop with the focus on healthy lifestyle, to the delivery next year.

33 schools in Shrewsbury received an offer from the school nursing service of a face-to-face Bladder and Bowel workshop delivery at their school. Facilitated by a School Nurse and Senior Parenting Practitioner. 13 schools engaged and 35 parents/carers in total attended the workshops. A virtual workshop was also trialled, which was attended by 19 parents and carers

Feedback during the session:

- Parents/carers felt able to open up about their child's toileting in a safe place without feeling judged.
- Parents/carers felt relieved that there were other people going through the same with their children.
- Parents/carers felt relieved that they aren't to blame, and that they haven't done anything wrong.
- Parents/carers felt empowered to support their child after learning new information. Especially those who have children with a SEN.
- Parents/carers felt relieved that there is support out there, some having children who have been under consultants for years weren't aware of basic information.

Follow up calls 6 weeks later.

14 of the parents/carers who attended, have been contacted:

- Two children who were withholding and only pooing in a nappy or on the potty are now both pooing on the toilet.
- One child would go all day at school without having a wee. They are now accessing the school toilets to have a wee.
- One child was day wetting and night wetting, the parent increased fluids and stopped giving them fizzy drinks and they are now dry during the day and at night.
- One child's day wetting has improved significantly with fluids being increased, changing to pear squash instead of orange squash and the use of a wobble watch.
- One parent didn't feel confident to approach school regarding their child's toileting. After the workshop they arranged a meeting with school and now have a toileting plan in place for the child.
- Two of the parents have been to the GP to discuss disimpaction, which they are going to do during the summer holidays.
- Three of the parents required further targeted support, however, they no longer feel alone, they feel supported, have more knowledge and can implement strategies to support their child.

Reflections for the Parenting Team:

Some parents have accessed the Parenting Help and Support Line and booked onto Understanding your Child or Sleep Tight groups, since attending the workshop.

Containment was provided directly after the workshops and further parenting support relating to other issues were raised and consequently supported with, after the workshops. Signposting to Parenting Team online offer, FIS, AWM, SEND drop-ins and Early Help Hub drop-ins was also carried out following the workshops.

In addition, the Parenting Team has strengthened links with schools e.g. will now be delivering groups in Autumn Term at a school venue that the Bladder and Bowel workshop was delivered from.

St. Georges Health Drop In

This Drop-In is led by the school nursing service and runs once every half term. The Senior Parenting Practitioner is attending this drop in.

Below is an example of what needs are met at the drop in.

Professionals supporting at this specific session were School Nurses, Foodbank Plus, Breath (childhood bereavement network) and the Parenting Team

6 half hour appointments were booked, 5 attended (appointments all took longer than 30 minutes)

- **mother, 8 yr old daughter – SEND issues**

Signposted to SEND meet and Chat at Sunflower, AWM, PHSL, hub drop ins, PEGS, parenting support given at the drop in

- **mother, 6yr old and 8 yr old daughters – DA issues, parental conflict issues**

Signposted to SDAS, one plus one, PHSL, online Solihull Approach courses, parenting support given at the drop in

- **father, 7 yr old son – huge traumas and bereavements in the family over the last 12 months affecting behaviour and sleep**

Signposted to Sleep Tight group and Sleep Charity, PHSL, online Solihull Approach courses, bereavement support and parenting support given at the drop in

- **mother, 8 yr old daughter, 3 yr old son – SEND/ASD**

Healthy weight and diet guidance given, booked onto Sleep Tight SEND group, signposted to PHSL, hub drop ins, SEND coffee and chat, parenting support given at the drop in

- **mother, 2 boys 11 yrs old and 8 yrs old – bereavement and sleep/behaviour**

Bereavement support and parenting support given at the drop in, signposted to Sleep Tight group, PHSL, online Solihull Approach courses

All parents/carers had tears and lots of containment and the drop in, saying they felt better for sharing and had taken away some good advice, made sense of things, felt listened to and now have other resources they didn't know about.

Supporting refugees

The Parenting Team has a good link with Kariman Yakhoul, Resettlement Officer (Refugee Educational Advisor). Having completed some work with Syrian refugees in the past.



Kariman approached the parenting team and discussed that she is having regular coffee mornings with a group of women from Afghanistan. She identified that these are mostly young mothers who do not have the support from their own mothers now that they are living in England and might need support and guidance around parenting. We agreed that a workshop might not be the right tool to start with and therefore planned for the Senior Parenting Practitioner to come along to a coffee morning and introduce our service and specifically share the online course offer as this is accessible in different languages. As English is limited for most of the women this could be a beneficial tool.

We agreed with Kariman that Gill can come back to the drop in at any point if the women would like support in a specific topic or just need general or individual advice.

Playtime with Books

PEDAL (University of Cambridge), with support from Nesta, is delivering PwB in two cycles of delivery across three local authorities as an initial pilot and trial. Shropshire Council was one of the local authorities. The Parenting Team, 0-5 team and library service offered staff to attend the training and trial the programme.

Playtime with Books (PwB) is a digital book-sharing intervention for children aged 10-24 months based on Murray and Cooper's evidence-based shared picture book intervention, adapted for virtual delivery. The programme aims to promote parental sensitivity and support and reinforce parents' use of positive book-sharing skills with their young child. It consists of five self-directed online skill sessions and up to three personalised video-feedback support calls provided virtually by practitioners from local early-years services. Facilitators guide parents through the programme, encouraging them to practice new skills and film themselves sharing books with their child. They build a relationship with the parent via a welcome call and have three online calls with the parent to give supportive feedback about their recorded videos. The aim was to identify and test improvements to the PwB service so that it works better for delivery partners and families unable to access face-to-face book-sharing programmes.

All Parenting Practitioners and Play Practitioners accessed the training linked to the trial. 4 Practitioners took part in the trial and delivered the programme to 2 families each. The average duration was 12 weeks. The Practitioners enjoyed the experience and said it had enhanced their practice with regards to encouraging reading and how to use reading to develop skills in the child as well as parents/carers. Furthermore, they said they really felt the training upskilled them in using virtual technology to interact and work with parents/carers.

The report for PwB from PEDAL has not yet been shared with me.

Stepping Stones Annual Report

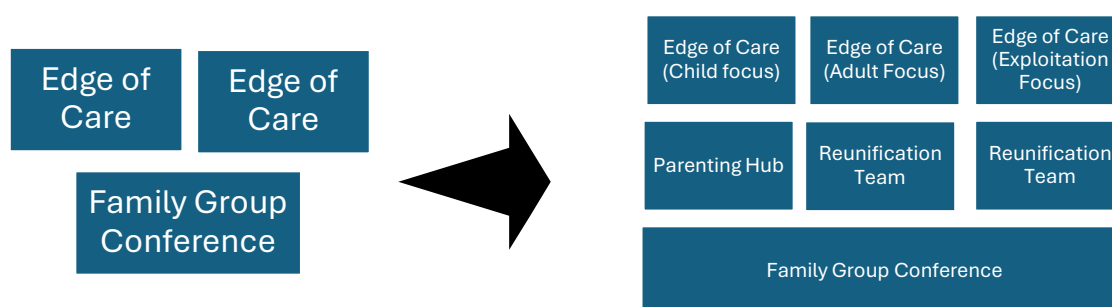
Title	Stepping Stones Annual Report
Purpose/scope	Stepping Stones Service (Year 4 of Programme) 2024-25
Subject key words	Stepping Stones, Children, Young People, Outreach, FGC (Family Group Conference), Step Down, Fostering, Residential, Therapeutic Approach, Multi-agency, Intensive Support, CLA (Children Looked After), PLO (Public law Outline)
Council Priority	Shropshire Plan – Breaking Generational Cycles; MTFS
Lead author & contact details	Maxine Ellis Service Manager, Stepping Stones, Children Looked After, UASC & Pathways and SEND
Date Established	July 2021
Date of Next Review	July 2026
Service Improvement & Efficiency Validation	
Legal Sign Off	N/A
Finance Sign Off	N/A
Approver and date	

Summary of Project Vision

The Stepping Stones Business case approved by council in 2019 set out a vision for a project which, would provide individualised, intensive, wrap around support to children and parents.

The Shropshire Plan 2022 – 2025 was the overarching strategic plan for the council and Stepping Stones aligned to it under Breaking Generational Cycles (Targeted Operating Model). The primary aim being that our intensive trauma informed approach not only with children and young people, but also with their parents / carers, addresses the impact of any adverse early experience, and will break cycles of abuse in families that lead to children and grandchildren in Shropshire becoming looked after.

A second Business Case was agreed by Council in August 2022. This allowed the upscale of Stepping Stones and to triple capacity to March 2025. A further business case to extend the upscale until March 2027, was agreed by Council in November 2024.



The primary aim of the upscale was to support the Council's Strategic Plan by continuing to deliver on cost avoidance of children and young people needing to become looked after, and with the additional capacity, give focus to reducing the number of children and young people currently in residential homes; reunifying them back home with their families or stepping them down into a foster home.

Progress

Phase 1 - Went Live on 12th July 2021, with the outreach team having been recruited and received initial training.

Phase 2 - Commenced in July 2022, with a focus on the development of the residential hub to sit within Stepping Stones, aimed at offering young people a short-term placement solution, whilst therapeutic and outreach work is carried out with the young person and their family to allow them to return home or move to a foster family.

Phase 3 - Recruitment to upscale of the original structure achieved by March 2023. Growth to the residential hub, with a new children's home Pebble House opening in May 2024.

Phase 4 - Embed Pebble House into the Stepping Stones hub, with a specific focus on children under the age of 12 years old. Approval of business case in November 2024 to extend the upscale capacity of Stepping Stones for a further 2 years, to March 2027.

The publication of the Ofsted focused visit in July 2024, highlighted the positive impact Stepping Stones was having within the wider Children's Services and they noted how embedded the process is compared to their previous visit.

Stepping Stones Benefits

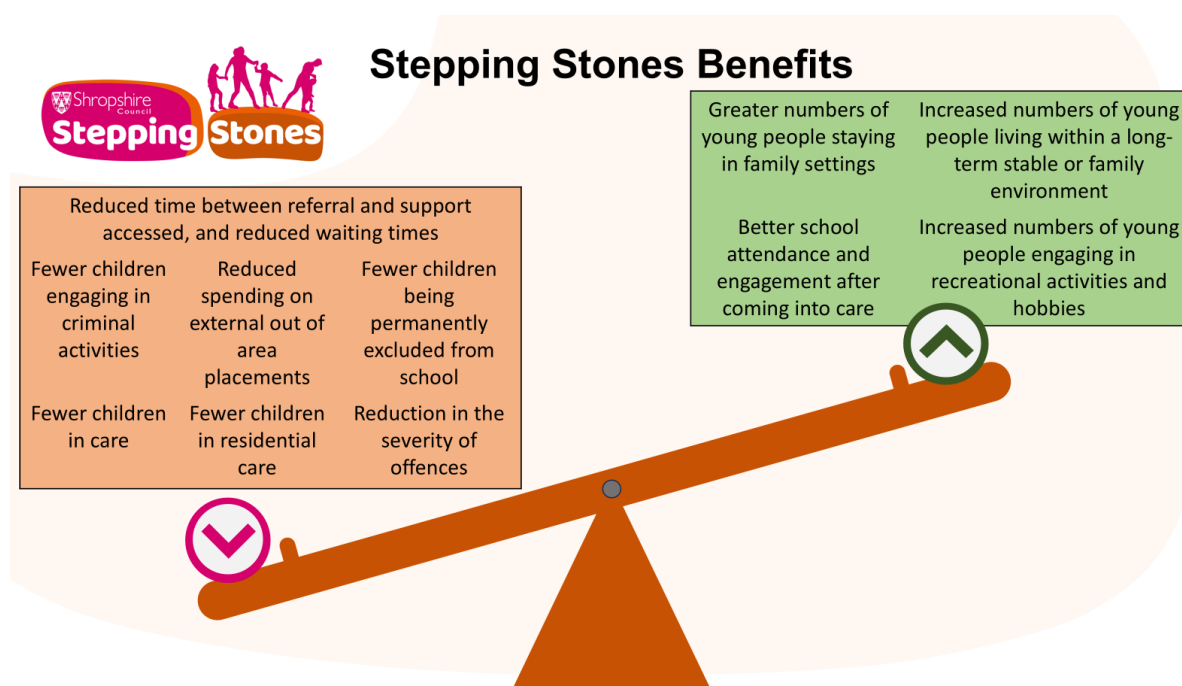


Figure 1. Stepping Stones benefits slide

Finance

- Stepping Stones achieved an in-year combined saving and avoidance of **£10.1m**, reflecting 84 children and young people being diverted from becoming looked after, 8 children avoiding a higher cost placement, and 55 children stepping down from residential homes to foster homes, reunified with birth or connected family or moving on to independence.
- Two of the step downs claimed in 2024-25 occurred in March 2024 and were claimed for the last weeks of 2023-24 as well as the 2024-25 FY.

Placement Vacated (Step Downs)	No. Of Children FY23/24	No. Of Children FY24/25
External Fostering	4 (£0.140m)	14 (£0.332m)
External Residential	14 (£1.308m)	20 (+2 claimed in March 24 who contributed to savings total) (£2.307m)

Internal Residential	3 (£0)	0
Internal Fostering	18 (£0.103m)	18 (£0.154m)
Supported Accommodation	0	1 (£0.396m)

- In 2024-25 Stepping Stones achieved a cost savings of **£3.189m** which surpassed the Year 4 target of **£3.1m** by **£89,728**

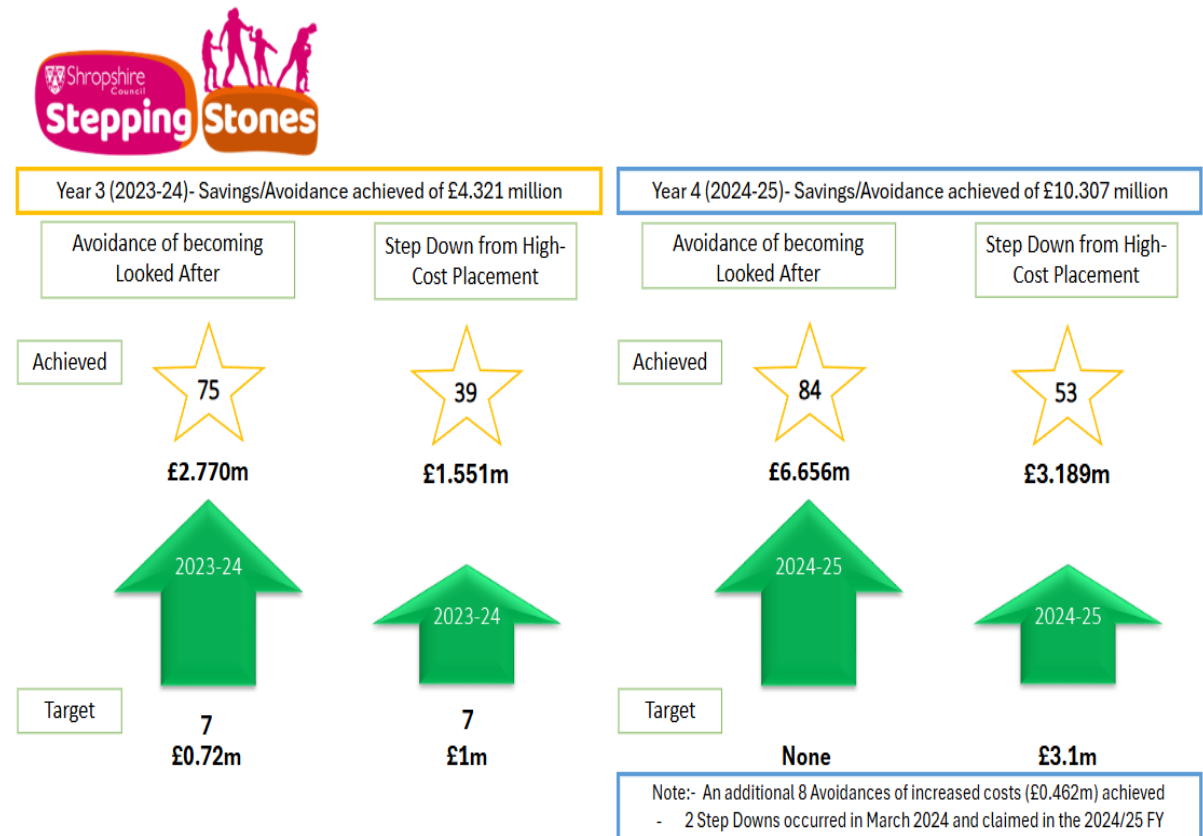


Figure 2. Target vs Achieved in 2023-4 & 2024-5

- In 2024-25, as can be seen for the charts below the step down placement types changed, to that of 2023-24. This is shown in Figure 3. There was an increase in step downs from Residential to Supported Accommodation. The number of step downs to foster care also increased from two to three.

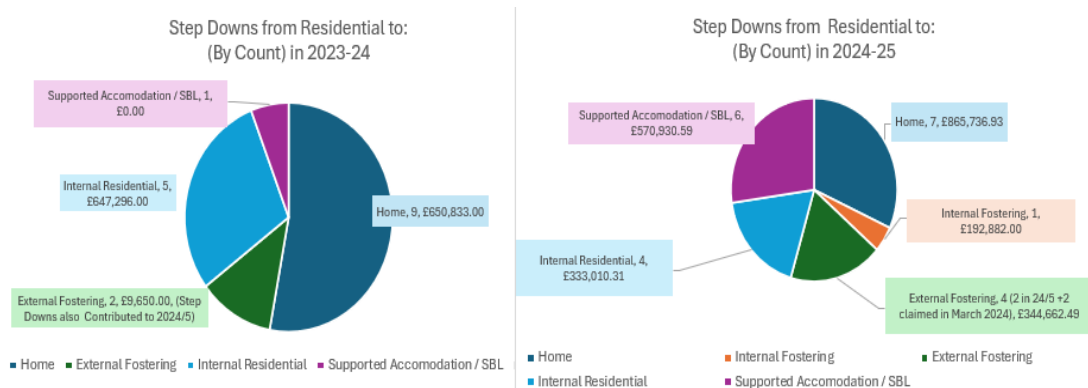


Figure 3. Step Down from Residential to Placement Type in 23/24 & 24/25

- The increase in the achieved cost avoidances from £2.770m to £6.656m (and an additional £0.462m from Avoidance of Increased Costs) between 2023-24 and 2024-25 was a result of more residential placements being avoided

Placements Avoided (Including Avoidance of Increase Costs)	No. Of Children FY23/24	No. Of Children FY24/25
Residential	19 (£1.646m)	30 (£5.371m)
Fostering	50 (£0.886m)	54 (£1.376m)
Parent and Child Residential	5 (£0.202m)	7 (£0.342m)
Supported Accommodation	1 (£0.037m)	1 (£0.028m)
Total	£2.770m	£6.656m

....

Figure 4 shows when step downs and cost avoidances occurred in the 2024-25 financial year. The savings target at the end of each month is the orange bar. This visual shows that Stepping Stones surpassed the target and increased the savings the most in July to October.

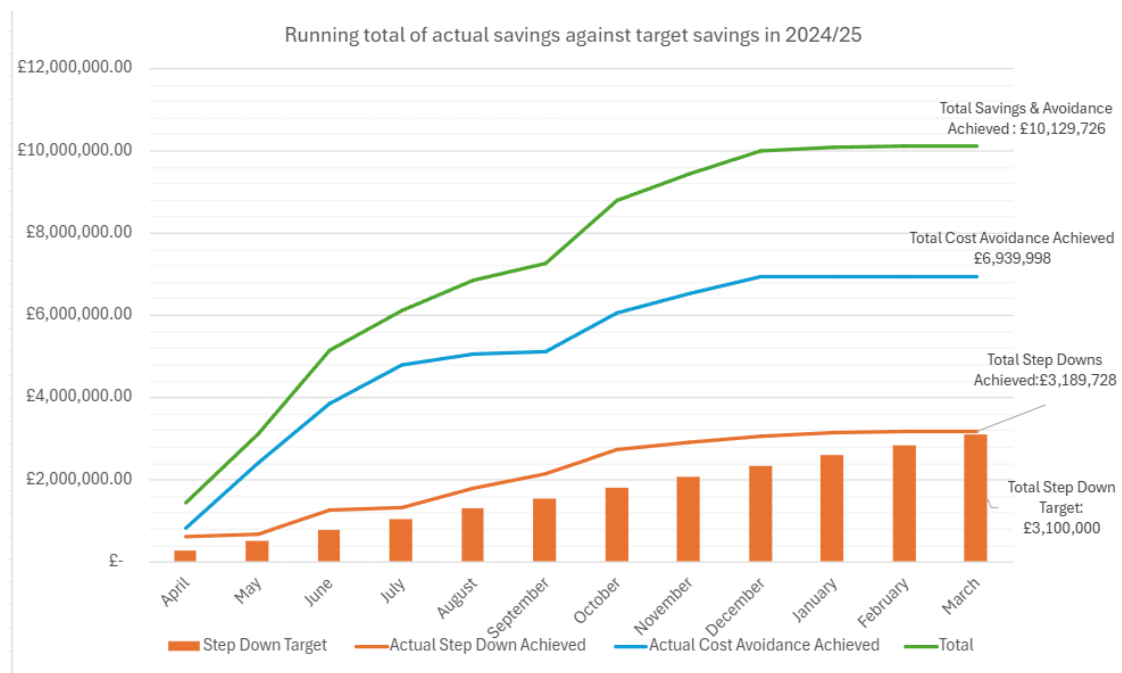


Figure 4. Running total of savings & avoidance each month

In 2024-25, Stepping Stones increased the savings they achieved compared to 2023-24 by 1.6 million. Figure 5 shows a month-by-month comparison of the 2 years. The increase in savings indicates that the step-down process has become more embedded and as resulted in a greater focus.

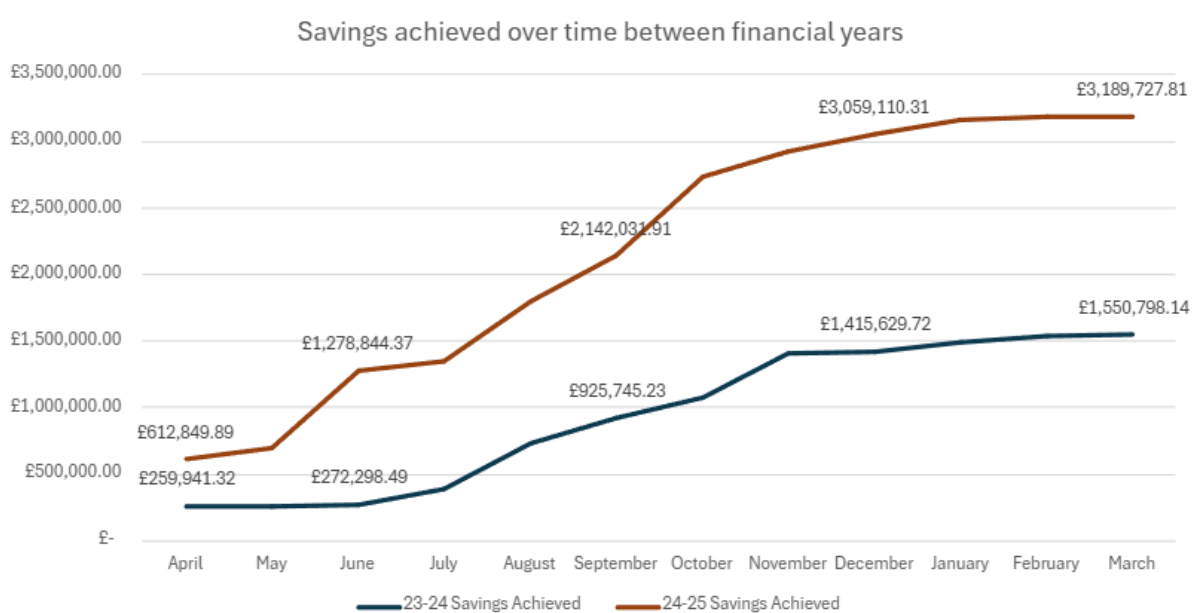


Figure 5. Savings each month in 2023-4 and 2024-5

Staffing

The upscaled service structure consists of six teams with six Senior Practitioners, who directly managed up to five Outreach Workers. The Family Group Conferencing Team and Outreach

teams were line managed by the Operations Manager, who intern was managed by the Service Manager. Due to the unsuccessful recruitment to the Speech and Language posts and the Clinical Psychologist post, a picture that continued to be reflected nationally; these posts are to be redesignated in the scale down of the service, which will allow opportunity to identify the posts that will best meet service needs. The Education Phycologist post was recruited to and reported to the Operations Manager.

In May 2024, there was a change in structure, and a Team Manager position was created providing an acting up position within the service. This post replaced the Operations Manager, who acted up to the Service Manager position.

Between 01/04/24 – 31/03/25, staff retention declined significantly. The service went from twenty-five outreach workers to fourteen, six family group conference co-ordinators to four, and six senior practitioners to four. The reduction in staff related to factors such as maternity leave, sickness; and workers leaving the service for more secure work as the end of the fixed term contracts drew nearer. Recruitment to vacant posts was paused due to all fixed term contracts within the upscale model being due to expire in March 2025, the first to expire was to be November 2024. Recruitment and training of new staff would not have been feasible due to the limited time left on contracts.

In September the educational psychologist capacity was increased from four days a week to five and this post became covered by two psychologists as a full-time equivalent post. This reflected the increase in demand for the service and the addition of Pebble House to the residential hub. In November 2024, there was approval to extend the upscale capacity of Stepping Stones for a further 2 years, to March 2027. Recruitment commenced immediately, and the first of the recruits started in March 2025.

Performance Data

Outreach Achievement 2024-25

Activity data from 01/04/23 - 31/03/24 compared to 01/04/24 – 31/03/25 shows that:

2023/24

495 children received Initial Consultations

469 children received an intervention

2024/25

492 children received Initial Consultations

485 children received an intervention

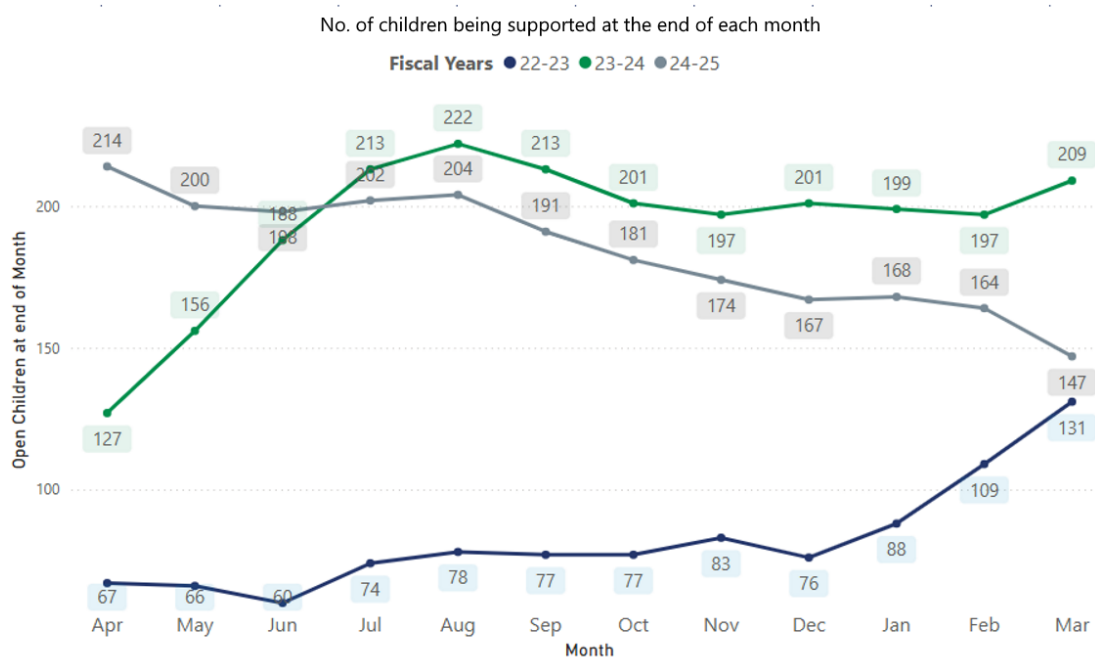


Figure 6. Children being supported each month in the last 3 years

Figure 6 shows the number of children Stepping Stones were working with at the end of each month and how this decreased in 2024-25. It fell 17% from December 2023 to December 2024. The highest number of children open at once during 2024/25 was 214 at the start of the FY. By the end of 2024/25 147 children were open to the project and receiving an intervention compared to 209 in the previous year. *This* decrease was due to (reduced staffing and a pause in recruitment due to the Council's financial position).

Legal Status

The ratio of male to female open to Stepping Stones in 2024-25 was 11:9 which is the same as 2023-24. However, the legal status of children when they started working with Stepping Stones changed as shown in Figure 7 and Figure 8. In 2023-24 the most common status was Child Protection (35%) but in 2024-25 Children Looked After was the most common status (38%). This change in referral for consultations may be linked in efforts to focus progressing children's care plans and work to step them out of care, reducing the number of children in residential placements and returning them home where it was safe to do so. Children subject to Child Protection Plans decreased by 28%, while Children Looked After plans increased by 7%.

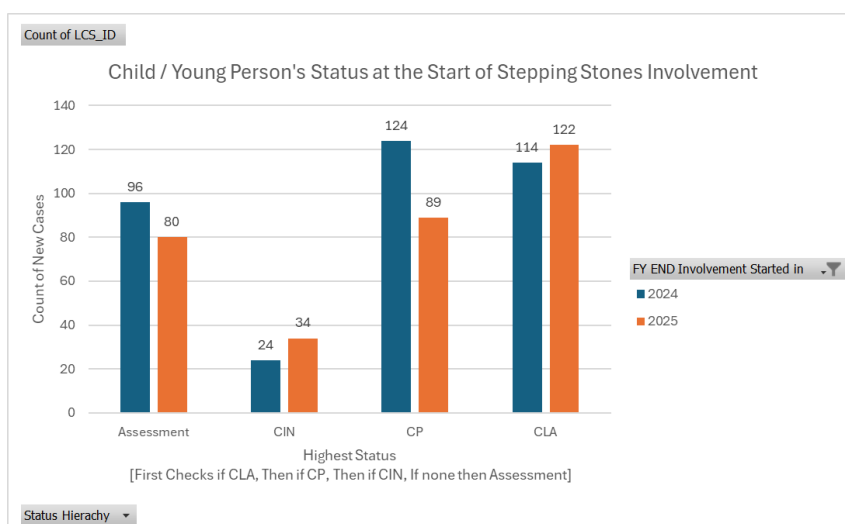


Figure 7. Status when involvement started

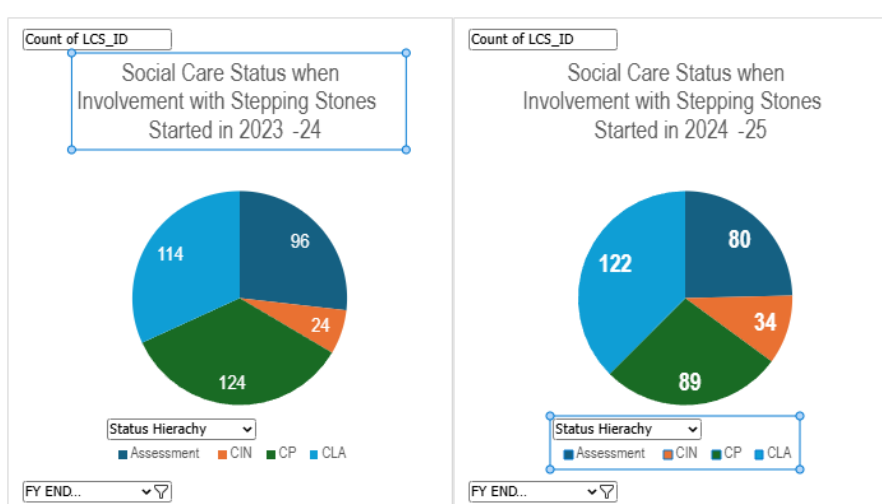


Figure 8. Pie charts of status when involvement started

These charts show the status of children and young people when their Stepping Stones intervention began, they only include children whose involvement started in the year. Children were categorised using a hierarchy. Firstly, if they had a CLA status, then CP and finally CIN. If they had none of these statuses when our intervention began, they were classed as 'Assessment,' to indicate that an assessment was being undertaken to determine their care plan going forward. The assessment grouping also includes the children who were working with Stepping Stones during a trial with Early Help to reduce the number of categories.

Allocated Teams

Assessment Team North remained the team who were supporting the most children when they started working with Stepping Stones: 68 in 23/24 and 50 in 24/25. Case Management Team Central North had the largest increase of children they were supporting at the start of Stepping Stone's involvement from 15 to 39 (160% increase). However, this is contradicted by Case Management Team Northwest decreasing from 36 to 13. To make comparisons

easier, teams into categories like Case Management, CLA Permanency, and Assessment Teams in Figure 10. This shows that the proportion of children being supported in the Disabled Children's Team & CLA Permanency decreased by the largest percentage when compared to the previous year while Case Management teams increased their percentage of new involvements.

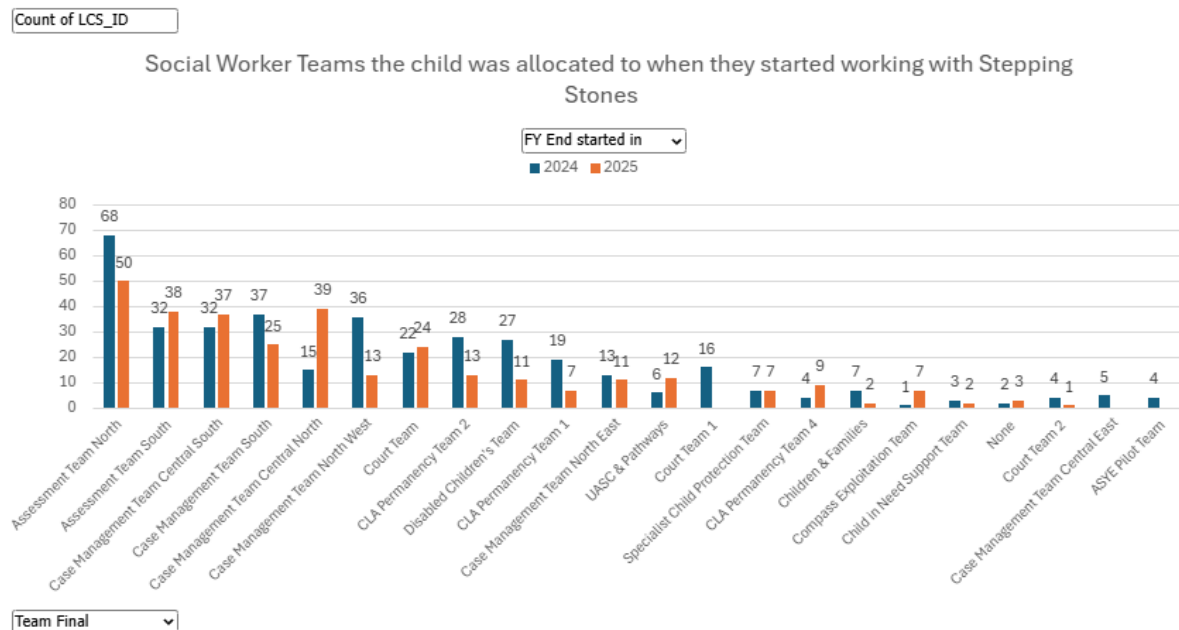


Figure 9. Allocated SW Team when Stepping Stones involvement started

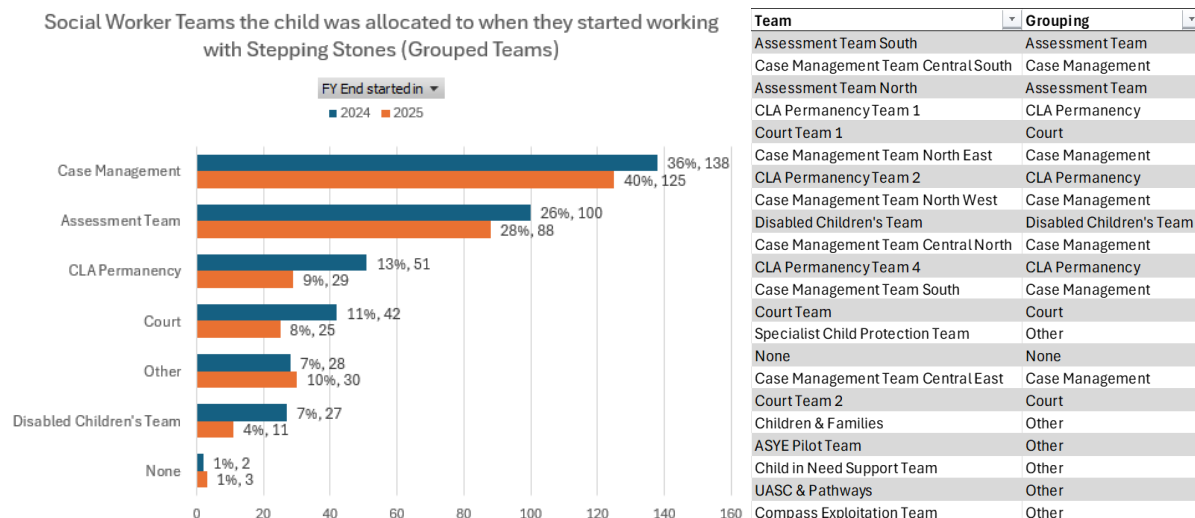


Figure 10. Allocated SW Team (Grouped) when Stepping Stones involvement started

Age of Children

There hasn't been a notable change in the distribution of ages that Stepping Stones was working with from 2023-24 to 2024-25 as shown in Figure 11. The average age of children working with Stepping Stones in 2023-24 was 8.76 and 8.73 in 2024-25.

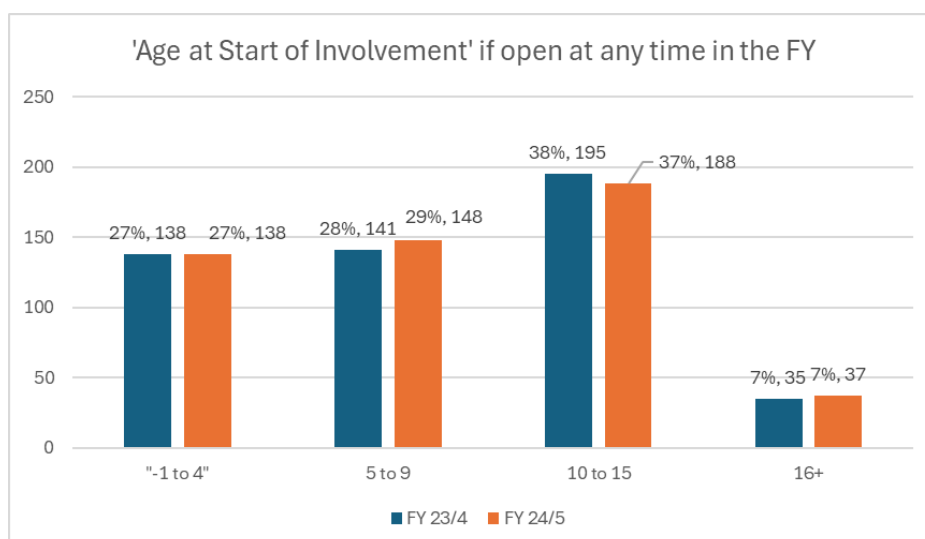


Figure 11. Age at the start of the involvement

Stepping Stones Forms

Forms	Forms Created in 2023/24	Forms Created in 2024/25
Initial Consultations	396	375
Review Consultations	312	360
Step Down Meetings	160	497
Evaluation Meetings	47	59
Closure Record	196	259
Group Supervisions	853	914
Adult Soft Measures	486	560
Child Soft Measures	337	467

The planned outcome 'Edge of Care' was the most frequently requested intervention status at the initial consultation which is the same as the previous financial year. 'Reunification Home' increased from 16% to 28%

Initial Consultations Planned Outcomes	2023/24	2024/25
Edge of Care	339 (65.32%)	307 (60.08%)
Reunification Home	83 (15.99%)	146 (28.57%)
Avoid Step up to Residential	53 (10.21%)	35 (6.85%)
Step Down to Foster Care	32 (6.17%)	13 (2.54%)
Transition to Independence / Supported Lodging	12 (2.31%)	10 (1.96%)

For Children that closed in 2024/25 without a cost save or cost avoidance form: 'Outcomes not achieved' were recorded as: 'non-engagement' was the highest selected reason with 32 forms compared to 29 forms for 'Outcomes not achieved due to risks escalating'. Non-engagement was the highest reason in 2023/24 also. However, in both financial years

'Other' was the most common selection and many of the free text answers are about the plan or situation for the child changing.

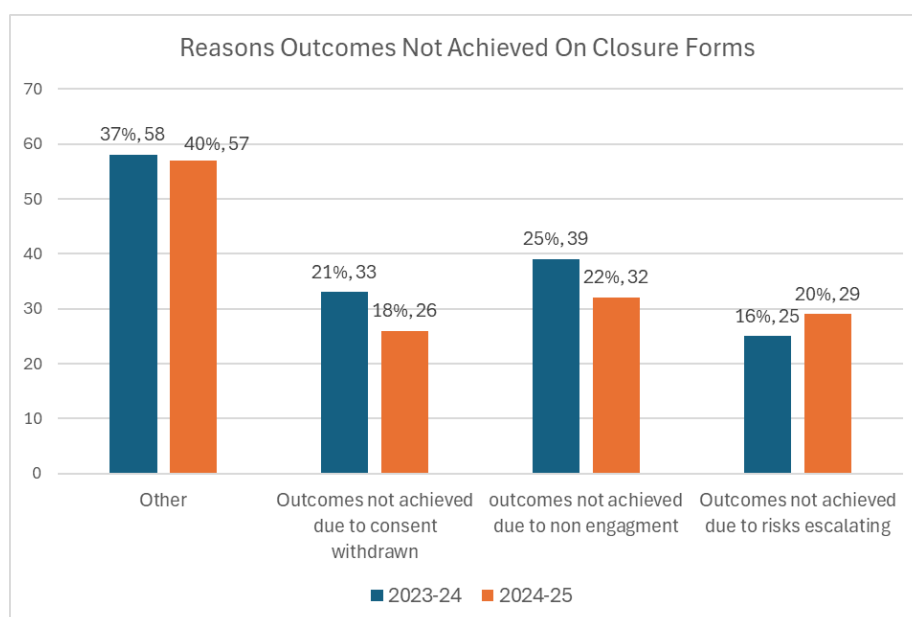


Figure 12. Reason Outcome Not Achieved on Closure Records

Involvement Length

Figure 13 and the table below show that the average length of involvements in 2024-25 increased from 2023-24's average to a length closer to 2022-23's figure. This could be an impact of increased case loads and a reduction in the intensity/frequency of visits.

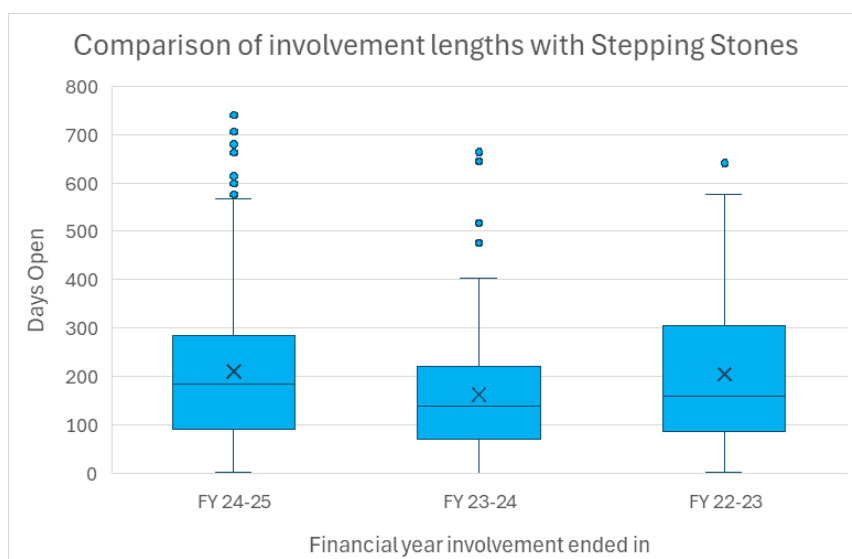


Figure 13. Stepping Stones involvement duration if ended in FY

Financial year	Mean Duration of cases ending in FY	Mean duration of cases ending in FY (Limiting Range to 5%-95%)
2022/23	204 Days	193 Days
2023/24	162 Days	154 Days
2024/25	210 Days	197 Days

Soft Key Performance Indicators Chosen on Initial Consultation Forms and Closure Records

When completing Initial Consultation, Group Supervision, and Closure forms on LCS, the Senior Practitioners select Soft KPIs/focuses to indicate what type of work they aim to complete with the family. There are separate lists for child, adult and parent focuses. The tables below show how many times each focus was selected on initial consultation forms and closure records made in FY2024-25.

Child Focuses	Accepted Initial Consultations	Closure Records
Wishes and feelings	195	261
Explore lived experience	186	247
Bespoke work with the child to support them	156	209

Relationship rebuilding within the family	125	162
Increasing sense of identity	73	104
Support with Education / NEET / possible exclusions	41	59
Reducing violence to peers and family	40	60
Exploitation (criminal/sexual)	27	34
Mental Health Support	14	29
Self-harm behaviours	13	15
Reduced missing episodes	8	15
Substance Misuse Support	7	13
Preparing for Independence	7	18
Improved health conditions	5	6
Adult Focuses	Accepted Initial Consultations	Closure Records
Explore lived experience	222	310
Increasing sense of identity	122	146
Domestic abuse support / perpetrator work	106	166
Mental Health Support	52	101
Life skills and budgeting (skills to manage a home)	49	79
Substance Misuse Support	42	61
Housing Support	41	61
Community support / increase network	34	62
Support with understanding positive risk taking	10	25
Employment / career opportunities (signpost to services)	9	9
Adults Service Support	5	26
Support if a learning disability is a barrier	3	10
Reduce criminality	3	0
Parent Focuses	Accepted Initial Consultations	Closure Records
Confidence building with parenting	228	302
Increase understanding of impact of adult behaviours on child.	228	297
Relationship rebuilding within the family	152	196
Safety planning	110	111
Accessing the community as a family	56	74
Reduction in child harming a parent	55	61

The rankings for focuses are similar between initial consultations and closure records. Lived experience was one of the most common categories for both child and adult focuses and confidence building was the most common parenting focus selected. Preparing for independence and adult service support were more likely to have been selected on closure records than identified at initial consultations, this could mean that these needs are only

being identified once work has started or that newer cases are less likely to need this type of support. Alternatively, an increase in key performance indicators at closure, are due to new areas of intervention being identified at 12 weekly points when soft measures are revisited. This is a tool for children, young people, parents and carers to identify areas that they would like support in.

Operational Delivery

Outreach

As can be seen from the data within this report, whilst there were twenty-one less referrals accepted, the increase in service provision across all areas was significantly increased and this was at a time where there were considerably less staff to undertake the work. This was accomplished due to the strong infrastructure of Stepping Stones which has been developed over the years and the practice that has been embedded. Regular Performance meetings ensured close management oversight. Power BI has further been developed ensuring closer monitoring of group supervisions resulting in increased consistency, an increase in the number of soft measures being completed improving in the focus of intervention, monitoring of supervisions taking place initially within 2 weeks and 6 weekly thereafter.

During the summer there was an increase in crisis support needed within the wider children's service. Balancing planned therapeutic interventions for Stepping Stones children and families, alongside crisis support for non-Stepping Stones families was challenging, but necessary for children and families on the edge of care who required crisis support. Whilst successful for a very short period, it evidenced that this support which sits outside of the scope of Stepping Stones, could not be sustained within current resources.

At the same time service development projects continued and an example of this is the pilot between Stepping Stones and Early Help, to reduce the escalation for statutory intervention by combining service expertise, providing earlier intervention of Stepping Stones therapeutic approach at an earlier stage and Early Help targeted practical support. The outcome of this work will be reviewed next year.

Multi-Agency Working

A social work feedback survey was undertaken and although the overall response rate was extremely poor, the feedback received was helpful as it resulted in a meeting with Post Adoption Support and Compass to look at how Stepping Stones support adoption breakdown.

The Stepping Stones Forum where social workers present families facing barriers to accessing services, remains well supported by our multiagency partners. Services collaborating include educational colleagues from the Virtual School, Housing colleagues, Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service, We Are with You, Adult Mental Health, the Looked After Children's Health Nurses and Probation. Housing continues to be the most requested service, followed by request for support from education

Residential Hub

Stepping Stones continues to work closely with Pebble House and Chelmaren, internal residential homes, to step children down from residential care.

Our Educational Psychologist base themselves at each of the homes for 1 day per fortnight and work with the Registered Managers, providing group supervision, training to the team and undertaking child lead sessions with the children and young people in the home.

An internal weekly tracking meeting between the respective Service Manager's, the Residential Quality and Development Lead and Stepping Stones's Team Manager; to monitor the intervention of both services and trajectory when children will move on to minimise the length of bed vacancies.

Fostering

Work as continued with the fostering service to try and increase the number of approved specialists foster carers and ensure that the right support is offered to those recruited. Stepping Stones is represented on the Fostering Transformation Board.

TACT Fostering were approached to work in partnership identifying carers for children awaiting step down to foster care. They are a small independent fostering agency with currently one foster carer in Shropshire so were keen to work together. They attempted to recruit carers in the surrounding areas close to Shropshire border but were unsuccessful. They continue to maintain links with Stepping Stones and keep us in their scope. The aim of the work with independent fostering agencies is to increase the number of children able to move to loving foster homes.

Family Group Coordinators

The Family Group Conferencing team (FGC) works with families primarily whose children are subject to Public Law Outline to divert them away from costly care proceedings or assisting families to formalise their support networks to safeguard children and identify alternative carers. Their work is focused on bringing families and their friendship network together, to formalise safety plans, minimising risks to children and reducing reliance on statutory services.

Throughout FY24/25, there were staffing challenges within the FGC service. There were four workers in post, but due to sickness only three workers available to facilitate family group conferences and meetings. The data below evidences how impressive that team has performed.

Family Group Conference (FGC)

Referrals

The chart below shows that the number of FGC referrals have stayed at a similar level to the previous year with 295 children referred at least once in 2024-25 and 291 referred in 2023-24.

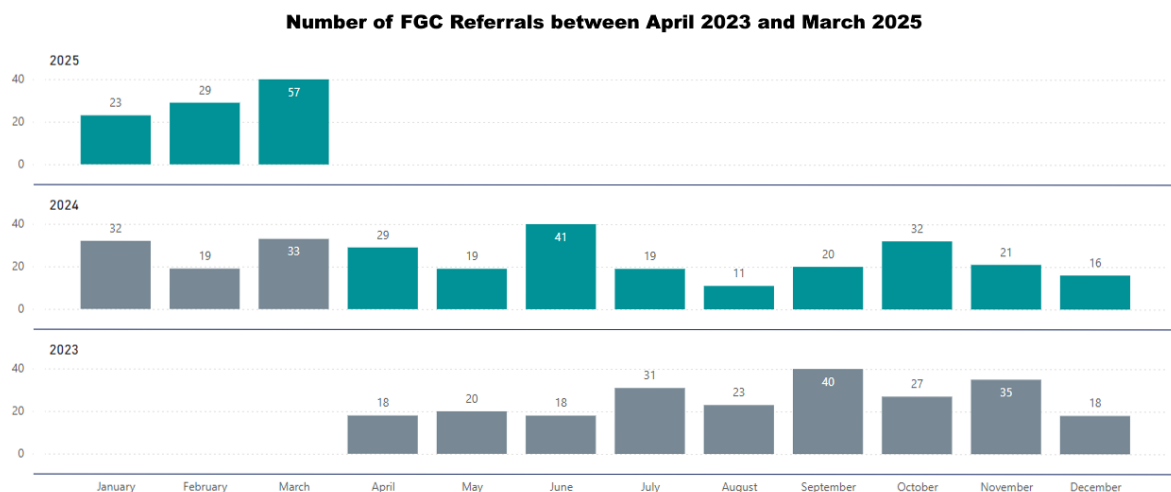


Figure 14. FGC Referrals each month

In 2023-24 and 2024-25, Case Management Teams submitted the most FGC Referral. When looking at teams individually, Assessment Team North submitted the most referrals in both years.

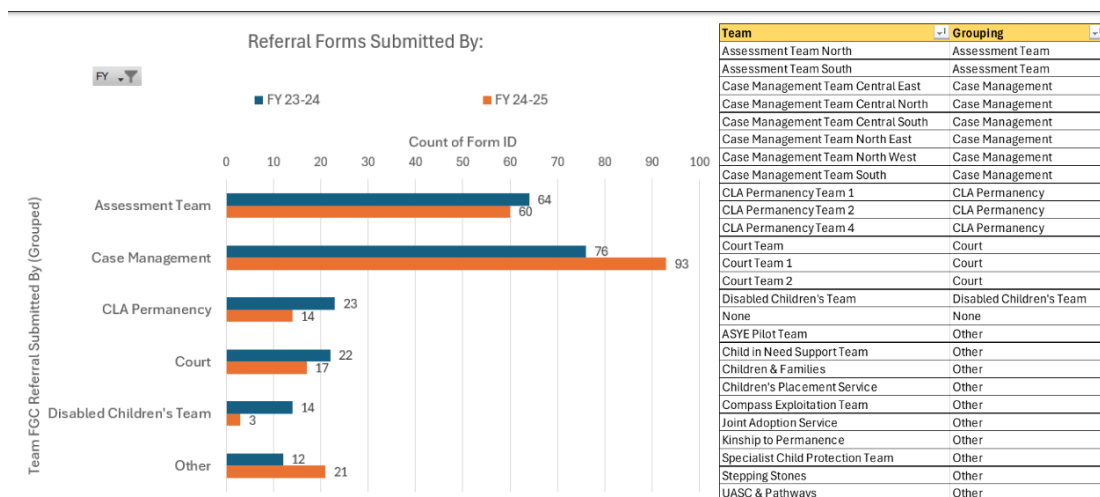


Figure 15. Allocated SW who submitted the referral

For referrals that went on to open an FGC workspace the most common status for a child when they were referred was CPP (Child Protection Plan). When compared to 2023-24, the number of children who were CIN decreased by 42% in 2024-25. The number of children who were Children Looked After increased by 28%.

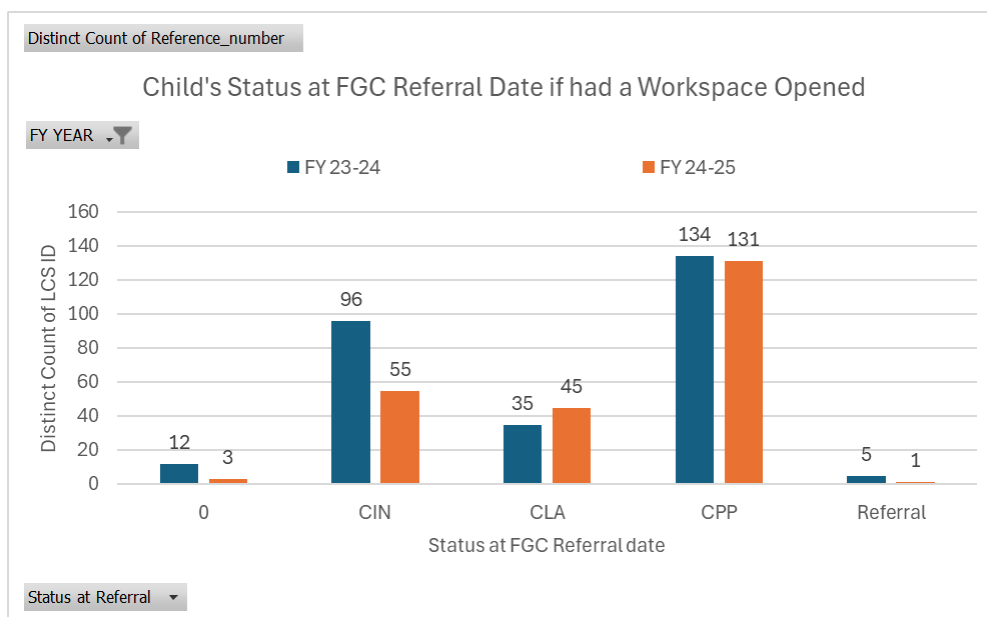


Figure 16. Status when FGC Workspaces opened

FGC Meetings

The types of meetings completed by the FGC team are FGC Conferences and Family meetings, these are different because the FGC Conference is initially facilitated by the coordinator and family are then given time to remain in the room alone to draft their own plan. Family meetings are led by the coordinator, and the plans are drafted together. Both types of meetings start with an initial meeting where the plans are devised and then a review meeting follows a few months later where the plan is reviewed for its effectiveness. The table below Figure 17 shows that while the total number of meetings decreased, they did not decrease significantly, given the challenges with the reduction of FGC coordinators undertaking them. The largest decrease was from initial FGC Conference, which by virtue of the model of the meetings require a more structured approach and specific planning.

Financial year	FGC		Family Meeting		Total
	Initial	Review	Initial	Review	
FY 22/23	53	62	82	65	262
FY 23/24	117	57	62	64	300
FY 24/25	65	46	75	85	271

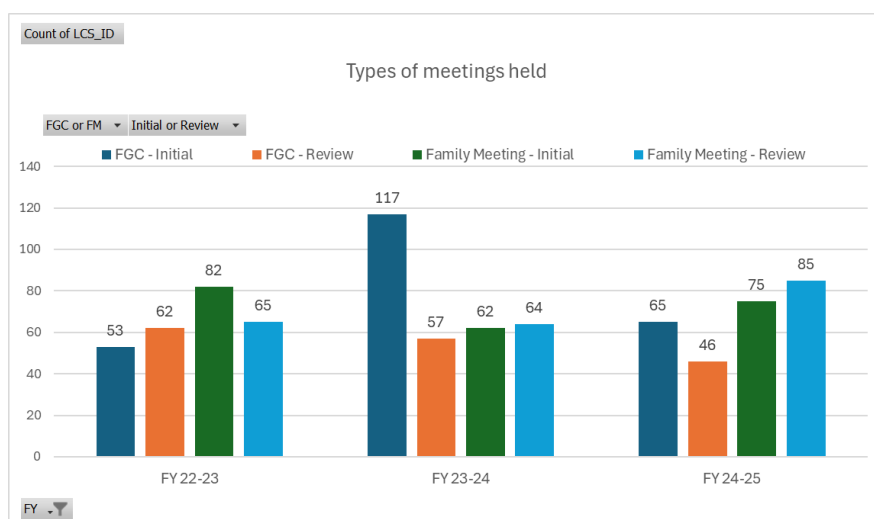


Figure 17. Number of FGC Meetings held each year

Impact of the Upscale on Children Looked After (CLA)

The upscale of Stepping Stones came into effect in the 2023-24 financial year. It is important to monitor how this upscale has impacted CLA statistics. Figure 18 shows whether a child was working with Stepping Stones when they became CLA. This percentage increased from 13% to 23% between FY22-23 and FY 23-24. It increased slightly in FY 24-25 to 25%.

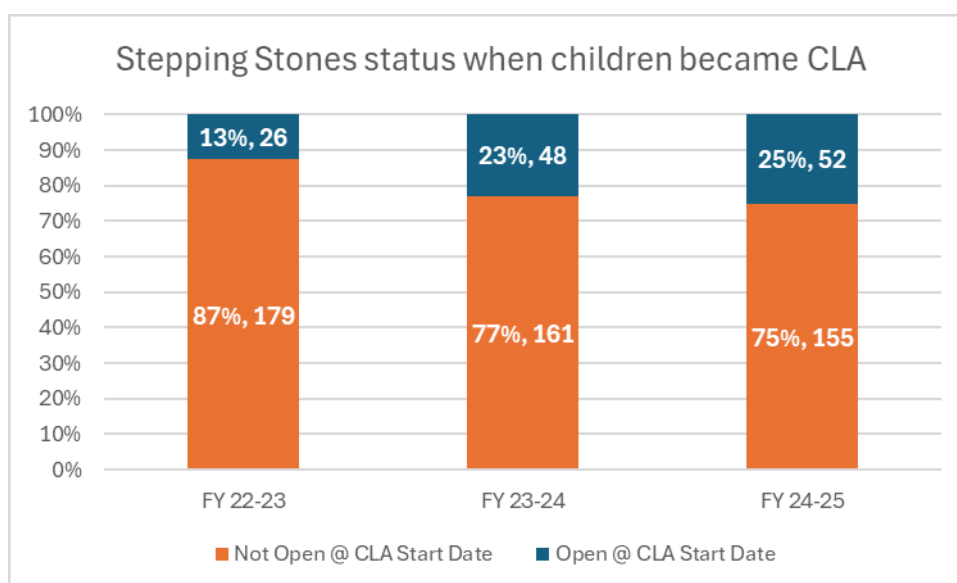


Figure 18. Percentage working with Stepping Stones if they became CLA

Stepping Stones is increasingly contributing to children ceasing to be CLA or transitioning to a 'P1 – Placed with Parents' placement. Over the past three financial years, Stepping Stones has been involved transitioning children throughout their placement move. In FY 22-23 17% of children (16) who ceased being CLA or moved to a P1 placement were working with Stepping Stones at the time. However, in FY 24-25, this has increased to 42% (45 children) demonstrating that more children can be stepped down safely with the wrap around service that Stepping Stones provides. These statistics from Figure 19 excludes young people who ceased being CLA within 1 month of their 18th birthday.

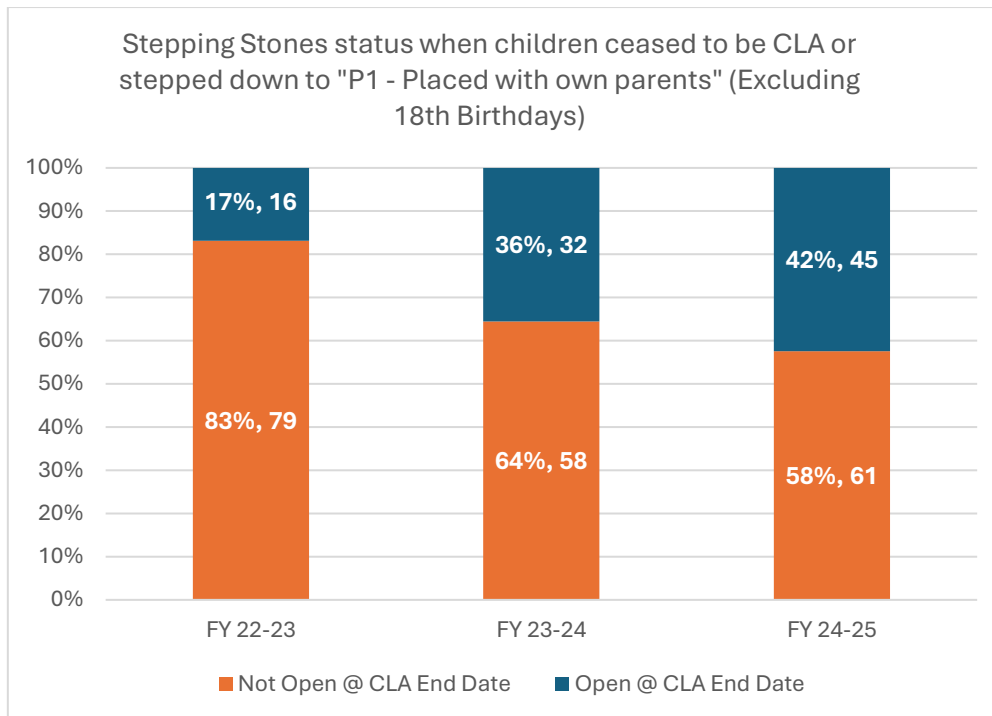


Figure 19. Percentage working with Stepping Stones when they ceased being CLA or moved to 'Placed with own parents'

Figure 20 shows how long children continued to be looked after when they ceased being CLA or moved to a P1 placement before their 18th birthday, by financial year without looking at if they were working with Stepping Stones. It shows that step downs in FY 24-25 were most common for children who were looked after for less than a year while FY 23-24 showed a larger amount of step downs for the 2-4 year period.

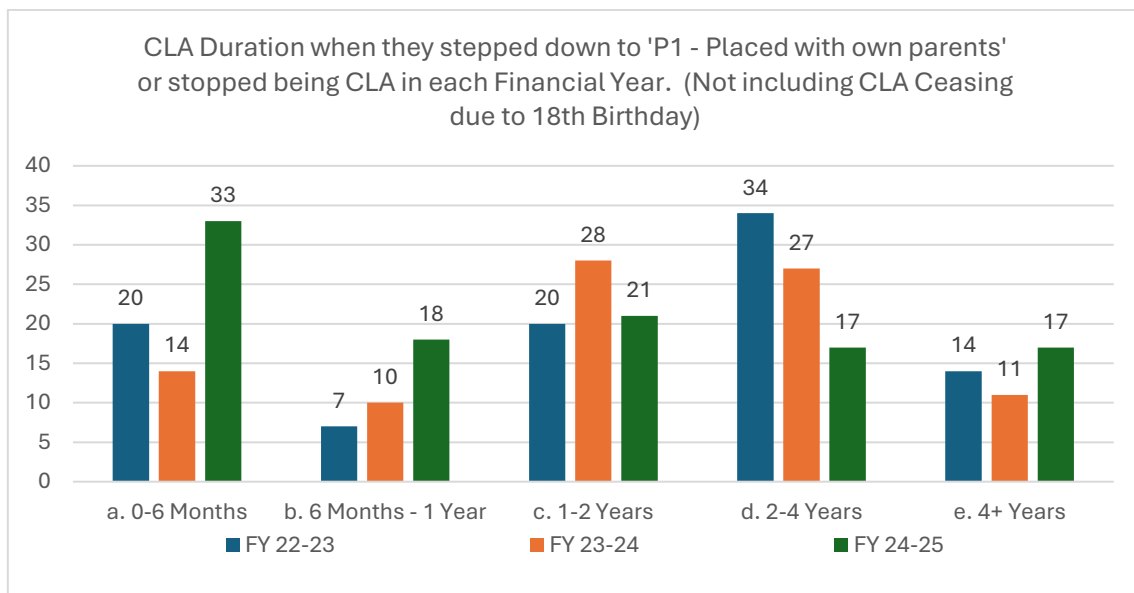


Figure 20. Number of children who ceased being CLA or moved to 'Placed with own parents' each year

Figure 21 focuses on FY 24-25 and looks at whether they were open to Stepping Stones when they stepped down. This visual shows that children are more likely to be involved in

step downs from being looked after when the child had been looked after for less than 6 months or over 4 years, compared to if the child had been CLA for 1-4 years.

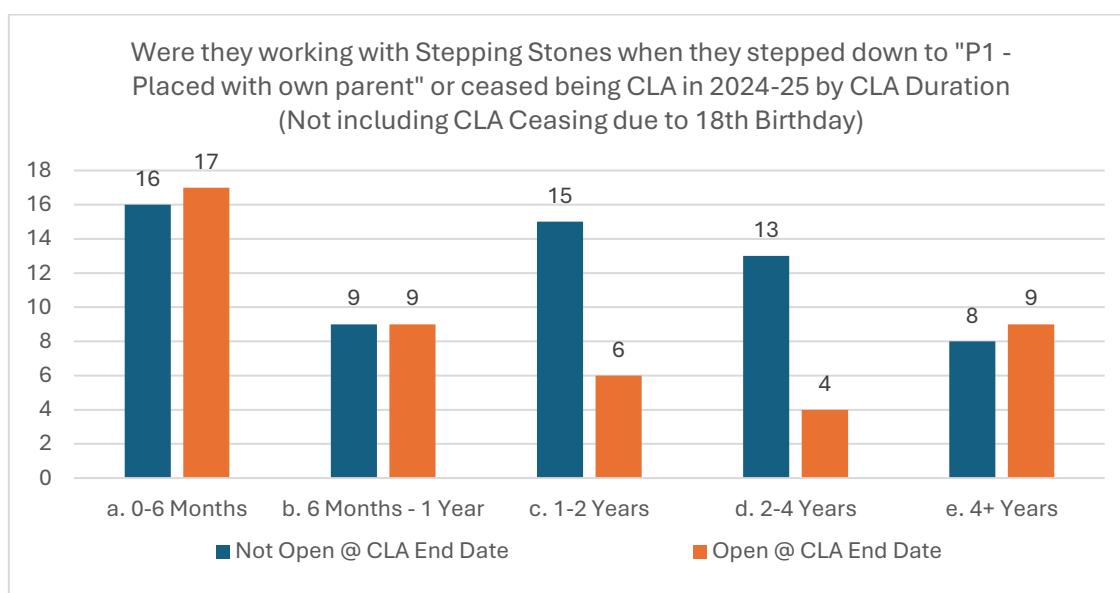


Figure 21. CLA Duration if they ceased being CLA or moved to 'Placed with own parents' in 2024-25

Since Stepping Stones began in April 2021, 242 Target Achievement Forms have been created indicating an avoidance of 242 children becoming looked after. Only 17 children became looked after following their forms being submitted as of the 31st March 2025. The table below shows which year 'Avoidance Closure Forms' were from if they stepped up later and how long it was from avoidance form to step up. The average days to step up decreases as time passes. Therefore, we do not have the complete picture because some children who were open to stepping Stones in FY21-22, only became looked after in 2024

FY of Avoidance	Number of Children	Average Days from Avoidance Form to CLA start
2021-22	4 (4 Families)	686.5 Days
2022-23	5 (1 Family)	319 Days
2023-24	6 (3 Families)	136.8 Days
2024-25	2 (1 Family)	133 Days

PLO

2023/24

130 Children commenced PLO

39 (30%) had been involved with Stepping Stones before entering PLO (open for any time before PLO started)

24 (18%) opened to Stepping Stones for the first time while they were in PLO

2024/25

148 Children started PLO

43 (29%) had been involved with Stepping Stones before entering PLO

12 (8%) opened to Stepping Stones for the first time while they were in PLO

Feedback

Compliment for Outreach Worker AL from a Parent

M said that she had found the work with Stepping Stones is going really well. J finds AL really easy to talk to. AL consistently visits J at school, always reliable and have never let him down, this has been so important to J as he has experienced this before. When asked has the situation at home improved during the time working with Stepping Stones, M replied "definitely". AL has worked with parents and shared strategies that they are using daily.

Compliment for Outreach Worker NJ from a Parent

M's first words were, "Brilliant, just brilliant", adding that, "I really feel that without NJ, I couldn't have got through this, and be where I am now. M shared that, "NJ's advice, support and constant presence, both in person, and when I needed it on the phone, has been the best thing ever, for me and the boys". M said that she, "will be forever grateful that such an amazing person has been with me and the boys, throughout our journey and I can honestly say that my confidence with parenting differently is as high as it's ever been".

NJ was described as, "patient, calm, knew so much, and made me believe in myself as a mum, and I now do feel I am doing all I can to be the best mum. NJ has helped make us a family again - and that won't be forgotten"

Compliment Passed on by a Social Worker for FGC Co-ordinator LM from a Parent

They (parents) cannot thank you enough for the FGC, it has had life changing positive impacts for them both. P's family have fully accepted R into the family now, they hug and embrace him, and they are also allowing S to visit them at their home. The FGC allowed their families to finally come together and connect.

Compliment for FGC Co-ordinator TH from a Parent

TH was helpful and a pleasure to work with, she listened to the boys in detail of their views and opinions about what they wanted both in the plan and their future going forward. She was very accommodating to them with plenty of biscuits and drinks. The experience overall was very pleasant, helpful and enlightening.

Next Steps

Phase 5 – Business case submitted in January 2025, for the expansion of Stepping Stones upscale to pilot a Placement Stability Team. It is proposed that the new team will focus primarily on children on the edge of connected carer or foster home breakdown, working intensively with both the carer(s) and the child(ren) to avoid a step up into a high-cost residential home.

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CORPORATE PARENTING

Annual Report 2024/25

Abstract

Corporate Parenting is the collective responsibility of the local authority to actively promote the life chances of children in care and care leavers, treating them as if they were our own children. This report provides an update on how our Corporate Parenting responsibilities and activities are being delivered.

Steve Ladd, Service Manager



1. Introduction

Shropshire's Corporate Parenting Board brings together elected members, senior agency representatives and practitioners, and representatives of our children looked after and care leavers, to ensure children and young people in our care, and those who are care leavers, are supported to have high aspirations and achieve their full potential. The Board has a key role in ensuring that the Local Authority and its partners are discharging their responsibilities towards children and young people who are looked after and who are leaving our care to become adults.

The Annual Report 2024/25 highlights the work of the Council and partners and of the oversight of the Board in support of our children and young people looked after and care leavers, charting progress made alongside barriers and plans for the year ahead.

We are all Corporate Parents, and this report ensures the needs and voice of our children and young people is heard and taken into account in the plans we make and resources we use as a Council and with our partners.

We continue to work hard to hear and respond to the voice of our Looked After Children and Care Leavers and continue to apply the test of *"would this be good enough for my child....."* when considering our Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

2. Executive Summary

The term 'Corporate Parent' encompasses the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, all working together to provide the best possible care and safeguarding for children looked after and care leavers up to the age of 25. This report outlines our commitment, strategies, and achievements in fulfilling these responsibilities.

3. Corporate Parenting Principles

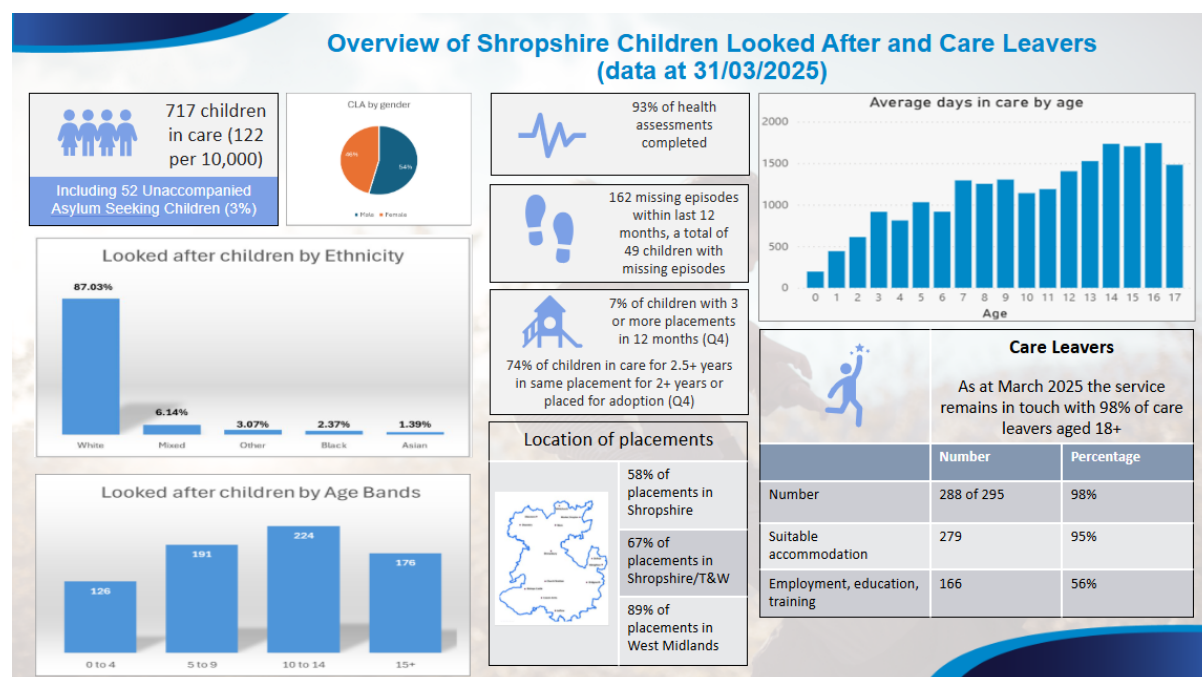
The statutory framework for Corporate Parenting is established in the Children and Social Work Act 2017, which outlines seven principles:

- Act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.
- Encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes, and feelings.
- Take into account the views, wishes, and feelings of children and young people.
- Help children and young people access and make the best use of services provided by the local authority and its partners.
- Promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for children and young people.
- Ensure children and young people are safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships, and education or work.
- Prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

SHROPSHIRE

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

4. Overview of Shropshire Children Looked After and Care Leavers (Data as of 31/03/2025)



5. Key Achievements and Initiatives

5.1 Corporate Parenting Strategy

- The strategy was refreshed and outlines key considerations and plans for Shropshire Council and its partners. (Appendix 1) This strategy outlines key considerations and plans for Shropshire Council and its partners in our role as corporate parents of children in care and those leaving care.
- Emphasis on bringing love back into the system, shaping and delivering services with care and compassion.
- Presented to full Council on 12th December 2024 by the Lead Member and care experienced young person (Co-chair of Corporate Parenting Steering Board)

5.2 Corporate Parenting Steering Board

- A well-established Corporate Parenting Steering Board that acts as an advisory and consultative body to the Council, its partners and its committees and other strategic groups and will provide robust challenge to ensure that Corporate Parenting duties are carried out effectively and consistently. (see corporate parenting strategy for terms of reference)
- It also Provides robust challenge to improve outcomes and life chances for children in care and care leavers.
- Co -Chaired by care experienced young person alongside the Lead Member for Children

5.3 Care Leavers Local Offer and Care Leavers Covenant

- Updated to provide comprehensive support and services to care leavers.
- Compared with neighbouring local authorities to ensure it meets the needs of Shropshire's care leavers. This confirmed that the proposed offer to Shropshire Care Leavers is appropriate, in line with comparable neighbours and that it meets the needs of our Care Leavers, supporting them towards independence.
- Also presented to full Council on 12th December 2024 by the Lead Member and care experienced young person (Co-chair of Corporate Parenting Steering Board)
- Reconfirmed commitment to the Care Leavers' Covenant (appendix 2 signed), demonstrating ongoing support for care leavers.
- In March 2024, Full Council carried the motion that care experienced people would be a protected characteristic. Resolving:
 - That it recognises that care experienced people are a group who are likely to face discrimination.
 - That it recognises that Councils have a duty to put the needs of disadvantaged people at the heart of decision-making through co-production
- In March 2025 we progressed the post of Care Ambassador apprenticeship out to recruitment and appointed to the post in May 2025.

5.4 Independent Charitable Trust 'Above and Beyond'

- Established to enable young people looked after and care leavers to fulfill their aspirations as they move into adulthood.
- The first meeting of the Board of Trustees took place in December 2024.

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**We believe
that every
care
experienced
young person
deserves the
opportunity
to thrive**



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5.5 Participation and the Voice of our Children and Young People

- We have listened to the **voices of some of our care experienced looked after young people** in their feedback about how they have been looked after at our Staff Conferences.
- We have commissioned **Mind of My Own** to enable children and young people to have an independent means to express their views. Mind of My Own is available in a range of languages and is accessible to children who may have communication difficulties or additional needs.
- We promote and support our **Children in Care Council (CICC)** and **Care Leavers' Forum**. A group of care leavers supported by our Leaving Care Team and an independent artist recently refurbished a space for care leavers to meet and enable support with independent living skills.
- We have funded posts for an apprentice **Care Leavers' Ambassador** and **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children Peer Ambassador (which has now been converted to a permanent position)**.
- We have a **Participation Sub-Group and a Participation worker in the Virtual School**, leading on developing and promoting the voice of our children and young people across the Council and with partners, not only to ensure we listen to them in respect of their own plans but also their direct input into the development of services that impact on them, including our development of our Care Leavers' Hub and accommodation, new children's homes, training of foster carers and appointments of key staff.
- Advocacy and Independent Visiting service is in place and utilized
- Corporate Parenting Steering Board is Co Chaired by a **care experienced young person**
- **Shropshire Virtual School Student Council** presentation to Corporate parenting Steering Board



Corporate parent
board Presentation yf

5.6 Stability of Care Arrangements

Permanence

Ensuring children and young people in care have stable, appropriate placements that meet their individual needs is fundamental to achieving positive long-term outcomes. Stability in care supports emotional well-being, educational progress, and the development of secure relationships.

A key component of this is planning for permanence—a principle embedded in all our work with children. Early and proactive permanence planning helps avoid unnecessary delays and ensures that all potential options are explored thoroughly.

All legal avenues are considered with a focus on the least intrusive intervention necessary to safeguard the child and meet their assessed permanence needs. Wherever possible, the goal remains to support children to remain with, or return to, their birth families and siblings. When this is not feasible, alternative permanent solutions are pursued without delay.

SHROPSHIRE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The Permanence Forum plays a central role in this process. It brings together the Strategic Lead for Permanence, the Permanence Coordinator, and representatives from Stepping Stones, Kinship Fostering, Adoption, Special Guardianship Order (SGO) services, and the Principal Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

Since its establishment in April 2018, the Permanence Forum has been instrumental in supporting social workers across Shropshire in developing robust and timely permanence plans. Newly looked-after children are scheduled for discussion at the Forum as soon as they enter care and before their second Child Looked After (CLA) review.

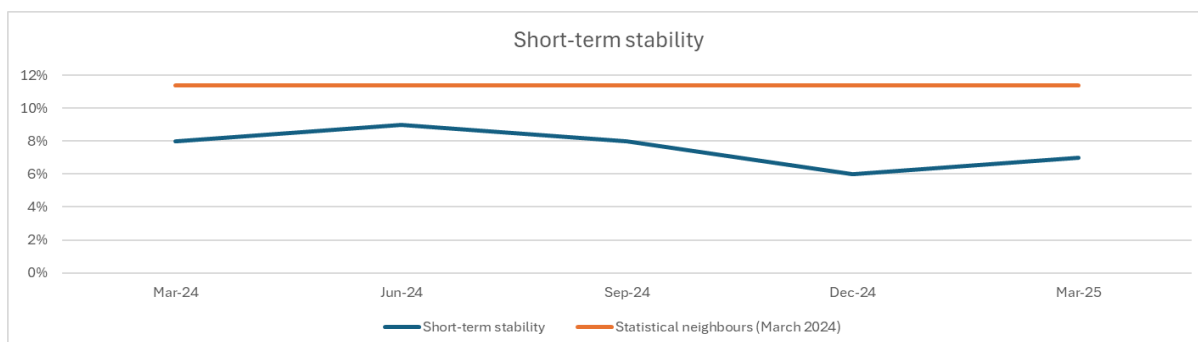
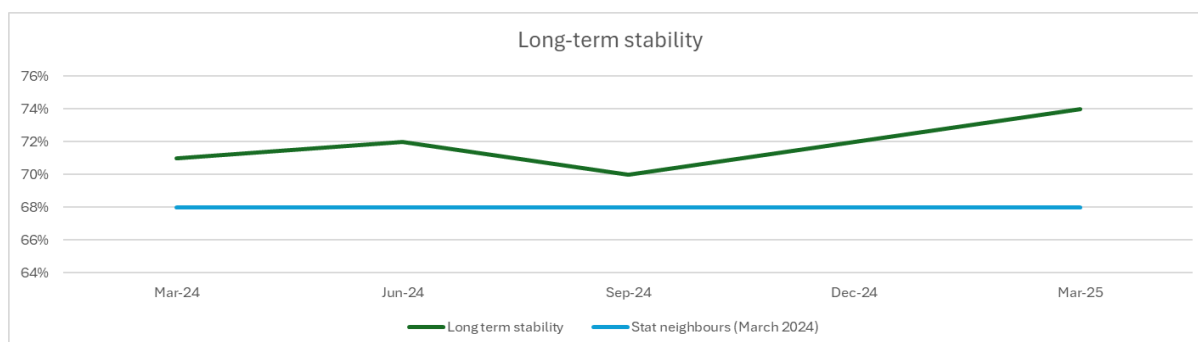
In 2024/25, all children under the age of 16 who entered care had their permanence plans reviewed by the Permanence Forum. In the reporting year, 102 children attended Permanency Forum. 75% were within timescale, being heard before their 2nd CLA Review. Many of these children had multiple parallel plans in place. The Forum provided critical support in prioritising actions, identifying appropriate pathways, and coordinating the professionals involved.

Stable Homes

Stable Homes (Placement stability) is an area that that is closely monitored.

The following charts for 2024/25 tell us that a higher percentage of our children are secure in their homes (long-term stability) and experience consistency of care and home environment.

On the other side it shows a low percentage in disruption \ moves of home occur during the first 12 months of a child be cared for, which when combined with long term stability means we are sustaining good performance, Stable Homes, that enables our children and young people to experience and build good relationships from a secure base.

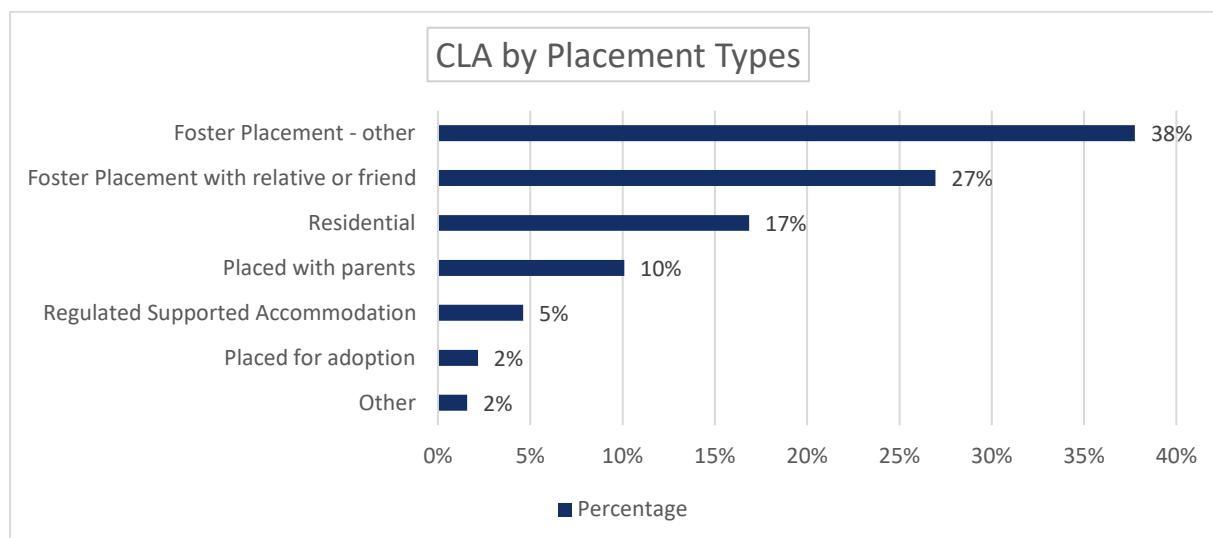


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LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Where our Children Live

77% of our children looked after population are cared for in a family setting – placement with parents, connected foster carers, foster carers, prospective adopters etc.



- We have 72 foster carers approved to offer care to over 140 children
- We have 118 connected carers offering care to 185 children
- We increased we recruited 16 new fostering households compared to the previous year

Shropshire own and operate 6 residential children's homes. One of these is a short-break home

- All our homes are rated Good or Outstanding and are providing excellent quality of care
- Children are making exceptional progress and achieving significant outcomes.
- We have increased internal residential capacity from 2 children's homes to 6 children's homes in 5 years.

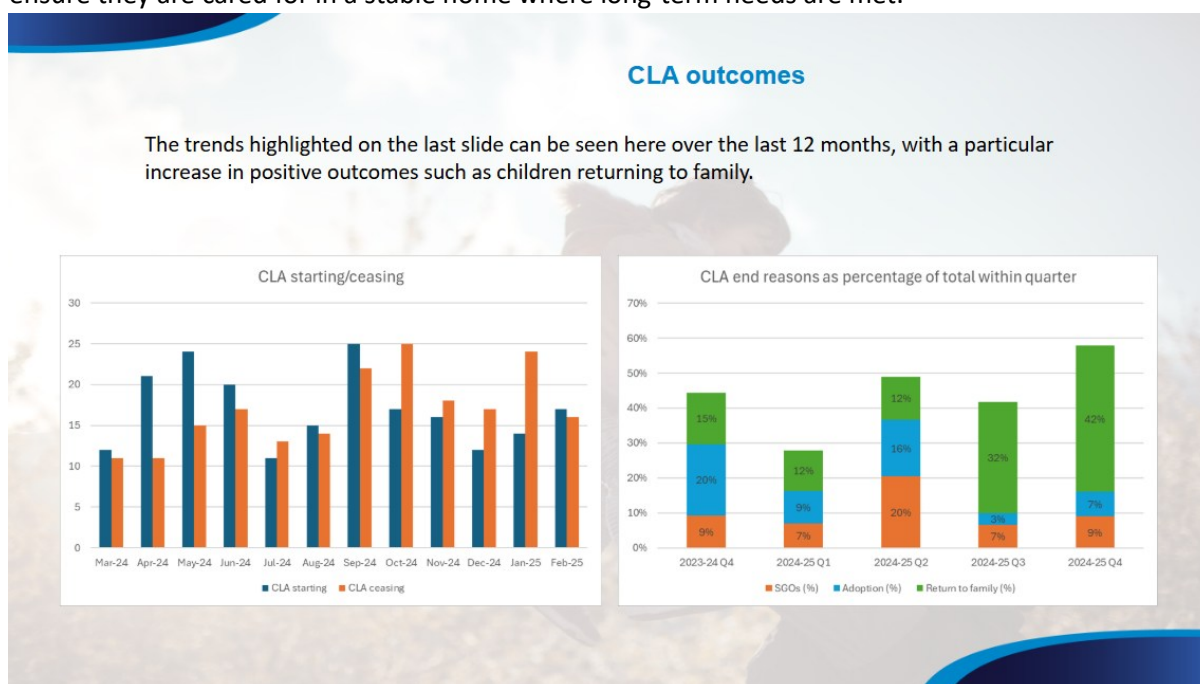
What else have we done

- Commissioned **Stepping Stones** to reduce the need for children to be looked after by supporting children to remain living safely within their family or stepping back to their family, and to support children to be in the right care arrangement for their needs by 'stepping-down' into foster families from residential care.
 - 39 children stepped down from their care arrangement through stepping stones involvement
 - 17/39 children stepped down from residential setting to foster care, return home or to connected carers

SHROPSHIRE

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- Refreshed our **Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy**, including Council approval for a significant uplift in fees for foster carers.
- Opened **4 new Children's Homes** since 2020, including a home for 16/17-year-olds and 1 for children aged 8-12 to support them on their journey to adult life.
- Commissioned an **End-to-End Permanence Project** to update our Permanence Strategy. The aim of the Strategy will be a shared understanding from the beginning of Children's Services involvement to the end of what 'permanence' looks and feels like for a child and what we need to do at all stages to find the right pathway to permanence, not just in the 'here and now', but through their childhood and beyond.
- Launched a new **End-to-End Permanence Strategy** in 2024 to reflect our priority to enable most children to remain living within their family, either with a parent or a connected carer, without needing to be looked after. Where children need an alternative family, we will make decisions and take actions swiftly. Where children's needs are best met by being looked after, we will ensure they are cared for in a stable home where long-term needs are met.



- We updated our **Sufficiency Strategy** (2024).
- Increased IRO headcount by 5 full time equivalent to bring capacity to the IRO function

5.7 Education and Virtual School

[Virtual School Annual report](#)

Key highlights of this year's report are:

SHROPSHIRE

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- No Permanent Exclusions for any of our Children who are Looked After (CLA) for three years in a row – and 23 prevented with the help of partnership working.
- Completion and Quality of PEPs has shown an upward trajectory with 97% completion and 97.2% good quality by the end of the summer term. Additionally - following preparation through the year, our new Key Stage 5 and Early Years Shropshire PEPs launched in September 2024.
- A significant increase in the numbers of Children who are Looked-After that we have supported this year. This is particularly marked in years -2 to 11 with a +17% change through the academic year.
- Planning and preparation for a significant reduction in annual funding with the loss of Recovery and National Tuition Programme Grants from September 2024. This is in the context of budget austerity in schools and the council.
- Excellent attendance outcomes for indicators against statistical neighbours and national for both CLA and Children with a Social Worker. However, challenges have increased around securing swift education for CLA with EHCPs who move out of county – and a new Escalation process is being piloted.
- At the end of KS4, significant gains were made in Maths outcomes this year for both indicators of grades 4 and 5 or above and 13% achieved 5 GCSEs at grades 9-5 including English and Maths, compared to 4.2% last year. End of KS2 outcomes for Combined were lower than regional/national unverified outcomes, but progress indicated to be good – and for Reading/Writing outcomes were close to national CLA averages.
- The VS Head Teacher has recently moved into a new post and is now Head of the Virtual School and Access to Education. This will necessitate a new look at how best to meet service needs in alignment with this change.
- Early evaluation of Phase 1 of the Hearts & Minds and Nurture projects are beginning to evidence good impact. The VS training offers are very well received and attended.

SHROPSHIRE

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This year, we are particularly proud of our young people because:

17 Shropshire CLA students achieved 8 GCSEs or more. One young person with neuro-diverse challenges attending a specialist hub achieved triple 9 in science plus high grades in 5 other subjects. He is going on to 6th form to study science.*

Our young people from School Council who 'took over' the SVS Conference, positively disrupting and challenging adults to make Stable Schools Built on Love!

11 young people starting A levels and 2 going to university this Autumn! Congratulations to those students who achieved robust A level grades and 1 student who achieved 3 Distinction Stars!

K received a SVS Award for making cakes for a local home for the elderly & volunteered there. He said hello to every resident, served them drinks & one of his cakes, also played games. The manager of the home has asked if Kane can make this a regular visit as it brought so much joy to the residents.

Our children achieved better attendance than statistical neighbours and national with absence at only 6.9% at 31st March 2023 (*DFE data*)

K who demonstrated exceptional dedication, talent & leadership - including her involvement with the Kidderminster Harriers, participation in the Silver Duke of Edinburgh Award program, achievements as a referee, mentorship of younger pupils, and her trials for the Lionesses Team.

The young people who engaged so well with their Aspire mentoring for careers, taking risks to think about the future so that 100% of them said they now have a clearer vision of their future.

5.8 Health and wellbeing

- Implemented the new Mental Health Pathway with BeeU.
- Provided additional Business Support to social workers to complete the information for Initial Health Assessments in timescale and to a high standard to inform their Health Plans
- ICB continues to offer free prescriptions to care leavers.
- As at 31/03/25 93% of children had completed health assessments.
- The Designated Doctor and Designated Nurse for Looked After Children will take the lead for ensuring all children looked after having their health assessments completed in timescale and for the provision of a Health Passport to all care leavers at age 18.



- Every looked after young person has the opportunity for a final health appointment before they are 18 and will have a **Health Passport** to take with them into adult life.

5.9 What our care experienced children and young people tells us

Social Workers are important

Message to current social worker J and previous social worker P

- *“hey J, it’s only C, obviously I leave care this year will I be able to see P one last time as she has been by my side for half my life and it’s the only thing I wish for is to see her one last time as well as you!!.”*

Extracts of letters to care team at one of our Children’s Homes

- *“you’ve all made your way to be a second family, you all loved me when i didn’t love myself and you showed me so many things and taught me so many things, life lessons that you didn’t have to show me but you showed me out of the kindness of your hearts”.*
- *“I came here a different person to the person that is leaving here. A better person, the best version of myself. This house feels like a home. Deep down every child here knows that”.*

Extracts of presentations by 2 young people to our Staff Conferences 2022 & 2323

Feelings

- *“One of the hardest things is being away from family. I understand why but being 2 hours away and with no real plan as to how you will see family is hard. I went to live with people I didn’t know, who didn’t seem to care, no college, no job, no friends”*
- *“Being moved all the time gives me the feeling of not being “wanted” and shame; I have to keep reminding myself that its not my fault”.*
- *“I know what family is, I know what being in a family feels like...I learnt that from my foster carers – but then that ended. I know what love is and how it feels to live without it”*

What would help

- *“Don’t move kids as far away, our families are important and just cos its not going well at the time we need support to make it better. I needed my family, especially my mum”.*
- *“For anyone working with these kids to understand it takes loads for us to talk to you and tell you stuff – that is almost scarier than what we are living through. If you don’t get that then don’t work with us”.*
- *Having “One person that follows you through your whole journey, in whatever role, someone that understands”.*
- *“Carers and Social Workers should be able to give a proper explanation for why something happens or can’t happen”. “Because it’s a regulation” or “because it keeps you safe” is not an explanation - What is the regulation? How does it keep you safe? Is there anything we can do to make it better?*

6. Summary of Corporate Parenting Strategy Priority Actions for 2024-2026

- New **Participation Strategy** to be implemented.

SHROPSHIRE

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- In February 2024 Shropshire Council will be asked to approve a Motion (*accepted in March 2024) to accept that **having care experience is treated as if it were a Protected Characteristic**. **Completed**
- We are starting up **an independent charitable Trust 'Above and Beyond'** for young people looked after and care leavers to enable them to fulfil their aspirations as they move into adulthood. **Established**
- Host an event to **promote the Care Leavers' Covenant** again with businesses and partners.
- **Each department in the Local Authority will be looking at what it can pledge specifically to our care experienced young people.** The Council can then officially pledge its offers of support available to care leavers through "MyCovenant" which will then be published on the MyCovenant App.
- Implement the **new Mental Health Pathway with BeeU**. **In place**
- Provide additional Business Support to social workers to complete the information for **Initial Health Assessments in timescale and to a high standard to inform their Health Plans**. **Completed**
- The updated **Care Leavers' Local Offer** will be published by the end of December 2024.
- We will implement any actions agreed as an outcome of the **Regional Care Leavers' Offer Project**.
- We are commissioning **an additional children's home** for young children who are not ready to live within a family setting yet. This will enable the children to remain living locally. **Completed**
- We are updating our **Sufficiency Strategy** (2024). **Completed**
- We will have a new **End-to-End Permanence Strategy** in 2024 to reflect our priority to enable most children to remain living within their family, either with a parent or a connected carer, without needing to be looked after. Where children need an alternative family, we will make decisions and take actions swiftly. Where children's needs are best met by being looked after, we will ensure they are cared for in a stable home where long-term needs are met. **Completed**
- The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will monitor **Shropshire's 'Stability Index'** through these measures for our children looked after:
- The **Virtual School Improvement Plan** aims to improve attainment and to increase inclusion and reduce exclusions. This will be overseen by the Virtual School Governing Body and progress reported to the Corporate Parenting Steering Board. **Completed**
- Housing and Care Leaver **Joint Protocol** to be developed **Completed**
- Corporate Parenting Induction sessions for new elected members – July 2025



Corporate Parenting
Induction for Elected Members

6.2 Conclusion:

Significant developments have occurred over the last 12 months and we are committed to being ambitious for the next coming year and beyond.



Through our structures, like the Corporate Parenting Steering Board, we will continue to ensure that the outcomes and life chances of children in care and care leavers are improved so they are in line with their peers and will act as the champion for these children and young people.

We will:

- Ensure that the commitments outlined in the Shropshire's Charter for Children in Care and Care Leavers are delivered.
- Oversee the implementation of this strategy with delegated responsibilities to Heads of Service or Senior Managers within all Departments and partner agencies.
- Monitor the delivery of good, safe, high-quality services through quality assurance and performance management frameworks.
- Provide High Support and High Challenge to ensure effective undertaking of the Corporate Parenting Responsibility – holding to account on behalf of the council.
- Provide clear line of sight on practice and what good practice looks like and assure selves it is delivered, including the role of the IRO.
- Provide Scrutiny and oversight of performance, outcomes and impact for children and young people of the work of the Local Authority and key partners.
- Lead the culture and share the message about Corporate Parenting responsibilities.
- Lead the narrative – these are our children, who deserve parenting that would be good enough for our own children.

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Shropshire Independent Review Unit Annual Report 2024/25

Reporting Period	31 st March 2024 to 1 st April 2025
Report of	INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE Principal Independent Reviewing Officer
Report to	Jennie Lowe Service Manager
Report Author	Shakuntla Sian
Date of Report	14 th April 2025



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

1. Introduction to the Shropshire Independent Review Unit

- 1.1 The Independent Reviewing Unit in Shropshire operates within the framework of Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023); the IRO Handbook (2010); the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulation Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review. This is the statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of children and young people in care.
- 1.2 The Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and Independent Chairs (ICs) have a responsibility to ensure that plans are timely, effective and achieve good outcomes for children and young people. They have a responsibility to promote best practice and highlight professional standards across the children's social work service. The role is key to the improvement and quality assurance of the Care Planning for Children Looked After; children on a Child Protection Plan and challenging any drift and delay.
- 1.3 The IRO handbook outlines the duty of the IRO Manager/Principal IRO (PIRO) to produce an Annual Report for the scrutiny of the Director, Assistant Director and members of the Corporate Parenting Board. It should also be available to the public on the Council website.
- 1.4 The IRU service in Shropshire Council consists of:
 - Jennie Lowe – Principal Social Worker and Service Manager for Safeguarding Quality Assurance, Learning & Workforce Development
 - Shakuntla Sian – Principal Independent Reviewing Officer (Interim)
 - 14.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) IROs/ICs
- 1.5 This report covers the period from 31st March 2024 to 1st April 2025.

2. Significant events and staffing in IRU

- 2.1 It is important to highlight a significant event which occurred before this reporting period; the Focused Visit undertaken by Ofsted in November 2023, where clear concerns were raised in respect of the capacity within and effectiveness of the IRU.
- 2.2 Excerpts from the subsequent Ofsted letter (published on 12th January 2024) which relate to the IRU included:

“Capacity within the quality performance and assurance service is insufficient to meet demand, due to the increased numbers of those children who are in care and subject to child protection plans. Caseloads for child protection conference chairs are too high. As a result, child protection plans do not receive the appropriate level of independent scrutiny and challenge when there is a lack of progress for children”.

“Children remain on child protection plans for too long and there is an absence of robust and effective challenge by child protection chairs”.

“There is insufficient grip of practice by social workers, managers and child protection chairs in driving forward plans”.

2.3 In response to these concerns and the Priority Actions outlined by Ofsted, the Executive Management Team committed to establishing a Children’s Improvement Board, supported by the DfE, plus some immediate actions which included establishing 5 new permanent IRO/IC roles. The subsequent recruitment campaign saw a good deal of interest in the IRO roles and interviews were undertaken, through which 3 high quality, experienced (external) IROs were appointed between April and June 2024. This was a significant ‘success story’, however the remaining 2 IRO/IC posts remain vacant until early October 2024 both were appointed to from internal candidates.

2.4 There have been other changes in staffing arrangements within the IRU that require have had an impact in/on the last financial year:

- During Quarter 3 of 2023 there was no Principal IRO (PIRO) in place and IRU were solely reliant upon the Service Manager for the day to day running of the service. Interim PIRO was appointed in January 2024; since being appointed the PIRO has provided monthly supervision to the IROs and has had direct responsibility for the team.
- 1 (agency) IRO left the service in March 2024 owing to personal reasons. This individual left behind uncompleted work and a significant backlog and gaps in service that their successor (one of the newly appointed external IROs) had to spend several months resolving.
- 1 (permanent) IRO reduced their hours significantly for a temporary period from end of December 2023 to May 2024. This IRO’s allocated children who required reviews during this period were reviewed by other IROs and, dependent upon need and urgency, some children were reallocated.
- 1 (permanent) IRO who had been on secondment to another area of the service returned to the IRU in April 2024.
- 1 (permanent) IRO offered their resignation in July 2024, and this was accepted; they left the service in Quarter 3 of this reporting period. It needs to be noted that the IRO left significant gaps in service with some children not being reviewed within the recommended timeframes.
- The IRU experienced some wider staff sickness (including some extended sickness absence) and staff changes, including 1 (permanent) IRO leaving for maternity leave (returned in January 2025). These changes increased significantly upon the pressure on IROs caseloads.

2.5 To summarise, the strategic response to Ofsted’s findings of increasing the capacity within the IRU to allow more manageable caseloads, was very much welcomed. Lower caseloads in turn enables greater scrutiny by IROs and evidence of ‘footprint’ on children’s records. Unfortunately, although we were successful in appointing 3 new IROs, all of whom were experienced and confident in their roles, the wider challenges in respect of staff sickness, leave and resignations, resulted in the PIRO being unable to reduce caseload numbers by

any significant degree until the latter part of Q3. This was significantly supported by the addition of 2 locum IROs (1 to cover the vacancy left by permanent IRO leaving in Q3, 1 as additional capacity).

2.6 At the end of this reporting period, the total number of full time and part time staff was 16 which equates to 14.5 FTE IROs. The longest serving member of staff has been with the service since 2008. The 2 most recent members of the team joined in October 2024 as locum IROs as extra capacity.

2.7 The IRU team remains experienced; some colleagues have worked in Shropshire Council for over 20 years, and all have at least 5 years post-qualifying experience in social work, most with considerably more than this. Despite the staffing challenges described above, it is important to note that there are low levels of staff turnover in the IRU. It is fair to say that retention in the Shropshire Council IRU is a significant strength which has enabled some IROs to be consistently involved with children and young people for most if not all their time in our Care.

2.8 Those longest standing IROs have strong and enduring relationships with the children and young people they are responsible for; in some cases, they are the most consistent professional in the children's lives. Our data indicates that 16% of children and young people have had a consistent IRO for two years or more which has contributed to the alignment of Shropshire's Restorative, relationship-based model promoting good relationships between children and their IROs. It is recognised that, due to staff shortages during this reporting period, it has not always been possible to maintain this consistency for all of our children. Every effort is made to ensure the same IRO reviews all the children in a sibling group to maintain continuity for children and parents alike.

2.9 The team is predominantly staffed by females, of the 16 IROs in post only 3 are male. Most staff are of White British ethnic origin. There is a need for increased diversity within the team in respect of greater representation from colleagues from the global majority.

3. Legal Context

3.1 Legislation for the reviewing of children and young people in Local Authority Care is supported by detailed guidance which informs the planning in Shropshire IRU. The appointment of an Independent Review Officer (IRO) is a legal requirement under the guidance of The Children's Act 1989, Children's and Young Persons Act 2008, Children and Social Work Act 2017 (Corporate Parenting Principles), Care Act 2014, Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and the IRO Handbook 2010 which provides a statutory guidance for IRO's and sets out the functions of the local authority in terms of case management and review for children in care. Hence, IROs are guided by a broad range of legislation and statutory guidance to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in care. [iro statutory guidance iros and las march 2010 tagged.pdf\(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

3.2 The IRO Handbook (2010) states that the statutory duties of the IRO are to:

- Monitor the Local Authority's performance of their functions in relation to the child's case.
- Participate in any review of the child's case.
- Ensure any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning their case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority.

3.3 IROs are required to oversee and scrutinise the Care Plan devised for every child or young person placed in the care of the Local Authority. The IRO will ensure that everyone who is involved in the child or young person's life fulfils the responsibilities placed upon them.

4. Caseloads

4.1 The IRO Handbook (2010) recommends IRO caseloads of 50-70 children per (full time) IRO. In Shropshire's IRU, the average full-time caseload includes children and young people in care, children on a Child Protection Plan; and those receiving care through short breaks (Section 20). As already highlighted, IRO caseloads at the beginning of this reporting period were far in excess of this recommended range, with the average caseload for a full time IRO on 31st March 2024 being 76 and part time is 55 although the majority of full time IROs had caseloads that peaked between 89 – 108.

4.2 As clearly recognised by Ofsted in the November 2023 Focused Visit, the high caseload numbers were impacting upon the ability of IROs/ICs to meet their statutory duties as outlined above.

4.3 Following the recruitment of additional IROs (albeit during a period of other staff leaving and experiencing sickness absence), by 1st April 2025, the average full time IRO caseload was 65 children – although some IROs had caseloads that peaked between 69-72: with the part time equivalent being 36.

4.4 This reduction in caseloads is significant and has been particularly noted as so by our most longstanding colleagues, some of whom had been carrying caseloads more than 108 children for several years. In line with the reduction in caseloads, we are seeing greater evidence of IRO 'footprint' on children's files; increased IRO visits to children in their homes (placements) and more timely management of Rags raised within the DRP process. There is more to be done across these areas – which will be detailed later within this report.

4.5 In respect of diversity, as of 1st April 2025 the tables below reflect the ethnic demographic of the Child Looked After (Table 1) and that of the IRO/ ICs (Table 2) indicating ethnic breakdown of the IRU Service is closely matched to the profile of the children they work with.

Table 1:

Ethnicity of CLA	Percentage
White British	84%
Any other White background	2%
White and Asian	2%
Other background	2%
Any other mixed background	2%
African	2%

Arab	2%
White and Black Caribbean	2%
Any other Asian Background	1%
White and Black African	1%
Not obtained	0%
White Irish	0%
Traveller of Irish Heritage	0%
Any other Black background	0%
Gypsy/Roma	0%
Indian	0%
Pakistani	0%
Caribbean	0%
Total	100%

Table 2:

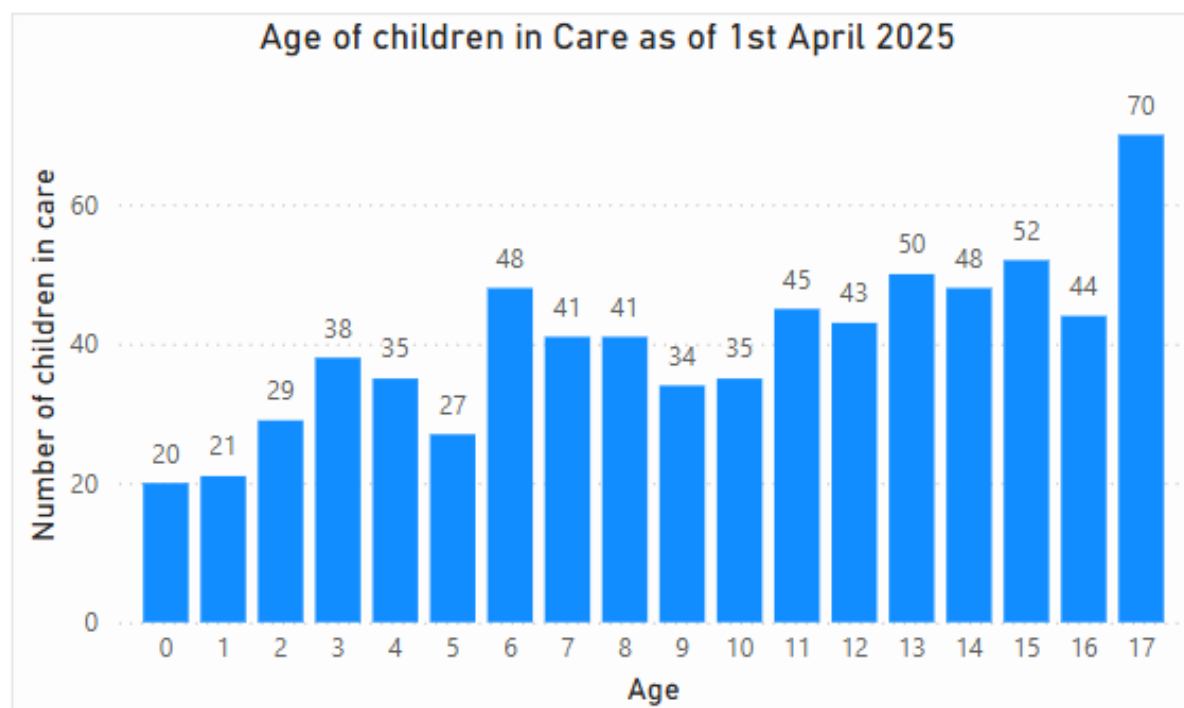
Ethnicity of IRO	Number	Percentage
White British	12	76%
Other background	2	14%
White Irish	2	14%
Total	16	100%

5. Our Children and Young People in Care Population

5.1 There were 721 children and young people in our Care as of 1st April 2025 compared to CLA population being 714 on 31st March 2024. Of these children 329 (46%) were female 392 (54%) male there was not much change the previous year as there were 317 (44%) female and 397 (56%) males.

5.2 Table 3 below indicates an even spread of ages of children in the Care of Shropshire Local Authority, with the majority of our CLA being aged 10 and above.

Table 3



5.3 As of 1st April 2025 the breakdown of legal status for children and young people in Shropshire's Care was as follows:

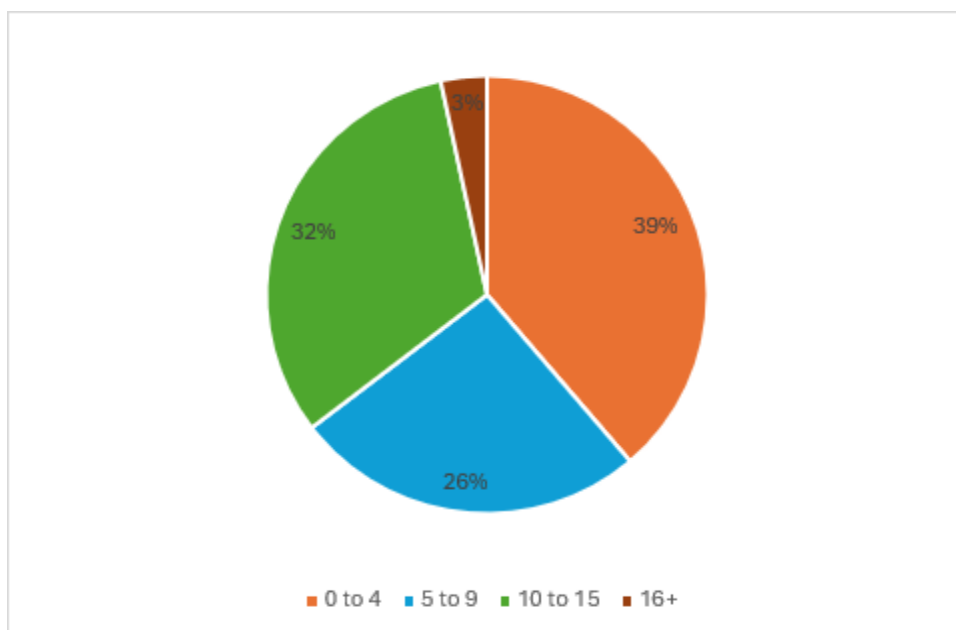
- 500 children subject to a Care Order which was an increase of 13% from the beginning of the reporting period.
- 104 children subject to an Interim Care Order which was a decrease of 26% from the beginning of the reporting period.
- 45 children with a Placement Order status which was an increase of 29% from the beginning of the reporting period.
- 1 child was in Local Authority on remand or committed for trial or sentence.
- 71 children were placed in Voluntarily Care under the auspices of S20 which includes Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) which is a decrease of 27% from the beginning of the reporting period.
- 25 children placed with adopters which is an increase 92% from the beginning of the reporting period.

6. Our Children subject to Child Protection Planning

6.1 On 1st April 2025 the number of children in Shropshire Council IRU that were subject to Child Protection Planning was 178. This number has decreased by 10% from the beginning of the reporting period. This indicates a rise in children and young people who required intervention and planning to ensure their safety and well-being. The decrease in the number of children on the Child Protection Plan is attributed to the work being completed and has effectively enabled a step down out of Child Protection.

6.2 A key initiative involved holding Child Protection Plan Review Panels, Chaired by the Case Management Service Manager. These panels included the participation of the PIRO, a social worker and a team manager. The purpose of these panels was to explore available options for the upcoming Review Child Protection Conference (RCPC). The discussions focused on determining the appropriate threshold for child protection and considered whether children could be transitioned to a Child in Need Plan or moved to Early Help Intervention. The panels ensured the children had increased oversight from Service Manager and PIRO. The panel was effective and as a result several children were successfully stepped down from the Child Protection Plan, indicating progress in their planning process and a reduced need for intensive intervention.

6.3 The age of children on a Child Protection Plan for 1st April 2025 is illustrated in the pie chart below indicating that the most vulnerable population of our children needing safeguarding via a Plan is 0–4-year-old and is closely followed by the other age groups.



6.4 In this reporting period, 15% of children starting on a Child Protection Plan have had a previous Plan. The repeat Child Protection Plan indicates the difficulty of establishing whether thresholds are met due to the reliance on information provided by various agencies, the selective information shared making it challenging for Chairs to gather comprehensive data and the legal constraints involved. The repeated patterns and themes of returning to be made subject to a Child Protection Plan highlights that parents need more work around their presenting issues not just during the Child Protection process but beyond for the cycle to end and a sustained change to occur. The application of the correct thresholds at ICPC and at RCPC when considering recommendations for step downs is an ongoing discussion with Independent Chairs.

7. The IRO Service

7.1 The IRO handbook clearly states the Local Authority is required to carry out Review meetings in line with timings specified in the Regulations (Regulation 33):

- The first review of a child's case within 20 working days of the date on which the child becomes looked after.
- The second review no more than three months after the first.
- A review whenever the IRO directs; and
- A review in all other circumstance's as specified in the Regulations.

7.2 From 31st March 2024 to 1st April 2025 a total of 1666 Child Looked After Reviews have taken place with 83% being within the expected timescales. We saw a decrease in timescales for reviews being met due to several reasons, but the main reason being staff shortages resulted in 17% of reviews not completed within the expected timescales. In the previous year's same reporting period 1407 (77%) children were reviewed within timescales; previous year 2021-22 was 1328 (87%) in timescales.

7.3 Data indicates the poorest IRU performance was in June 2024 when timeliness of reviews was impacted due to internal staff shortages and external reasons within the Local Authority. It is recognised that the review timeliness needs to improve and will be a service priority.

7.4 The IRO is required to speak to the child alone prior to the first review and before every subsequent review (regulation 36) the requirement for direct contact with the child extends to observation of babies and younger children. It is fair to say that IRO visits are improving over the reporting period but there is a way to go.

7.5 Every effort is made to ensure an IRO is allocated within 24 hours of the IRU being informed of the child's entry into care. Data indicates 39% of children who have entered the care system were allocated an IRO within 24 hours and 52% within 5 working days.

7.6 In the main, siblings, whether placed together or apart, are allocated the same IRO, ensuring consistency of information exchange, oversight of care planning and decision making, including sibling family time, and is particularly of benefit when children have different social workers.

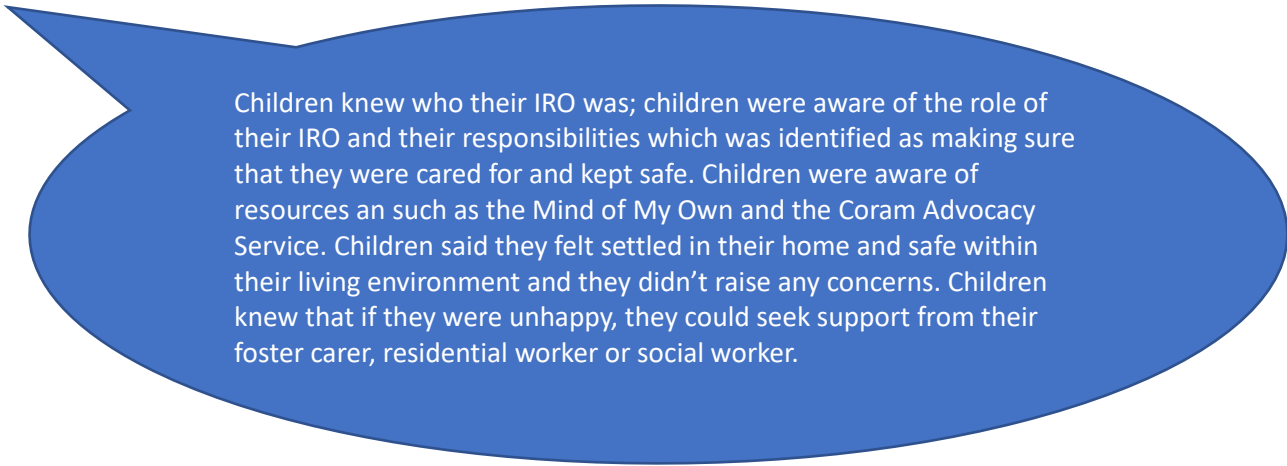
7.7 Although, consultation forms for children, parents and carers are available they are only in paper format as such are rarely being used. The IROs are highly skilled in their field and able to focus upon ensuring the child and young person's wishes, feelings and views are pivotal to and at the forefront of Care Planning in reviews. IROs are mindful when seeking views that the child, young person's age, communication needs and stage of development is considered and where required they may need assistance from their carer/parent/advocate to voice their views. IROs are using a personable, child centred approach to engage children before their reviews via home visits and encourage participation in reviews and are actively promoting the use of Mind of My Own.

7.8 The involvement of children in their own reviews is regarded as an essential part of the process: 'A key task for the IRO will be to ensure that the review processes, and particularly review meetings, remain child and family centred' (IRO guidance, Adoption and Children Act 2002). The IRO has an important role in ensuring that the child:

- Can make a meaningful contribution to their review.
- Speak for themselves if they are able and willing to do so; and where there is not possible that their views are conveyed by someone else on their behalf or by an appropriate medium; and
- Has been given the opportunity to make a written contribution to the meeting, particularly if they have chosen not to attend or are unable to attend for some other reason.

7.9 Performance data indicates that there was an increase of 256 more reviews undertaken than from the previous year and children's participation increased. Overall, 77% of children either attended their review in person, sent their views; briefed their advocate or attended without contributing - this was an increase of 37% from the previous year. Also, 16% related to children being aged 4 and under at the time of the review. In addition, IROs work increased for when the Care Plans were ready to be presented to Court and Ratification Meetings were required.

7.10 The views of children are captured within their review record, every effort is made to ensure their wishes, feelings and views have been addressed and acted upon with IROs showing a clear direction of thought. Information obtained from the Virtual School Council by an IRO representative indicated that:



Children knew who their IRO was; children were aware of the role of their IRO and their responsibilities which was identified as making sure that they were cared for and kept safe. Children were aware of resources such as the Mind of My Own and the Coram Advocacy Service. Children said they felt settled in their home and safe within their living environment and they didn't raise any concerns. Children knew that if they were unhappy, they could seek support from their foster carer, residential worker or social worker.

7.11 IRU have a mechanism to ensure feedback from children is received, this is in the form of consultation forms; children attending their reviews and via the Mind of My Own App. Unfortunately, in this reporting period, only 93 children have participated their views via the Mind of My Own mechanism. IROs are encouraging children to use this App, and it will be a priority action for IRU.

7.12 In this reporting period IRU have received 3 formal complaints which were all resolved and not upheld.

7.13 IROs need to improve the participation of parents in Child Looked After reviews as data suggests only 42% of mothers and 18% of fathers attended their child's review. However, for children on a Child Protection Plan in this reporting period data indicates an equal amount 54% of mothers and fathers attended either their child's ICPC or RCPC - this remains work in progress and is a priority action.

8. Conduct of the organisation in relation to the Children Looked After Reviews and Child Protection Conferences

8.1 The IRO is responsible for quality assuring each child's case at every review ensuring that challenge of practice and escalation of areas of concern occurs on a frequent basis. The IRO Handbook sets out the purpose and requirements to create a local dispute resolution process, both formal and informal (*Chapter 6 of the IRO Handbook- Dispute Resolution and Complaints*).

8.2 In Shropshire Council IRU the Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) evaluates the plans for children subject to Child Protection Plans and for CLA with a RAG rating that is Red, Amber and Green. Amber and Red Rags indicate that the IRO has concerns with care planning, statutory compliance, social worker practice, team manager oversight and any drift or delay. The IRO will raise a RAG appropriate to the severity of the concerns.

8.3 To monitor the progress of the Amber and Red RAGs the IROs attend a Dispute Resolution Clinic each week to ensure that the PIRO is alert to all RAGs raised and for IROs to report on the progress of open RAGs. As required, RAGs are followed up through the Dispute Resolution Process (DRP). Appropriate and consistent use of the DRP demonstrates that IROs are exerting effective challenge. In the IRU it has been found that the DRP meetings have previously not been used effectively by all IROs, therefore within this reporting period different methods have been used to ensure accountability from all IROs. The DRP has been subject to review throughout the reporting period and a revised, clearer, more structured process is being developed.

9. RAGs

9.1 In this reporting period data indicates 53% of all CLA Reviews completed were Green, 31% Amber and 16% Red RAGs.

9.2 Amber RAGs: 400 were resolved at Stage 1 Team Manager level showing concerns were taken on board and addressed at the lowest level possible by the Local Authority, resolving the RAG in a timely manner. 51 Amber RAGs were resolved at Stage 2 Service Manager Level and 9 at Stage 3 – Assistant Director Level.

9.3 Red RAGs: 230 resolved at Stage 1 Team Manager level, 18 were resolved formally at Service Manager Level and 3 at Assistant Director level which indicates the Local Authority effectively understands the challenge from the IROs ensuring drift and delay is executed in a timely manner.

9.4 In addition, 11 DRP meetings took place to resolve outcomes for children where drift and delay had been identified.

9.5 Equally, in this reporting period for children on a Child Protection Plan 472 RAGs were completed of which 50% were rated Green, 26% Amber and 24% Red; this was a slight decrease from the previous year.

9.6 The timeliness of RAGs being issued has varied amongst IROs which is an area of work being completed to ensure RAGs are issued on time after the review/conference, this is a priority action.

10. Quality Assurance, IROs collaborative work with the Local Authority and other agencies

10.1 An integral part of the IRO role is to quality assure the work of the Local Authority in relation to Care Planning for children and to identify areas of good practice as well as issues of concern. This reporting period IROs have issued (for Children Looked After and on a Child Protection Plan) 1081 Green Rags reflecting effective working of the Plan; that is timely and meeting the needs of the children and young people. IROs provide a summary of their finding on the RAG and in some instances will send out a Good Practice Notification.

10.2 As part of Practice Week in September 2024 a group of our IROs promoted good practice standards by delivering a Masterclass in relation to the role of an IRO and Independent Chair across the Children's Services and this work was received well. The purpose of the session was to promote better communication,

collaboration and connectivity between Social Workers across Children's Services and Independent Reviewing Officers with the aim of ensuring a high-quality service to the children subject to Child Protection Plans and children who are being 'cared for/looked after' by Shropshire Council. The sessions were well attended and received positive feedback from social workers and the wider social work teams.

- 10.3 With agreement IROs have had periods within this reporting year when they have been exempt from completing Child Journey Audits (CJAs) due to excessively high caseloads. They received a grace period in Q1 and Q4 while three new IROs were being recruited. This allowed the IROs to feel heard and not be in a position where they felt they were continuing to fail to meet expectations. IROs felt acknowledged and heard. Despite some ongoing resistance, most of the IROs have now completed several CJAs and have given feedback that it is an activity which helped them gain a wider view of a child's journey in the service and assisted them to think in more depth about how they discharge their duties as IROs. PIRO has dip sampled the IROs work to ensure they are meeting and adhering to their statutory duties.
- 10.4 The PIRO and IROs are integral to several Panels (Child Protection and Children Looked After) and planning groups (Final Evidence and Step-down meetings) in which the IRO perspective is valued as part of the decision-making process alongside that of the children's social work teams.
- 10.5 IRU are a representative within the CAFCASS/Children's Services, where monthly performance meetings take place. During these meetings there are discussions regards to Court Care Proceedings to identify where there is drift and delay in meeting the recommended 26 weeks conclusion of proceedings. The IRU provide information in relation to common themes and agreements of working together, formulate action points to a timescale to ensure that prompt long-term permanency for children and young people is achieved.
- 10.6 The IRU have a link with the UASC team to look at practice issues and themes that may arise for the young person who is seeking asylum. The aim together with operational services is to formulate and agree an action plan to ensure the young people are provided with the necessary holistic package of care by the placement providers.
- 10.7 One IRO is part of the monthly Exploitation Panel meetings whereby social workers present their updated risk assessments for children and young people who are at risk of either sexual or criminal exploitation. The meetings scrutinise the reports and make suggestions of what actions can be followed to reduce the risk of exploitation taking place with the outcomes placed upon the children's case record to ensure oversight by management is undertaken and the view of the IRO sought.
- 10.8 The IRU have interface meetings that commenced on the 2nd July 2024 and take place on bi-monthly basis. The purpose of these meetings is to promote communication, collaboration; and connectivity in line with Shropshire's Restorative model. The management of these meetings lays with 3 IROs whom report back to PIRO and Service Manager any issues/ concerns arising. The invitation is extended to Team Managers from the Compass, Assessment: Case Management; Child Looked After teams; Fostering and Adoption including

Stepping Stones. To date these meetings have been received well, they have helped to support arrangements where there have been workflow issues on the children's file as well as promoting the work of the IROs and to strengthen relations.

10.9 The Shropshire Council IRU is part of several quarterly regional safeguarding and IRO forums. These meetings have provided a good opportunity for IROs to network and share ideas for practice improvement. Some IROs attended the Annual Regional IRO conference in January 2025 which enable further understanding of development and processes within the West Midlands region. The IRU is committed to working in partnership with other agencies; the Service Manager works closely with the Police, Education and Health to strengthen conversations re: safeguarding issues for children and young people.

11. PIRO review of last financial year

11.1 Impact of Business Support Review

During the beginning of the reporting period, there was a significant reduction in the administrative support to the IRU. Unfortunately, the key business support worker moved to a new role and was not replaced until Q4 of the reporting period, following the completion of the Business Support Review. Four business support workers have been absent for extended periods throughout the year due to long-term sickness or absent due to maternity leave. The team of eight admin workers was down to four, with only 50% of support available to IROs/ICs this had a significant impact on what support was available to the team. The biggest impact was on minuting Conferences and ensuring that ICPCs were arranged within timescale. From October to end of December 2024 there had been a shift in ICPCs and RCPCs taking place via MS Teams as opposed to face to face for several reasons which includes room availability; staff capacity as admin support had been halved in size. During this time there was a sharp decline in ICPCs taking place on time. In addition, the administrative support provided to the PIRO was limited which impacted upon data being provided and effective analysis taking place.

To overcome the challenges, the PIRO completed some focused work by clarifying to Business Support the statutory duties of IROs/ICs; had daily meetings with admin and senior staff until the matter was resolved. Importantly, ICPC timeliness was hugely impacted and at the end of the reporting period 61% of ICPC where in timescales, prior to this, the figures were far lower. PIRO continues to have regular meetings with Business Support to ensure the IRU is effectively functioning with their administrative duties and tasks.

11.2 Re-establishment of face-to-face conferencing

In total 444 Child Protection Conferences have taken place in this reporting period for 859 children the breakdown in figures indicate 43% ICPCs and 52% RCPCs were held face to face. Data confirms 57% ICPCs and 48% RCPCs were held via on teams (which included 2% of Receiving in ICPCs). As noted above, this remains a key area of priority action.

11.3 Involvement of parents in conferences and CLARs

Independent Chairs have made significant efforts this year to ensure parents attend the ICPC and RCPC data shows 87% of mothers and 63% fathers have attended either an ICPC or RCPC. In terms of children and young people participated in their ICPC or RCPC 65% of children either attended in person, sent their views or were represented by an advocate. A similar trend can be seen for children and young people's participation in their Child Looked After Review which shows this year it was 81% it is worth noting 15% of Children Reviewed under care arrangements were under 4 and 26% of children placed on a Child Protection Plan were under 4 years old.

11.4 Introduction of Magic Notes

During the reporting period in Q4 saw IROs/ICs being introduced to Magic Notes. The use of this AI meeting summary tool has reduced admin time for IROs/ICs and has enabled proficiency in service. IROs/ICs maintain this system is an essential tool for them; one they cannot do without, and it has reduced the admin burden, and they are satisfied with the service.

11.5 Greater use of advocacy

Our contracted advocacy service changed from Coram Voice to VoiceAbility from 1st November 2024 which has been widely advertised within the Local Authority however it has been recognised that the increase in the use of advocates in meetings is needed as the referral to advocacy remains significantly low.

11.6 Revising the CLA Review minutes to make them more restorative

This action is work in progress - IROs are in the main writing their review records to the child in a sensitive and relationship-based manner. Magic Notes is supporting this by utilising the function to change meeting notes into child friendly language.

11.7 Reducing IRO caseloads.

IRU Service has recruited more IROs to the service which has enabled the caseloads to be reduced and be more equitable across the service. It is recognised with the decrease in caseloads has increased IRO scrutiny, challenge and the IRO footprint is an upward trend which is beginning to indicate the effectiveness of the IRO during when challenging drift and delay in Care Plans for children and young people is needed.

11.9 IRO/ICs access to their performance and dashboard

Towards the end of the reporting period the IRO/ICs were introduced to the PowerBI IRU Dashboard. The Dashboard has been a positive factor for the IROs/ICs as they have been able to self-service; understand and improve their performance data and there has been a shift the way they work. In addition, the Dashboard has meant the PIRO has been able to apply scrutiny to the data for IROs/ICs and establish how data can be improved. With support from the Ofsted Improvement Lead, there has been a significant focus for the Local Authority to ensure essential paperwork such as Pre-Meeting reports are completed on time as the absence of these reports affects the LCS workflow, often indicating CLARs as being overdue/out of timescales.

11.10 Discharge Project Team

IROs have worked effectively with the Placement with Parents/SGO Discharge Project Team, supporting the efficient making of SGOs and resolution of care plans for reunification/ending of Care Orders. IRO involvement in this work has been critical to the success of a number of children ceasing to be Looked After and securing permanence in a family environment without statutory intervention.

12. Priorities for 2025-26

- ★ The IRU will ensure all children and young people whether in Care or on a Child Protection Plan receive their paperwork within the required timescales. These documents will be written in a child friendly manner with accessible language.
- ★ The timeliness of CLAs/ICPC and RCPCs has improved, however the data reporting timeliness needs to be consistently at 95% or above. IROs will ensure that ICPCs are convened as face to face meetings.
- ★ IRO/ICs footprint in terms of seeing the child or young person before reviews must be evident in all children's records (or clearly noted why this could not go ahead e.g. child unwilling to meet with IRO). IROs will promote use of Mind of My Own at every Review.
- ★ IRU to review and monitor parental engagement in both conferences and CLAR meetings and use feedback forms. PIRO to provide quarterly reports to share findings across the service.
- ★ IRO/ICs will ensure that all children's Care Plans and Child Protection Plans include SMART targets and will challenge/escalate where this is not the case.
- ★ Representatives from the IRU will engage with a working group to explore the creation of a single LCS document that allows CLAR Minutes and Recommendations to be recorded in the form of a letter to the child.
- ★ IRO/ICs Profile proforma will be developed to be completed by individual IROs at point of allocation and sent to the relevant children and social worker.

13. Conclusion

This report highlights the work of IRU in Shropshire Council from 31st March 2024 to 1st April 2025. There are ongoing efforts and initiatives undertaken by the IRU to enhance the services provided to children and young people under their care.

There has been a significant reduction in IRO caseloads, enabling IROs to establish a stronger presence in children's lives and effectively challenge the Local Authority on issues requiring resolution. The focus applied by IROs and ICs to ensure that work-flows show an accurate representation of a child's journey has been significant and indicative of the commitment of these professionals to the children they are responsible for.

It will be important that IROs and ICs continue to be enabled to ensure that the progress made in clearing backlogs created by unmanageable caseloads is not undermined by increased workloads or poor workload management moving forwards.

High levels of effort and tenacity have been exerted by IROs to ensure that review meetings are held within statutory timescales and to challenge the local authority on drift and delays in care planning. IROs are keen to remain consistent in this area of practice, to ensure that they are doing all they can to achieve positive outcomes for children. As a team, the IRU is committed to ensuring that all children are reviewed within the recommended timescales to maintain and further improve service quality.

There is a clear drive within the IRU to further strengthen IRO footprints on children's records, ensure regular home visits to see children before their CLARs; ensuring parents are present in ICPC/RCPC and CLAs. IRU aim to progress the priority actions as stated in point 11 as a key development focus to ensure IRO's presence is further pronounced and increasingly effective in supporting children's lived experience and to ensure they receive a high-quality service.

Children's Services

Quality Assurance

ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

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Introduction

This Annual Report provides a comprehensive overview of the Quality Assurance activities and findings for the reporting year 01 April 2024 – 31 March 2025, covering all four quarters. The report highlights key developments, audit outcomes, and areas for improvement across various aspects of Children's Social Care and Safeguarding.

The underlying principles of our QA Framework:

Child centred	Understanding children's experiences and their progress. Ensuring the voice of the child is heard and taken into account in assessment, planning and decision making.
Ensure services are effective and of high quality	To hold ourselves accountable for delivering services that meet high standards. Professional staff who work with children, young people and their families do so because they are committed to making a positive impact on children's lives.
Evaluate service deliver Impact.	We take collective responsibility for improvement. Our systems gather data from various sources to analyse local need, service, performance and individuals already receiving a service. This helps ensure services are delivered effectively meeting standards that safeguard and promote children's welfare.
Demonstrate Continuous Learning	Report quality assurance findings, give feedback to staff and managers and identify areas for improvement to develop actions plans that enhance practices.

Overview of the key QA activities this year:

The Quality Assurance team has invested substantial effort in refining the Child Journey Auditing process, addressing gap created by the vacancy in the QA Lead post (vacant for 9 months).

Upon filling the vacancy in January 2024, the key priorities were:

- enhance the clarity of the audit process
- foster accountability among auditors
- ensure that auditing work is meaningful, impactful and drives practice improvements
- provide ongoing advice and support

Work started in this year with our Sector Led Improvement Partners (SLIP) from Wiltshire to review our Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), which is overdue for an update. We have also undertaken work within End-to-End meetings to review the QAF and the updated QAF will be published in summer 2025. The work to update is on hold whilst we await the outcome of our bid to the DfE for additional SLIP support focused on QA. Should the bid be successful and we are able to fully utilise the resources and tools that will be made available to us by Wiltshire, we can ensure that our updated QAF is robust, future proof and structured around a variety of auditing activities.

Completing Child Journey Audits (CJA) remains a mandatory monthly task for our auditors (Assistant Directors, Service Managers, Team Managers, IROs and Advanced Practitioners), with

an observed increase in the completion rate of allocated case audits throughout the year. CJAs focus on the child's voice, visits, assessment, planning, management oversight/supervision, and meetings and reviews; providing a holistic view of the child's experience and the impact of our practice. These findings contribute to continuous learning and development.

In order to enhance our learning from CJAs, this year we embraced new technology, utilising Microsoft Forms instead of continuing to complete CJAs as a Word document. This has allowed us to more easily capture and collate both quantitative and qualitative data from CJAs.

Furthermore, monthly Moderation Panels have now become embedded as 'business as usual', acting as another layer of assurance in terms of auditing whilst also providing moderators (our auditors, on a rotating basis) the opportunity to read and learn from audits from a variety of their peers and develop their own practice.

The development of the Power BI performance dashboard has assisted auditors and leaders in understanding performance and for data analysis to be part of auditing work.

The majority of our management information is now provided through Power BI, offering real-time accessible reporting tools that enable leaders and managers at all levels to access, understand, analyse, and act on available data. Service Managers and Team Managers utilise this information to support their practice oversight. Furthermore, our Business Analysts produce a range of management information tailored to those service areas where Power BI reporting is still under development.

Performance information is crucial for assessing key performance indicators and benchmarking against various standards. Our objective is to analyse data effectively to continually understand and improve our services. Business Analysis and Quality Assurance provide managers with a reporting frameworks to support informed decision-making and track progress.

Our Quality Assurance approach is evolving as we gain insights. We employ various tools and methods to gather quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources to understand practice more comprehensively. Quarterly evaluations, which include feedback from children, families, and carers, help us identify areas for improvement.

Additional to CJAs and daily performance analysis, throughout 2024/25 a high level of thematic dip sampling has been undertaken to explore and address emerging issues. These dip sample audits have been undertaken in the main by the Principal Social Worker (PSW), with some work being undertaken by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and, on occasion, as shared learning/group auditing work by Team Managers within End to End or Performance Management meetings. The findings from these dip samples have been reported into the Children's Improvement Board (CIB).

Feedback from compliments, complaints, and user experiences is also vital for understanding the quality of our services. Quarterly Quality Assurance reports analyse audit information to identify themes, trends, issues, and actions for improvement.

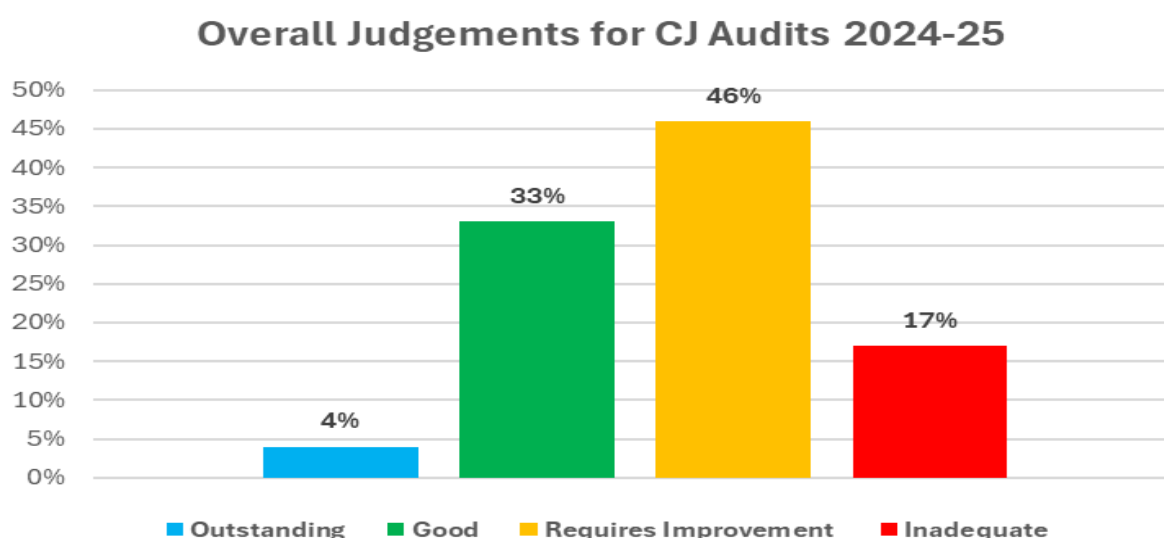
To ensure accountability, a "Closing the Loop" action tracker has been established and is sent to Team Managers on a weekly basis. It is their responsibility to update the tracker when audit actions have been completed. We continue to incorporate service user feedback into our

quarterly reports, aiming to increase the amount of feedback collected, combined with direct practice observation, to provide a more comprehensive view of our practices.

The year 2024-2025 has seen significant progress in audit quality, child-focused practice, and management oversight. While challenges remain in achieving consistency, timeliness, and analytical depth, the strategic developments and focused efforts have laid a strong foundation for continued improvement. The commitment to enhancing the quality of services provided to children and young people is evident, and the next steps outlined in this report will further support this ongoing journey.

Child Journey Audits

330 CJAs were completed in 2024/25 compared with 132 in 2023/24 which equates to a 150% increase, an additional 952 dip samples were also conducted. Audit activity is undertaken by a range of roles within Children Services, with the Director and Assistant Director taking part in this activity alongside Service Managers, Team Managers and the IRU Team.



	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Total for quarter
Q1	0	19	31	20	70
Q2	3	26	23	12	64
Q3	2	19	44	13	78
Q4	7	44	55	12	118
Total	12	108	153	57	330

Overall Judgements for our 5 Priority Areas

Visits	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Outstanding	4	6%	6	9%	5	7%	24	20%
Good	36	51%	22	34%	37	47%	49	42%
RI	23	33%	25	39%	25	32%	30	25%
Inadequate	7	10%	11	17%	11	14%	15	13%

Assessments	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Outstanding	0	0%	1	2%	5	7%	4	4%
Good	8	33%	23	36%	22	33%	40	41%
RI	13	54%	28	44%	28	42%	34	34%
Inadequate	3	13%	8	13%	12	18%	21	21%

Supervision	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Outstanding	1	1%	3	5%	3	4%	6	5%
Good	25	36%	26	41%	27	35%	34	29%
RI	33	47%	21	33%	53	53%	67	58%
Inadequate	11	16%	14	21%	8	8%	11	8%

Plans & Planning	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Outstanding	3	4%	5	8%	4	5%	9	8%
Good	27	39%	22	34%	36	46%	57	48%
RI	30	43%	28	44%	28	36%	38	32%
Inadequate	10	14%	9	14%	10	13%	14	12%

Meetings and Reviews	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Outstanding	0	0%	3	5%	2	2%	10	9%
Good	34	49%	22	34%	11	35%	50	42%
RI	20	29%	25	39%	18	50%	43	36%
Inadequate	16	23%	14	22%	3	13%	15	13%

Quarter 1 (Q1) 2024/25

- ❖ 388 case file dip sample audits were conducted.
- ❖ PSW and SLT dip audit work for Children's Improvement Board focused on:
 - Last 50 children to become Looked After, Direct Work and S47 investigations leading to no further action (April 2024)
 - Quality of Management Oversight on Child Protection Plans and quality of Child Protection Plans (May 2024)
 - Visits (June 2024)
- ❖ 70 CJAs completed.
- ❖ CJA return rates increased from 51% in Q4 2023/24 to 60% in Q1.
- ❖ CJAs graded as 'Good' decreased from 40% in Q4 2023/24 to 27% in Q1 2024/25, with an increase in CJAs graded as Requires Improvement and Inadequate. This change was attributed to more stringent Moderation gradings, where 35% of moderated cases resulted in a lower grading.

Key events/developments

- ❖ Introduction of a Power BI dashboard linked to the Annex A report to streamline data reporting.
- ❖ Mind of My Own training provided to 70 workers.
- ❖ Inaugural meeting of a new participation working group
- ❖ Microsoft Forms CJA tool introduced to improve CJA quality and streamline data collection.
- ❖ Moderation Panels established.
- ❖ Closing the Loop (Actions log implemented)
- ❖ Monthly 'data hygiene' meetings established to provide a unified approach to overseeing and taking action on matters related to practice, performance, and system management tasks.
- ❖ Key recruitment to additional capacity Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) posts created (following the Ofsted Focused Visit in November 2023) to address the challenges of excessively high IRO caseloads which impacted upon the ability of IROs to have adequate scrutiny or apply robust challenge. 3 of the 5 IRO posts were successfully recruited to from external candidates – all 3 began their employment within Q1, creating an immediate positive impact on caseloads.

Strengths

Audit Submission: Audit submission rates rose from Q4 and feedback received from auditors that attendance at Moderation Panel was reflective and educational.

Visits: 87% of visits reviewed in CJAs were purposeful; direct work increased from 37% to 59%; 66%, visits also included detailed observations especially for non verbal children and were often written directly to the child.

Assessments: 82% of assessments reviewed in CJAs were comprehensive and analytical; 84% led to targeted interventions; and in 82% of assessments effective tools were utilised. Good

assessments were clear, concise and included historical context and risk analysis. 67% included the child's voice; 80% included at least one parent's views.

Planning: 39% of plans reviewed in CJAs were rated 'Good', with 71% up to date a 10% increase from Q4. 52% met SMART criteria, 73% of plans involved at least one parent and 70% of plans met assessed needs and 18% increase from Q4.

Supervision: 64% of CJAs showed supervision helped advance plans; 73% had well-documented supervision.

Meetings & Reviews: 71% of CJAs found the review process effective in identifying drift and delay, up from 44% in Q4, and 75% of meeting showed consistent interagency working.

Service User Feedback: 61% of service users spoken to as part of CJAs felt listened to and understood; 68% felt social worker involvement improved their situation. Several service users praised individual social workers for their support and communication.

Areas for improvement

- ❖ Audit Judgements: Only 27% of audits were rated Good, with 44% Requires Improvement and 29% Inadequate.
- ❖ Timeliness: Visits, assessments, and supervisions often missed statutory timescales or were poorly recorded.
- ❖ Use of Theory & Research: Only 39% of assessments reviewed in CJAs incorporated theory and research.
- ❖ Fathers' voices were underrepresented in assessments, plans, and meetings.
- ❖ IRO Oversight: Only 44% of cases reviewed showed clear IRO scrutiny; documentation gaps persisted.
- ❖ Service User Feedback: While 61% of service users spoken to felt listened to, only 57% felt social worker involvement was important, and many felt less in control.

Actions required – communicated via End to End and Performance

Management meetings this quarter

Visits	Ensure visits are recorded	Increase direct work	Minimise social worker changes and ensure continuity of care	Promote Mind of my own usage
Assessments	Embed theory and research	Improve timeliness by using Power Bi dashboards to flag overdue assessments and follow up	Enhance genogram use	Capture fathers' voices
Supervision	Ensure supervision policy is followed	Enhance reflection and challenge	Improve IRO documentation	

Plans & Planning	Ensure SMART planning	Increase parental involvement	Cultural and identity inclusion	Timely updates
Meetings & Reviews	Improve timeliness and documentation	Boost IRO oversight	Ensure greater attendance of partner agencies	
Child Journey Audits	Increase numbers of submitted CJA's	Utilise Moderation Panels to ensure consistency of gradings of auditors	Ensure inexperienced auditors are invited to Moderation Panels	
Service User Feedback	Improve response rates	Increase participation of families, children and young people	Act on feedback	

Quarter 2 (Q2) 2024/25

- ❖ 377 dip sample audits were conducted.
- ❖ PSW and SLT dip audit work for Children's Improvement Board focused on:
 - Last 62 children to become Looked After (July 2024)
 - Visits (August 2024)
 - Quality of Management Oversight on Child Protection Plans and quality of Child Protection Plans (September 2024)
- ❖ 64 CJAs completed.
- ❖ CJA return rates were low due to the summer holiday period, with only 48% returned.
- ❖ There was an increase in audits graded as Good to 39% from 27% in Q1, Outstanding rose to 5%, and a decrease in those Requiring Improvement, Inadequate dropped from 29% to 19%.
- ❖ CJAs downgraded at moderation panel were mainly linked to supervision and review issues.

Key events/developments

- ❖ Practice Week 2024 delivered to all staff – including Staff Conference with theme of Participation; keynote speakers included Mind of My Own Chief Exec. Throughout the week nearly 30 workshops and masterclasses held to enhance understanding, offer learning on new issues and refreshers on key social work practice - over 625 staff members across Social Care and Early Help attended one or more sessions.
- ❖ Practice Development Hub (PD Hub) enhanced and developed to offer wider resources for social care and Early Help staff. Practice Week sessions recorded and uploaded to the PD Hub for access after the event.
- ❖ Additional training sessions and workshops delivered, including "High Quality Auditing", attended by over half of current auditors.

- ❖ Social Work Health Check 2024 completed; we received 113 responses, providing insights into job satisfaction and areas for improvement.
- ❖ Business Support Review completed: all administrative teams now report to the All Age Business Support Team Manager. A new booking system has been implemented to increase meetings between social workers and information support officers, enhancing record-keeping on children's case files.

Strengths

Audits & Moderation: CJAs rated Good increased from 27% in Q1 to 39% in Q2. Outstanding ratings rose from 0% to 5%. Audits rated Inadequate dropped from 29% to 19%, and Requires Improvement decreased from 44% to 36%. The Microsoft Forms CJA tool continued to capture both quantitative and qualitative data, supporting a balanced view of practice. 61% of audits were moderated in Q2. Only 19% of moderated audits were downgraded, indicating stronger initial grading accuracy.

Assessments: CJAs noted that Good assessments highlighted strengths and areas of concern and reflected the wishes and feelings of child families and carers. Within the Good graded SWAs there was good holistic content around education and health and were deemed purposeful with clear intent, direction and were comprehensive and analytical capturing family dynamics and protective factors.

Planning: Strong permanency planning evidenced by CJAs and an increase in plans capturing the voice of the child, 95% of the plans considered the child's emotional health and contact with the family and were regularly updated following reviews. 85% of families involved in shaping the plan.

Meetings & Reviews: 76% of meetings and reviews considered by CJAs were conducted within scheduled timeframes, a 7% improvement from Q1. 76% of CLA cases showed clear scrutiny from the IRO, up from 44% in Q1. 70% of meetings included parents, up 7% from Q1. Strong evidence of agency contributions to plans and attendance at strategy meetings. Collaboration remained consistent at 70%. Minutes and records of meetings were generally detailed and clear, supporting transparency and accountability.

Supervision: Supervision was described as structured, reflective, and focused on the child's experience. It included hypotheses and space for reflection. Supervision was driving 74% of cases forward, with 57% addressing relevant challenges regarding tasks, actions, and timescales. 78% of supervision records were well-documented, IRO scrutiny improved significantly—74% of cases showed evidence of IRO involvement, up from 40% in Q1.

Visits: 93% of visits examined in CJAs were conducted within statutory timescales, a significant improvement from 60% in Q1. 90% of those visits were deemed purposeful, showing clear intent and relevance to the child's plan. 81% considered culture and identity. 63% of CJAs noted use of direct work techniques to understand children's wishes and feelings—up from 37% in Q4. Visits were well-documented, with detailed narratives that included the child's voice and emotional state.

Service User Feedback: Overall feedback remained consistent with Q1, indicating sustained quality in user experience.

Areas for improvement

- ❖ Audit Completion: Only 48% of CJAs were submitted. August and September had particularly low return rates (35%).
- ❖ Assessment Quality and timeliness: Only 36% of assessments were rated “Good”; 44% required improvement and 13% were inadequate. 37% of assessments reviewed were overdue. 24% of meetings/reviews were out of timescale or lacked a plan.
- ❖ Voice of the Child: Underrepresented in assessments (only 56%) and plans (32% lacked evidence of the child’s voice).
- ❖ More consistent oversight from IRO’s and CP Chairs required
- ❖ Fathers’ voices were included in only 30% of assessments reviewed by CJAs.
- ❖ Supervision Gaps: 47% of cases had sporadic or missing supervision. Some lacked reflection or timely recording.
- ❖ Visit Quality: Only 49% of children were seen alone. 21% of cases had no evidence that children’s wishes or feelings were considered.
- ❖ Plan sharing: Only 15% of plans were shared with the child; 55% had no evidence of sharing.
- ❖ Service User Feedback: Response rate dropped from 52% in Q1 to 37% in Q2.

Actions required – communicated via End to End and Performance

Management meetings this quarter

Visits	Statutory timescales	More emphasis on children being seen alone	More evidence that children’s wishes and feelings have been gathered and considered.	Complete incomplete visit records
Assessments	Better quality assessments to include genograms and theory and research	Timeliness	Younger children’s voices to be captured via direct work	
Supervision	Supervision must be in line with supervision policy	More reflection and challenge required	Improved recordings on case files, template to be used	Increased IRO oversight
Plans & Planning	SMART criteria to be utilised consistently and correctly	Plans to be shared consistently with both parent and child	Plans updated after Reviews and Conferences	

Meetings & Reviews	Improve CP Chair and IRO oversight, including use of RAGs/DRP process	Improve parents' attendance at meeting especially fathers	Timely completion of review minutes and care planning records	Increase the evidence of voice of the child
Child Journey Audits	Increase number of completed CJAs	Improve CJA tool (lengthy and repetitive)		
Moderation Panels	Increase number of CJAs moderated at panel	Address dropout rate from moderation panel		
Service User Feedback	Increase efforts to contact service user	To speak to the child wherever possible		

Quarter 3 (Q3) 2024/25

- ❖ 340 dip sample audits completed.
- ❖ PSW and SLT dip audit work for Children's Improvement Board focused on:
 - Last 52 children to become Looked After (October/November 2024)
 - Effective use of the Public Law Outline and Children who have had multiple allocated Social Workers (December 2024)
- ❖ 78 CJAs completed.
- ❖ CJA return rates increased to 60% (up from 48% in Q2)
- ❖ Overall Judgment Comparison: Audits graded as Good decreased to 24%, while those Requiring Improvement increased 56% (up from 36%)
- ❖ Collaboration with social workers during audits remains lower than desired (55%)

Key events/developments

- ❖ Engagement with DFJ Trailblazers Project aimed at reducing delays in family court proceedings.
- ❖ Sector Led Improvement Partners from Wiltshire engaged to assist with reviewing and developing Quality Assurance Framework. Collaboration around auditing processes, and data management and reporting tools. Began to consider implementing Wiltshire auditing model (ARMA).
- ❖ Wiltshire SLIP provided Action Learning Sets to Team Managers with a focus around the Public Law Outline.
- ❖ Impact Project Board launched – to improve children's participation and ensure their voices are central to service delivery.
- ❖ All Team Managers began DfE funded, Research in Practice delivered Leadership Development Course – with focus on effective Supervision and Anti-Racist Practice.
- ❖ Pilot of Magic Notes – an AI based meeting summary program designed to reduce the administrative burden on workers – began with a small roll out to limited number of users.

- ❖ 2 remaining additional capacity IRO posts recruited to (internally – capacity not immediately available) and 2 agency IROs employed for limited period (to year end) to assist with reducing IRO caseloads further.
- ❖ Performance Management Group conducted a dip sample review of Case Summaries across all teams. Based on the findings, updated Case Summary guidance, templates, and examples from the PD Hub were distributed to all Team Managers for dissemination.
- ❖ Strengthened Moderation Panel attendance by including IROs and CP Chairs in rotation.

Strengths

Moderation process strengthening, with 66% agreement between auditors and moderators.

Assessment Quality: 75% of assessments reviewed in CJAs were comprehensive and analytical, incorporating a wide range of evidence and child voice. 81% of those assessments considered risk and protective factors (up from 70% in Q2). 68% included the child's wishes and feelings, a 12% improvement from Q2.

Planning and Permanency: 46% of plans were graded Good (up from 34% in Q2). Voice of the child included in 75% of plans, showing a consistent upward trend from Q2 (32%) 85% of cases had a clear permanency plan, with 79% being timely and well-matched

Meetings and Reviews: 91% of CLA cases showed clear scrutiny from IROs, up from 32% in Q1 85% RAG completion rate for CLA reviews, reflecting improved oversight and 72% of audits confirmed consistent use of agendas in meetings

Supervision and Oversight: 67% of cases reviewed in CJAs had regular supervision (up from 53% in Q2) and 77% of supervisions were reflective, supporting better decision-making.

Visits: 47% of visits graded Good (up from 34% in Q2). 86% of visits were purposeful and 76% captured child's wishes and feelings.

Service User Feedback: 44% feedback rate, up from 37% in Q2. Positive comments highlighted professionalism, helpfulness, and strong relationships with social workers.

Areas for improvement

- ❖ Assessment Quality: 33% of assessments were graded Good (down from 36% in Q2 and 46% in Q1). 18% were graded Inadequate, showing a steady increase across quarters. Persistent issues include low use of genograms (18%) and theory/research (52%) 43% of assessments were not completed on time. Limited inclusion of the child's voice and direct work.
- ❖ Planning and Care Plan gaps: 35% of plans were outdated, in draft, or not signed off. Only 50% of plans reviewed were SMART (down from 86% in Q2). CLA plans were less current (55%) compared to CP/CIN (74%).
- ❖ Meetings and Reviews: 34% of meetings/reviews were not held on time (up from 24% in Q2). CP Chair oversight was inconsistent—only 50% of CP cases had evidence of clear scrutiny. Core group and CIN reviews lacked consistency.

- ❖ Supervision and Oversight: 53% of supervisions were graded Requires Improvement. 29% of supervision records lacked clarity or were poorly documented and some supervisions focused more on directives than reflective analysis
- ❖ Visit Timeliness and Recording: Timely visits dropped from 93% in Q2 to 86% in Q3. Direct work was often undocumented or lacked detail
- ❖ Workforce Stability: High number of children had 4 or more social workers since April 2024. Case transfers were delayed due to high caseloads and staffing shortages. Multiple SW changes led to delays in visits and planning.
- ❖ Service User feedback: some concerns included lack of progress, infrequent contact, and frequent social worker changes

Actions required – communicated via End to End and Performance

Management meetings this quarter

Visits	Improve timeliness of visits – ensure statutory timescales are met	Improved capturing of the child's voice and evidence of family engagement	Increase use of direct work	Improve quality of recording, continuity and relationship building
Assessments	Improve timeliness of completion	Increase use of theory, research, genograms and enhance analytical depth	Strengthen the evidence of child's voice and include family perspectives	
Supervision	Improve compliance with Supervision Policy	Increase evidence of depth, clarity and reflection in case supervisions	Ensure clarity of actions and tracking.	Improve evidence of challenge and oversight.
Plans & Planning	Ensure plans are up to date and SMART	Strengthen the evidence of the child's voice and family engagement	Enhance IRO oversight	
Meetings & Reviews	Improve timeliness	Improve consistency of oversight of CP Chairs and IROs	Whilst improving, there needs to be more inclusion of the child's voice	Speedier identification of drift and delay
Child Journey Audits	Strengthen accountability for non-submission	Improve collaboration with social workers	Increase audits grading from Requires Improvement to Good	Improve Leaving Care Team Audit tool
Moderation Panels	Increase moderator capacity	Strengthen feedback loop between moderators and auditors		

Service User Feedback	Increase feedback collection rates	Improve contact	Capture more young people's voices	
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Quarter 4 (Q4) 2024/25

- ❖ 176 dip sample audits were conducted.
- ❖ PSW and SLT dip audit work for Children's Improvement Board focused on:
 - Last 50 children to become Looked After (March 2025)
- ❖ 118 CJAs completed.
- ❖ CJA return rates increased by 51%.
- ❖ Good ratings rose from 24% (Q3) to 37% (Q4).
- ❖ Outstanding ratings increased from 3% to 6%.
- ❖ Requires Improvement and Inadequate ratings declined.
- ❖ 89% of moderated audits resulted in agreed gradings, demonstrating a high level of audit quality.

Key events/developments

- ❖ The Assistant Director weekly Staff Updates have proven to be very popular and it is clear that staff who attend find the information provided in each session very valuable. The sessions have addressed various topics such as Ofsted readiness, improvements for current practice, service wide improvements and feedback from quality assurance activity. Additionally, the AD Updates have facilitated:
 - the announcement regarding the new Leadership Board, with David Shaw appointed as the Director of Children's Services effective 25th July 2025.
 - Feedback and reflections from the 'Turning the Curve' conference (led by 2 Team Managers)
 - Principal Social Worker presentations on learning from Case Reviews and our Practice Priorities.
- ❖ Assistant Director Updates provided weekly staff updates on topics such as Ofsted readiness and service improvements.
- ❖ Team Managers and Senior Leaders completed the DfE funded Leadership Development course which focused on good quality supervision and Anti Racist Practice.
- ❖ Our Sector Led Improvement Partners from Wiltshire joined us to deliver 5 in person workshops:
 - Language that Cares (x2)
 - Driving Practice Improvement
 - Strengthening Practice Leadership
 - Workforce Well-being and Development
 - Embedding and Evaluating New Approaches
- ❖ The Wiltshire SLIP team also contributed to the enhancement of our Quality Assurance Framework, specifically focusing on the Child Journey Auditing process, its structure, and the supporting mechanisms for auditing, data management and reporting. A further bid has been made to the DfE for continued funding of this partnership work with Wiltshire into 2025/26.

- ❖ Microsoft Forms CJA tool for the Leaving Care Team updated and specific guidance created for auditors unfamiliar with Leaving Care Team processes as it had been identified that LCT CJA's have been unfairly downgraded due to lack of knowledge of their processes.
- ❖ 90-minute 'Lunch and Learn' session delivered on "High Quality Auditing". These sessions provided guidance on effective auditing techniques, including how to perform dip samples, focus areas based on team performance data, and understanding grading criteria.
- ❖ 14 auditors with consistently endorsed gradings will no longer require moderation.

Strengths

CJA submission rate: 51% increase in CJA submission rates – this is a significant and noteworthy success story, evidencing the efforts made to increase submission and also auditor 'buy in' to the importance of QA activity.

Assessments: 41% of assessments were graded as Good, a continued improvement from Q1, Q2 and Q3. Many assessments incorporated frameworks and models to support their analysis. Good assessments were noted for thoroughness, with clear analysis and recommendation which led to clear and concise care plans.

Supervision: CP cases had the highest evidence of reflection at 93%, and 82% of supervisions were found to be progressing the plan. Impact of Magic Notes observed in terms of supporting compliance and speedy write ups of Supervisions. Leaving Care Team supervisions reviewed to have the most robust challenge to practice. Majority of supervision recordings maintained a focus on the child's individual needs ensuring circumstances and welfare were central to decision making.

Plans and Planning: SMART planning has improved in the main, and there has been an increase to 84% of families helping to shape the plan which reflects a strong engagement and co-production with families. 71% of plans captured the child's voice.

Meetings and Reviews: Clear IRO scrutiny – much improved from earlier quarters – and most meetings reviewed in CJAs noted that there was regular attendance from key professionals.

Visits: 20% of visits reviewed were rated as Outstanding and more children were seen during the visits and 96% of the visits were considered purposeful. Social workers demonstrated strong engagement and often used direct work and activities in 74% of cases to build trust and support children.

Service User Feedback: Families spoken to for CJAs generally feel listened to, understood, and supported by social workers. 74% reported an improved situation, and 69% felt social worker involvement was important. Punctuality improved, with 69% of respondents saying their social worker was punctual.

Areas for development

- ❖ Assessments: Focused work around ensuring SWAs completed annually has been undertaken – will see the results of this in future auditing. Lack of Genograms still an issue and impact chronologies only present in 63% of assessments.
- ❖ Supervision: 58% of Supervisions were rated as Requires Improvement and some were considered to too task focused and lacked reflection. Also follow ups from supervision inconsistent. Although 68% of supervision challenged practice there is a need for more reflective discussions.
- ❖ Plans and Planning: Only 57% of plans were considered SMART this is an increase from Q3 (50%) but far from the target we wish to achieve. Many plans were not updated regularly, leading to a lack of current and relevant information. Plans are still not regularly being shared with either the child families or carer. Although 83% had a clear plan for permanency the delays were often due to plans still being in draft.
- ❖ Meeting and Reviews: 33% of meetings and reviews were not held within the expected timescales and delays were most common in Care planning meetings, CIN Meetings and ICPC meetings. It was not always clear if parent or the child had been invited to the meetings. Although interagency collaboration improved to 78% there were still cases where partner contributions were unclear.
- ❖ Visits: Requirement to improve clarity and consistency in visit documentation and increase use of Direct work.

Actions required – communicated via End to End and Performance

Management meetings this quarter

Visits	Improve clarity in recordings and ensure notes are comprehensive	CP visits to increase seeing the child alone	Detail types of Direct Work used	Increase evidence of the child's voice and lived experiences
Assessments	Focus on annual SWAs being completed in statutory timescales	Link findings to theory and research	Include genograms and Impact chronologies	More consideration of culture ethnicity and specifically Identity.
Supervision	Focus on regularity of supervision particularly CP cases	Ensure recommendations from previous Supervisions followed up	More consideration of the impact of decision making on the child	
Plans & Planning	SMART planning particularly timescales that are not timebound	More emphasis on sharing the plans with child and families		
Meetings & Reviews	Adress missing or unfinalised minutes	Monitor IRO scrutiny	Follow up why parents are not attending	

	especially for CIN meetings		meetings and record.	
Child Journey Audits	Address why more social workers are not involved in the CJA process	Continued monitoring of return rates and proactive reminders.	Continue Lunch and learn session for High Quality Auditing	Review current CJA tools for CLA and CP/CIN
Service User Feedback	Try to engage more young people in providing feedback	Auditors to consider contacting service users prior to completing the CJA		

Summary of progress over 2024/25

The year saw a strong commitment to embedding a culture of quality assurance across Children's Services. Audit volumes remained high throughout the year, with over 1,200 case file audits (CJAs and dip samples) completed. The introduction of Microsoft Forms for CJAs, regular Moderation Panels, and increased leadership engagement helped improve audit consistency and learning. However, audit return rates, while improving, still fell short of the 95% target, particularly during holiday periods.

Performance Across the 5 Priority Areas – as evidenced by CJAs

Assessments: While there was a steady increase in the use of analytical tools and frameworks, some assessments continued to be delayed and some not updated annually. There needs to be more consistent use of assessment tools and application of theory and research. Whilst the quality of reviewed assessments has fluctuated over the year, compliance with annual SWAs has increased (as evidenced by PowerBi reporting).

Plans and Planning: There was a positive trajectory in the quality of plans, particularly in Q3, with increased inclusion of the child's voice and more timely updates. However, many plans remained outdated or lacked SMART objectives, and the quality of CLA care plans was notably impacted by system workflow issues – an issue that, at year end, is close to being fully resolved.

Supervision and Management Oversight: Reflective supervision improved significantly, with evidence of reflective discussions captured more effectively with the use of Magic Notes. There remains work to do to improve consistency in this area.

Meetings and Reviews: Evidence of IRO scrutiny and footprint improved markedly, especially in CLA cases, due to increased staffing and reduced IRO caseloads. However, timeliness of meetings and documentation gaps persisted, particularly in CP and CIN cases. Parental engagement was variable, and the child's voice was not always clearly captured.

Visits: The quality of visits improved steadily, with more purposeful, timely, and child-focused interactions. Direct work increased, but documentation of tools used remained inconsistent.

Some visits were missed or poorly recorded, often due to high caseloads or social worker turnover.

Service User Feedback: Feedback response rates fluctuated across the year, with a low of 37% in Q2 and a high of 55% in Q4. Most service users felt listened to and understood, but concerns were raised about communication, social worker changes, and lack of updates. Young people's voices remained underrepresented, and efforts to improve engagement through tools like Mind of My Own (MOMO) are ongoing.

Moderation: Moderation panels were re-established and expanded, with growing participation from IROs and team managers. Agreement rates between auditors and moderators improved, but the 100% moderation target was not met. Some audits were downgraded due to stricter grading standards, particularly around statutory visit compliance.

Dip Sampling and Thematic Learning

Dip samples completed by the PSW, Senior Leadership Team and Team Managers provided valuable insights into practice areas such as children becoming Looked After, utilisation of escalation processes, including and especially use of the Public Law Outline and CP planning.

Dip samples are a vital tool to understand practice 'in the moment' and identify issues or themes and take action swiftly, rather than relying on CJA findings, which are always retrospective. Moving forward (see Priorities for 2025/26, below) we intend to utilise our auditor group to undertake monthly CJAs, dip samples and Direct Observations (including Senior Leader Observations of practice).

Key findings included:

- We bring the "right" children into our Care; thresholds for making a child Looked After are correctly and appropriately applied.
- Practice in respect of escalation of response through Early Help, Child In Need, Child Protection and Public Law Outline/Proceedings has improved throughout the year, with notable reductions in examples of drift and delay in escalation points.
- Increased visibility of IROs in terms of visits to Children Looked After, footprint on file, progression of RAGs through the DRP process.
- Positive impact from Family Support Workers and Stepping Stones workers/intervention.
- 'Legacy' issues related to poor performing agency SWs impacting on the progression of plans and resulting in gaps on children's files which cannot be filled (SWs have been given notice and left without completing outstanding records)
- Inconsistencies with statutory compliance with Visits.
- Variability in content and standard of Case Summaries (focused work undertaken).

Closing the Loop and Next Steps

Efforts to “close the loop” on audit findings have been strengthened through a centralised action tracker, dip sampling follow-ups, and performance monitoring. However, recurring issues—such as outdated chronologies, lack of genograms, and inconsistent supervision—highlight the need for continued focus on embedding learning into daily practice.

Across all quarters, recurring themes for moderation downgrades include Statutory timescales not being met, outdated plans and SWAs, lack of reflective supervision, inadequate documentation, and insufficient direct work with children. Addressing these issues is important for improving the quality of audits and ensuring better outcomes for children and families.

However, across the year, there has been a clear commitment to improving audit quality, child-focused practice, and management oversight. Noteworthy progress has been made in areas like visit quality, IRO scrutiny, and audit return rates – we now need to build on this to ensure consistency across these areas and our key areas of practice.

Priorities for 2025/26

Goal	How?	By when?
Ensure staff are fully sighted on learning from Quality Assurance in 2024/25	Learning Brief to be produced based on the findings in this Annual Report – to be shared within AD Updates, End to End Leadership meeting and at Staff Conference (within Practice Week – with clear links highlighted between learning from audits and topics of sessions within Practice Week).	AD Update – June 2025 End to End – July 2025 Staff Conference – September 2025
Refresh/update and publish Quality Assurance Framework – with associated ‘easy read’ summary to more effectively engage staff service wide	If bid for DfE funding for SLIP support from Wiltshire is successful we will continue to utilise Wiltshire colleagues’ support in reviewing and overhauling our QAF – this is high priority on the agenda should the bid be successful. If the bid is unsuccessful, we will complete this work independently.	By end of summer 2025
Develop wider breadth of monthly auditing activities	A minimum of 25 CJAs will be allocated each month for completion. Other members of the auditing group will undertake dip sample audits or direct observations of practice.	From May 2025, to be reviewed on a quarterly basis (ratio of CJAs to be increased as required)
Achieve 95% compliance with all monthly auditing activities	Ensuring allocated audit tasks are distributed 1 month in advance of required completion. PIP/QA Lead to ensure regular ‘check ins’ with	At key points within each month.

	auditors re: submission dates. Escalation to be utilised as/when required.	
Further increase auditor's confidence in undertaking quality assurance work	Repeat 'Lunch & Learn' sessions on "High Quality Auditing" – delivered by PSW.	Lunch and Learn sessions to be offered once per quarter.
Assist the achievement of greater levels of consistency in practice in our 5 key practice areas	Link learning from quality assurance activity with training/development sessions offered in Practice Week and by Joint Training Team. Ensure learning re: impact of inconsistency and how to achieve greater consistency is discussed regularly within End to End and Performance Management Group meetings (to be added to Forward Plan for these meetings)	Practice Week sessions in September/October 2025. PSW/PIP to share Annual Report with Joint Training Operational Manager – June 2025. Monthly End to End/PMG meetings
<i>(If bid for DfE funding for SLIP support from Wiltshire is successful)</i> Establish and embed a new audit management system based on Wiltshire's ARMA program.	Establish Task and Finish/Working Group with representatives from QA, Business Analysts and IT Support to devise Project Plan to implement a Shropshire version of ARMA.	To be in place and operational by Q3 2025/26.



**Local Authority
Designated Officer
(LADO)
Annual Report
April 2024 – March 2025**

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1. Introduction

This is the Annual Report from the Shropshire Council Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the effectiveness of the management of allegations in Shropshire for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 as well as to evidence compliance with statutory guidance and procedures.

The LADO role is underpinned by legislation which includes Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 and Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024. The West Midlands Regional Child Protection Procedures, National LADO Network principles and minimum standards and Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership all guide the Shropshire LADO's practice. The role is mandated by the Local Authorities duties under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004.

2. Summary

The Shropshire LADO service has continued to operate with two part time LADOs and one part time Business Support employee. During the past year there has been a consistent number of contacts made into the LADO service as well as frequent calls for general advice and consultation. During this period a Business Support Review was undertaken – the LADO service retained a dedicated Business Support Officer role which reflects the essential nature of consistent support for a service managing highly confidential information.

Shropshire are due an ILACS inspection by Ofsted. The previous inspection was in 2022 there has been no external inspection of the effectiveness of the LADO service since then. However, feedback has been collected periodically from those accessing the service.

In this year's report we have included some data for the past 5 financial years as opposed to focusing only on this last period compared to the previous. This is to enable us to have a clear overview in terms of demand management and identify any themes or trends which will assist us in identifying where action is needed.

3. The Role of the Local Authority Designated Officer

The role of the LADO and criteria for referrals is outlined in Working Together to Safeguard Children. This notes that:

The LADO should be informed within one working day of all allegations where it is alleged that a person who works with children has:

- *behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child.*
- *possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or*
- *behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children.*
- *behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.*

When considering an allegation there are up to three different pathways which can be utilised:

- *a police investigation of a possible criminal offence.*
- *enquiries and assessment by Children's Social Care about whether a child is in need of protection or in need of services; and*
- *consideration by an employer of possible disciplinary action in respect of the individual.*

The LADO is responsible for:

- Providing advice, information and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations around allegations and concerns regarding paid and unpaid workers.
- Managing and overseeing individual cases, including chairing Position of Trust meetings.
- Ensuring that children are safeguarded and that the voice of the child is heard throughout the process.
- Ensuring there is a consistent, fair and thorough process for all adults working with children and young people against whom an allegation is made.

- Monitoring the progress of cases to ensure they are dealt with fairly, robustly, and as quickly as possible.
- Ensuring that relevant referrals are made to Children's Social Care and where necessary, attending any strategy meetings in cases where the allegation may require investigation by police and/or social care.
- Provide training, leaflets, and information to the wider workforce to be confident that agencies are working efficiently in reporting allegations and managing the immediate concerns to ensure the safety of children, as well as considering their duty of care to their employee.

In Shropshire, the LADO also attends Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) meetings as the representative from Children's Services. The LADO also reviews the Risk to Children (RTC) markers on LCS as well as Hazard markers (HZD). These markers are predominantly added from Persons Posing a Risk to Children (PPRCs) that have been received over the years or from information provided by criminal justice agencies/via MAPPA. The reviews of the markers must be carried out in a multi-agency forum and therefore are dependent upon Police resources and time to assist with them.

4. Feedback

Although there is currently no formal method of seeking regular feedback from agencies who use the LADO service, we have sought views from internal and external partners in order to assess our impact and ensure that partner agencies feel that their views and experiences are valued. Some of the comments received are noted below:

"My experience of reporting concerns via the LADO in Shropshire is positive. The expertise and knowledge the LADO holds is invaluable. The guidance given to multi agencies is prompt and seamless. Follow up is always provided by the Team."

"I find the LADO referral process really helpful and supportive. I have made numerous referrals and the service is always professional. I get responses to any concerns very promptly, I also find that the context to concerns is taken into account when making decisions which I don't always see in all external services."

“Always found the LADOs very approachable. Even if not making a referral they are available for advice. Minutes of meetings attended are sent out in a timely manner and any referrals made are followed up by the service frequently.”

“I cannot speak highly enough about the service I receive from LADOs. The LADOs always respond to my queries without delay. The LADOs are very knowledgeable and approachable and will always offer advice and guidance as requested. This has been very much appreciated as often we have some complex situations, and I have greatly valued their insight and feedback”.

“In my experience the Shropshire LADOs have always responded to referrals in a timely manner and have proven procedures in place, collaborating fairly with those involved. The agency evidences a balanced and constructive approach whilst keeping children’s welfare at the centre of the process”.

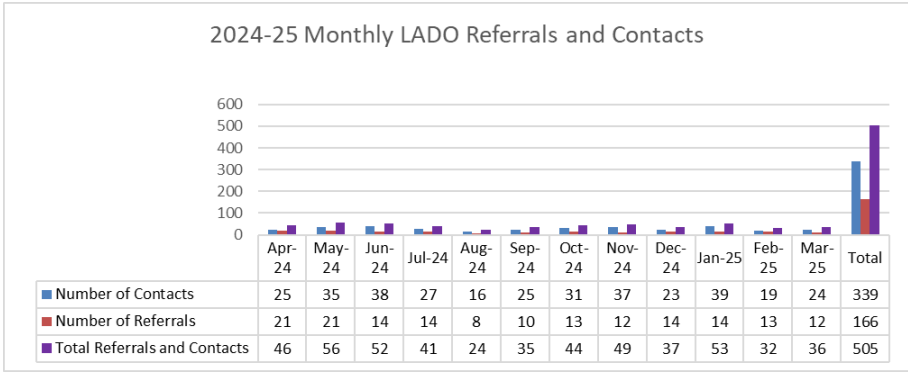
“My experience has always been positive with Shropshire LADO with quick responses and good communication for updates and outcomes. I feel supported by the team who I contact and feel comfortable to seek advice if needed”.

“I often consult with the LADOs in relation to Ofsted complaints and for advice regarding potential LADO referrals. Both are always available to offer support. Their advice, knowledge and expertise is really appreciated and both are so approachable, and I really value their input”.

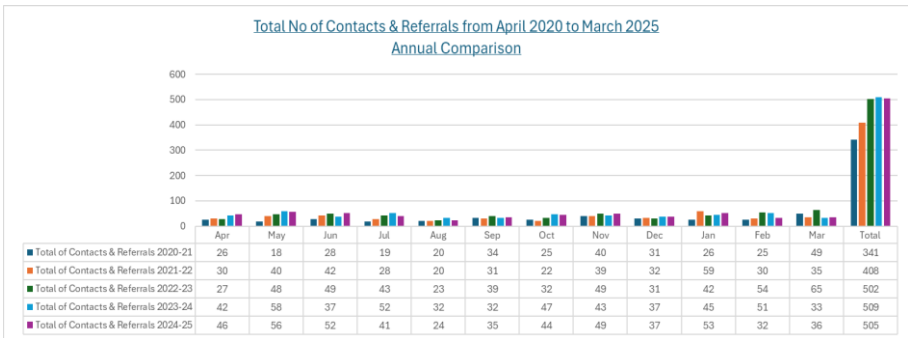
“We find the Shropshire LADO Service provides an essential and accessible service. We find the officers knowledgeable, experienced and provide helpful advice when required”.

“I find the approaches of the LADO measured, professional and always supportive. Their knowledge is invaluable, and I value the positive working partnership I have but also leaders within my services have commented on. Reports/records are also shared promptly and accurately by the service. Thank you for all the work you do”.

5. Activity data



The number of contacts received in the 2024-2025 year was 505. This compares to 509 contacts received in the previous year. In this latest period, 166 of the LADO contacts received progressed to investigations. This is a 6% increase in the numbers of contacts being accepted as referrals in the previous year. This could be indicative of the positive impact that regular awareness raising training and meetings with providers has had in order to promote an understanding of the threshold in line with statutory guidance.

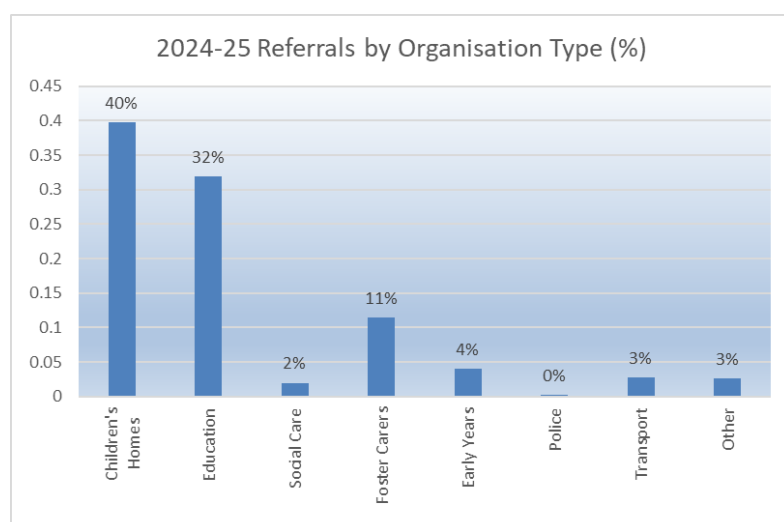


In the first financial year following the Covid 19 pandemic, the number of contacts and referrals increased by around 20%. This has remained a consistent trend over the subsequent three years that have followed, and it is not anticipated to change. A high proportion of contacts detail concerns which emanate from a person's private life and are therefore considered under the 'Suitability' criteria and the transferable risk that this may pose in the workplace. This criteria

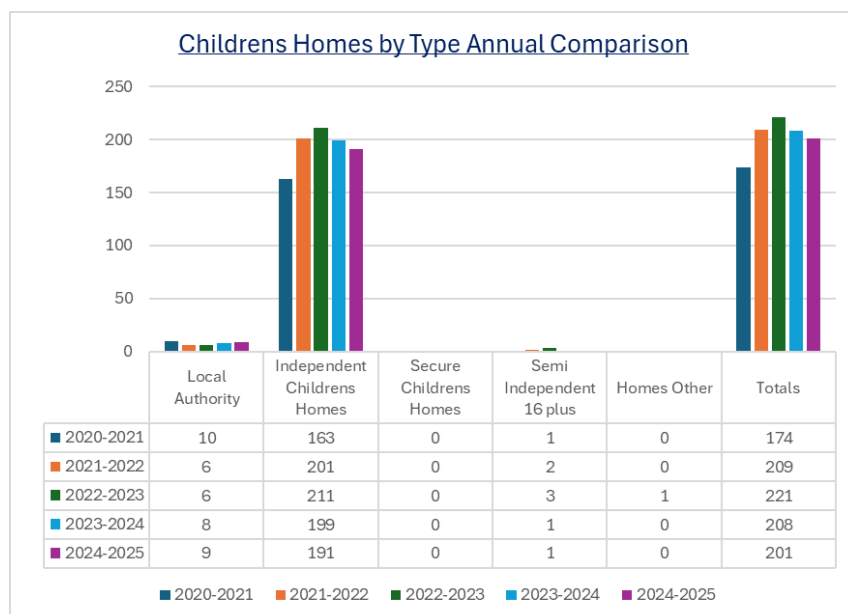
was only formally introduced to the LADO criteria early in 2021 which we believe explains the increase in contacts since this date. We have noted an increase in contacts relating to domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health issues – this is hypothesised to be a symptom of post pandemic as well as economic issues which are affecting families.

The busiest month for the last two years has been May and the least busy has been August. The quiet period over the summer when schools are shut is not surprising. Whilst it is difficult to hypothesise for the reasons why May appears busier; it is a new financial year and some awareness raising may have been delivered by specific providers which could account for this increase.

6. Allegations by agency



Contacts from Children's Homes continue to make up the largest proportion of referrals received into the LADO service. Within the 2023-2024 reporting period there were 208 contacts and referrals from Children's homes which equated to 2024-25 period's total of 201. This has been a consistent trend over several years (see chart below) and is attributed to the large number of independent care homes which operate within Shropshire.



Referrals relating to Children’s Homes in Shropshire equate to 40% of all referrals. Most of these referrals relate to staff who work in privately owned and managed residential settings, with less than 5% relating to staff employed in Shropshire Council run homes. However, it is acknowledged that there are only 6 internal care homes which is a small minority of the overall number of homes in the authority area.

Although over the last 5 years many privately run care homes have shut, many more are being opened or reopened by new companies; therefore the number of homes in the area remains broadly the same. It has been a consistent issue that privately run care homes tend to refer a high number of cases/concerns which do not progress to investigations. Whilst LADO support and advice provided to care homes to manage this, we receive feedback that many providers feel that referrals to LADO are necessary even if at a lower level, in order to demonstrate to Ofsted inspectors that these homes are fulfilling their safeguarding obligations. Some referrals can relate to very minor medication errors or driving offences which LADOs can advise are practice issues that can be dealt with by single subject supervision and training, or via the employer’s own disciplinary policies. LADOs remind employers of their responsibility to capture and collate the number of practice issues and assess if these are significant enough to suggest a pattern of behaviours indicating wider safeguarding issues that could meet the LADO threshold.

OFSTED consistently seek information from the LADO service ahead of residential care home inspections as well as providing feedback afterwards. This is an extremely valuable 'communication partnership' as this allows us to monitor specific providers, identify particular concerns regarding their management of allegations and consider how we can best offer support and guidance to those setting.

The second largest referrer to LADO is the education sector which is also a similar trend to that of previous years. Referrals are evenly split between mainstream schools (46%) and specialist provisions (44%), however referrals alleging physical abuse account for 60% of the referrals from specialist provisions, compared to only 37% of mainstream school referrals. Many schools are demonstrating that they are keen to seek LADO advice and guidance before managing low level concerns internally which is positive. Our regular meetings with school's HR teams ensures this continuity and positive networking.

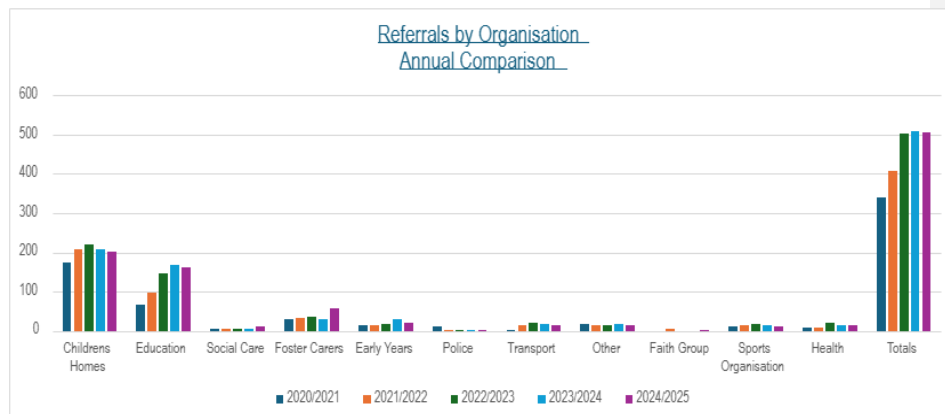
There has been an increase in the number of foster carers referred this year – up from 6% last year to 11% this year. Further work is needed to understand this rise. For the LADO service we will seek to amend our current recording format to more easily identify if carers about whom allegations are made are either Connected carers or mainstream Foster carers. This will assist to more easily identify issues or emerging trends – for instance, reviewing the quality of fostering assessments, access and quality of training and readiness to foster.

The referrals pertaining to people working within social care has risen from 5 to 10 over the last year. This is felt to be linked to the expansion of social care services, including recruitment into the Stepping Stones service, internal residential care homes and Early Help Service, which has created a larger workforce about whom referrals can be made. There have been no themes of concern or systemic issues identified within the increased number of referrals.

LADO have consistently seen a low number of contacts from the Police despite attempts to engage them over recent years. The Police Professional Standards Department (PPSD) takes the lead in allegations about members of their force. We would expect, according to the LADO criteria, that LADO would also be made aware of these cases. However currently it remains rare that we are made aware, unless these are reported to us via another agency, for instance, by care homes or social workers. There is some indication that allegations across the force are being reviewed following a serious incident in the Metropolitan Police area.

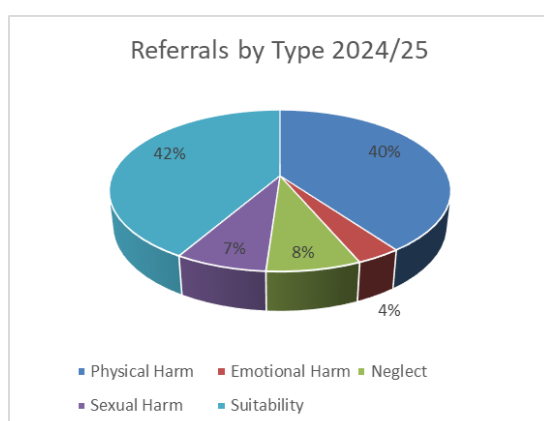
From conversations with regional colleagues, this appears to be a national trend. A letter had been sent by the National Police Chief's Council in February 2023 to remind Police colleagues

of their statutory duties. Whether this leads to changes locally is yet to be determined. LADO will continue to try and engage the PPSD.

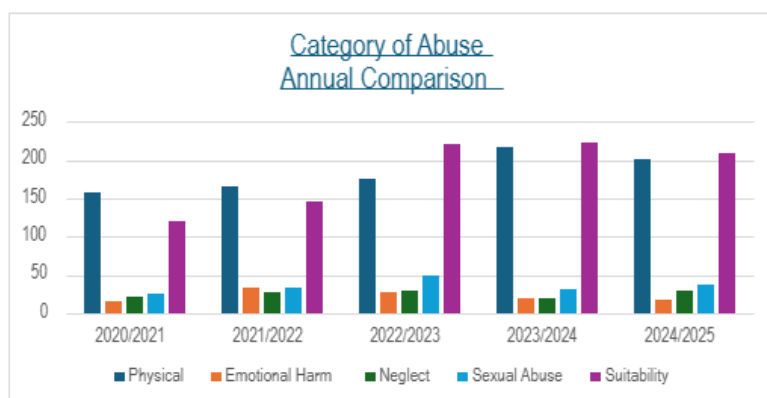


The chart above demonstrates the organisations referred over the past five years, which highlights the consistency in terms of the sectors of employees being brought to our attention. The slight decrease in figures relating to Children’s Homes over the past three years may be representative of the consistent messages that managers are being given regarding thresholds, both directly and via awareness raising sessions.

7. Categories of abuse

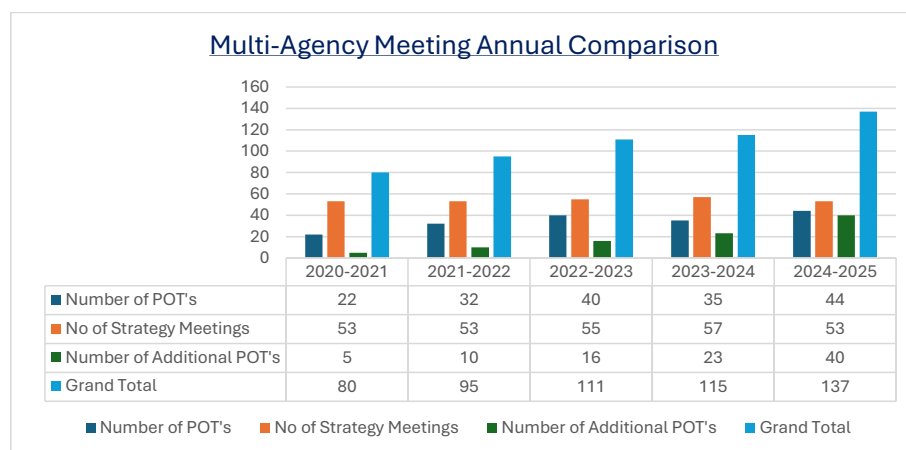


The main categories of concern have remained consistent with last year's figures. Suitability and physical abuse still account for over 80% of all referrals. A significant number of physical abuse allegations are made by young people in care homes and specialist education provisions who do not feel that restraints used were proportionate or carried out correctly. Likewise, suitability allegations are increasing as the formal identification of this category has become embedded into the LADO criteria. The category is used by many different agencies, and it is therefore unsurprising that it is now used appropriately to reflect the transferable risks that employers are identifying. We are now receiving increasing numbers of referrals direct from the police under this category.



The above chart demonstrates the rising use of referrals relating to suitability issues in the past three years, which is highlighted in the increased overall number of referrals during the same period.

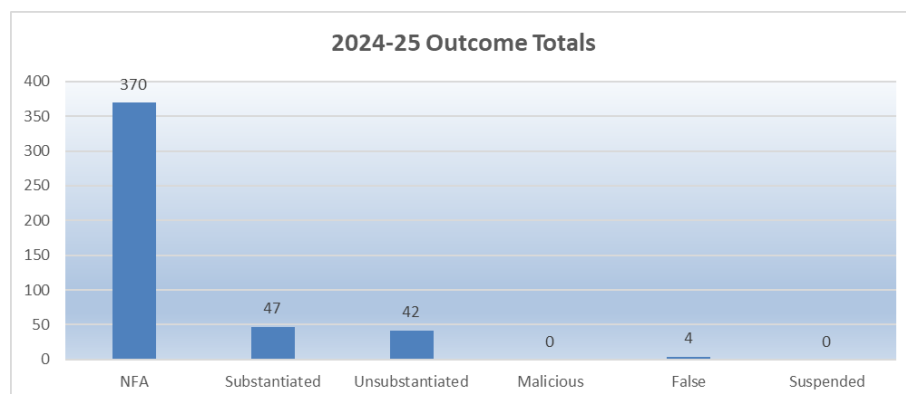
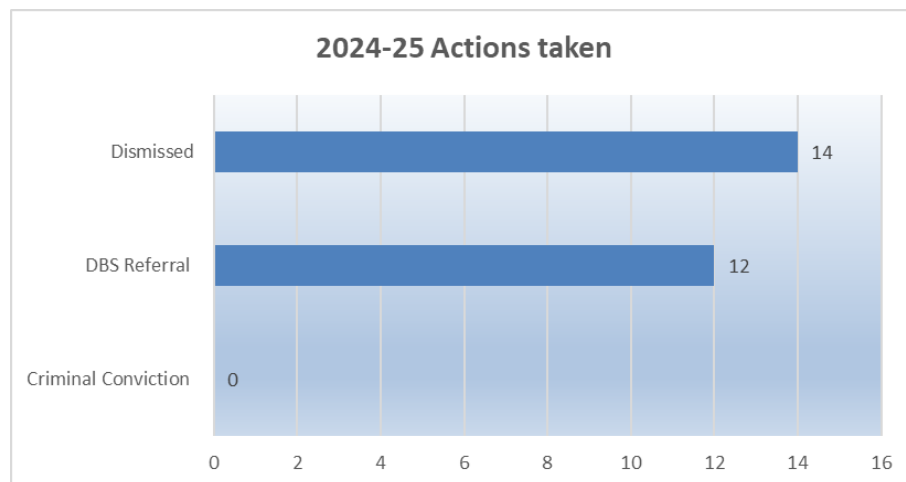
8. Multi agency meetings



During the 2024/2025 year there have been Position of Trust (POT) meetings held on 44 cases. There have been an additional 40 review POT meetings held. This is a 45% increase over one year in the amount of POT meetings being held. This demonstrates the complexity of the cases being taken forward as referrals. Additionally, more review POTS are needed as Police investigations are increasingly taking longer to conclude – we are advised that this is owing to lengthy investigations but also CPS and Courts who, since the Covid 19 pandemic, have struggled to progress prosecutions in a timely manner. Having review POT meetings on these cases ensures that all relevant professionals are kept up to date with actions and progress so that they can make appropriate safeguarding decisions in line with their own procedures.

In addition to POT meetings, 53 cases referred to LADO have resulted in Strategy Meetings being convened by the Local Authority in relation to the child / children concerned, evidencing appropriate safeguarding considerations being made specifically in relation to any child involved in the allegation. This number has remained consistent over the past 5 years. Where possible, the LADOs endeavour to attend any strategy meetings held to ensure that all available information is provided and received to support robust decision making.

9. Outcomes of allegations



Outcome Totals	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
NFA	170	200	323	383	370
Substantiated	69	93	78	57	45
Unsubstantiated	88	95	89	57	41
FALSE	11	16	6	4	4
Still open at year end	2	4	6	8	45
Grand totals	340	408	502	509	505

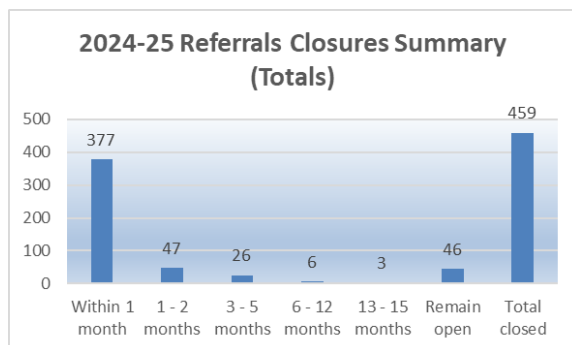
The number of cases resulting in a substantiated outcome have decreased from previous years, however there are still a significant number of cases yet to be concluded at the time of writing this report, and therefore the number is likely to increase as those cases are closed. Despite 45 cases concluding that the allegation was substantiated, only 14 were so serious that they

required the employee to be dismissed from their role. 12 cases required a DBS referral to be made. This indicates that some cases can be dealt with by other disciplinary outcomes, such as formal warnings. In addition, some cases will result in learning needs being identified, which could be additional training for the individual, but also organisation wide training.

Whilst the chart does not identify any cases where criminal convictions have occurred, this is because all the cases involving a criminal investigation in this reporting year are still ongoing. In some cases where there is no remit for a criminal investigation, information is still formally shared with the police so that they can record the concerns as intelligence, in case of a similar matter arising in the future.

In addition to referrals being made to the DBS to consider barring an individual from working in positions of trust with children, referrals are also made to regulatory bodies where relevant. Unfortunately, those referrals also take a significant amount of time to process, which is another issue that has led to LADO cases remaining open for a disproportionate amount of time on occasion.

10. Timeliness of investigations



The majority of cases are concluded within one month of referral. The most lengthy case which is ongoing was initially referred in May 2019 – this is still awaiting a court hearing to take place. The next longest case still open has been open since September 2020 and is with the TRA awaiting a decision. In order to ensure that we retain regular oversight of these long running cases, we will either diarise regular dates to chase or if multiple professionals are still involved, a review Position of Trust Meeting will be held in order for updates to be communicated.

Commented [SC2243401]: @Elle Jones @Michelle Taylor you've mentioned before that some LADOs in other LAs close down long running cases? And I think they just rely on the Police updating them ad/when? It might be worth adding in here that you are aware that some colleagues across the region don't keep cases open but explain why you do and how you feel that manages the risk well.

Commented [EJ2R1]: @Jannie Lowe - all done.

The most frequent cause of delays in finalising cases are as a result of issues with the criminal justice system. Often cases involve forensic analysis of devices which is a lengthy process. In addition to the protracted nature of police investigations, CPS decision making often elongates this process further. Once a person has been charged with an offence there is usually then a significant delay in obtaining a court hearing. In some cases it is possible to make a “balance of probabilities” decision prior to the conclusion of the criminal justice process, to enable employers to progress their internal disciplinary procedures, however this is not always possible.

From discussions with colleagues across the region and nationally, we are aware that not all LADOs keep these types of cases open if the individual has already been removed from their employment. However in Shropshire we choose to keep the case open until conclusion in order to ensure that if the criminal justice outcome does not result in a conviction, there is a process in place which can still manage the wider risks. It also allows us to maintain some contact with a previous employer to warn them when a case is reaching its conclusion, if there is likely to be some potential media interest as a result.

11. Information and advice

In addition to the number of contacts and referrals identified above, the LADOs continue to provide informal advice and guidance to internal and external colleagues.

Data was collated in the first month of the 24/25 reporting year which demonstrates that in addition to the formal LADO contacts received, the LADO service dealt with 33 informal enquiries to provide support, data, advice and consultation. The frequency of these informal conversations has been a regular feature in the work of the LADO service throughout the year and a significant amount of time is spent each week responding to these enquiries. Going forwards we plan to start to collate this information again so that we can target those agencies most likely to seek support and therefore those most in need of training or support going forwards.

12. Training and Awareness raising

The induction for new Social Care staff within Shropshire Council includes a LADO session to ensure that all new employees are aware of LADO procedures and are confident about how to seek LADO advice or make a referral. There is a plan to record this session so that it is more accessible to all.

LADO information sessions are still regularly provided to many care providers in addition to regular meetings being arranged with other larger organisations. For example, termly meetings are held with one of the biggest Academy Trusts in Shropshire, to ensure high levels of understanding, communication and decision making across different schools. Regular meetings are also held with Shropshire Council Education colleagues to ensure a joined-up approach in dealing with safeguarding concerns involving schools.

LADO also offers awareness raising to external agencies such as care home providers and this has been provided on a targeted basis where the number of referrals from an individual organisation are disproportionate. Through the collection of data that we have, we are also able to identify if there are spikes in allegations from individual children. This often leads to us suggesting and attending a planning meeting with the home and the child's Social Worker. In some cases, individual risk management plans are made for that child and shared with LADO so that we can take this into account in decision making.

13. Challenges

A significant challenge experienced by the LADO team over this reporting period relates to our communication with the Police. Investigating Officers are often unavailable to attend Position of Trust meetings and can be slow to respond to update requests. This has a significant impact on employers as well as employees under investigation. In addition, the Harm Assessment Unit (HAU) are no longer co-located within Children's Services, and with some changes in personnel, the relationship between the LADO team and HAU has been negatively impacted.

It is worth noting however that having a Detective Sergeant overseeing HAU has been of immense support. She has been consistently proactive in following up on Police issues. She will chase Investigating Officers on our behalf, seeks out information for us, engages in case

discussions to consider how best to progress cases and is invaluable in terms of the knowledge that she brings to Position of Trust meetings.

A further challenge is the increase in referrals and requests for advice since 2020 however LADO hours have not yet increased in line with these, resulting in higher workloads.

There are cases open to the LADO service which still open from as long as five years ago. This demonstrates the complexity of some cases and need to juggle active management of old cases alongside responding to new referrals / requests for advice can at times be challenging.

14. Why it matters

The data collated regarding the LADO contacts received during 2024/25 in addition to the feedback received from those using the LADO service means we are able to demonstrate we are consistently responding appropriately to safeguarding concerns for children in Shropshire, in line with statutory guidance. Responses to contacts are timely, the LADOs have positive relationships with internal and external colleagues, and we are engaged with a programme of awareness raising and training.

We recognise there are some challenges, many of which are out of our control – e.g. criminal investigations not being concluded over extended periods, but as LADOs we are committed to addressing those which we can have some influence over.

15. Actions for 2025/26

- 1) Over the course of the coming year, the LADOs will continue to engage with partner agencies, monitor patterns (contact/referral nature and source) to ensure appropriate targeting of organisations to raise their awareness of the LADO process, ensure appropriate referrals are made, and to consider the relevance of their referrals rates (high and low).
- 2) We have seen a large independent care home company take ownership of multiple care homes in Shropshire, making them by far the biggest local provider. In 2025/26 LADOs will make contact with the new management team to offer to revisit the training we have

undertaken in those homes previously, in recognition of personnel and leadership changes.

- 3) We will continue to work positively with Police colleagues, applying appropriate challenge where investigations are ongoing.
- 4) Given the increase in referrals regarding 'foster carers', we will ensure that our LADO data differentiates between referrals on mainstream foster carers and connected carers. This will enable more informed conversations with our colleagues within Fostering teams (recruitment and development) around any identified need for increased awareness of repeat risks or issues.
- 5) We will add a section to our data collation to identify which cases are NFA'd due to the LADO threshold not being met, and which are as a result of the allegations being unfounded. This will allow us to scrutinise the reasons for the high NFA numbers we have consistently seen in the service.
- 6) We will create a more formalised mechanism to seek feedback from agencies. This will likely be a form attached to our closure emails.
- 7) We will work with our colleagues in Workforce Development to develop and record a training video for staff inductions (and refreshers) to raise awareness and understanding of the LADO role and responsibilities.

Commented [SC2243403]: @Ellie Jones @Michelle Taylor please add your names as authors and the date of completion of the report - at the end of the report

Ellie Jones and Michelle Taylor – Shropshire LADOs

Quality & Assurance Service

Date report finalised: 21/5/25

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Shropshire Children's Social Care Workforce

Annual Report 2024/25



Author: Julie Duncan – Workforce Manager

Following the launch of the corporate Shropshire Plan (2022 – 2025), the Children’s Social Care Workforce Strategy was drafted and refreshed annually to reflect appropriate strategic objectives. The aim of the plan is to identify developmental opportunities for all staff across the whole safeguarding economy, those working with children, young people and their families to enable them to provide support and interventions that reduce risk and enable children, young people, adults and families to achieve their full potential and enjoy life. This will support us to grow a skilled workforce which is fit for purpose and can respond to the changing needs of families in the future. The context in which we are working is one of growing demand, coupled with growing complexity which means that recruitment, retention and development of the workforce is key.

Furthermore, the need for Social Care and Social Work services is growing. Business growth has provided us with a growing workforce in several areas including Social Work, Independent Review Unit, Residential Services, Early Help and Foster and Connected Carers.

During 2024-25, there has been a growth in posts across Children’s Social Care and Early Help, with 34 new posts created.

The service comprises (March 2025)

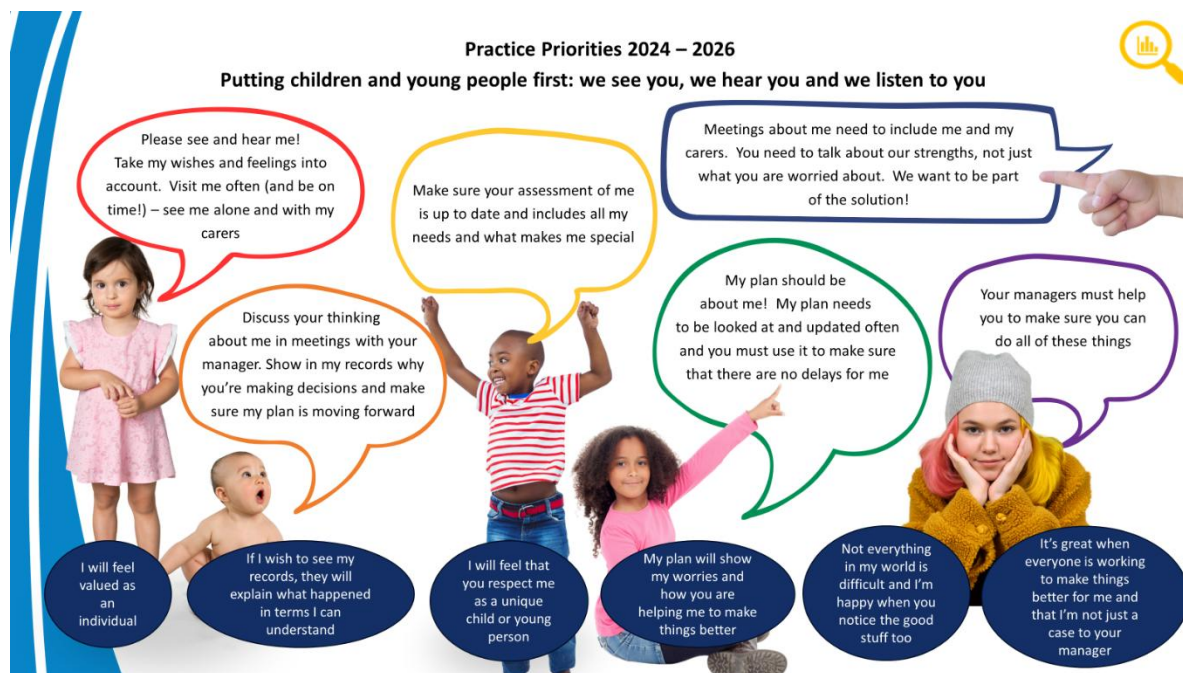
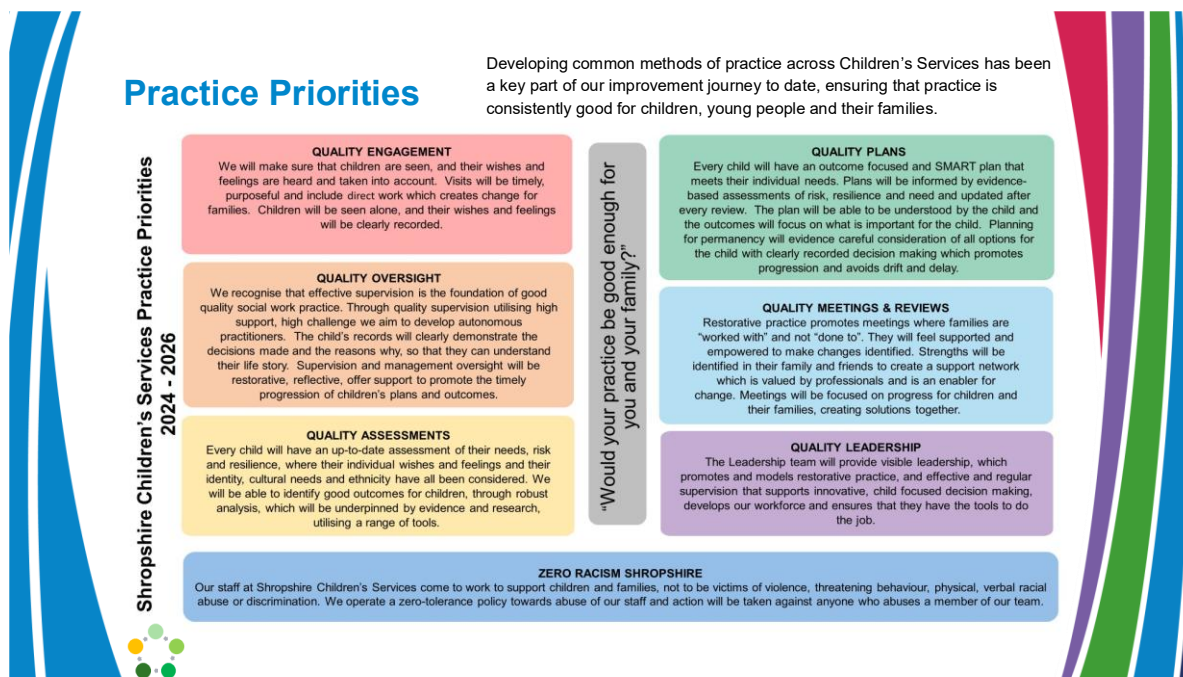
- 2 Assistant Directors
- 8 Service Managers
- 26 Team Managers
- 51 Senior Social Workers
- 67 Social Workers
- 18 ASYEs
- 9 trainee Social Workers
- 6 Registered Mangers
- 87 Residential Care Workers
- 106 foster carer households
- 71 connected carer households
- 13 team leaders
- 4 0-5 Family Support Workers
- 21 Hub based Family Support Workers
- 5 EHAAT workers
- 3 FIS Assistants
- 4 Parenting Practitioners
- 3 Play Practitioners
- 8 Youth Workers

Vacancy rate	8.5%
Sickness rate	3.36%
Turnover rate	6.15%
Agency worker rate	21%

Over 92% of qualified social work staff are female and 80% of them are between 30 – 59 years of age. Twenty-nine percentage of qualified social work staff have less than 2 years’ experience, although 45% have between 5 and 20 years’ experience.

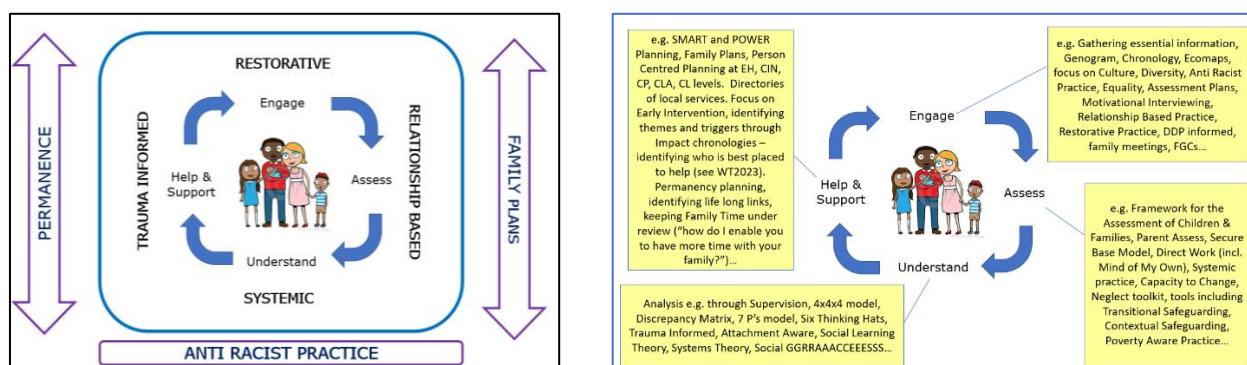
Practice Priorities

Developing common methods of practice across Children's Services has been a key part of our improvement journey to date, ensuring that practice is consistently good for children, young people and their families. We have refreshed our 6 Practice Priorities for the service which has helped focus our workforce and drive improvement, embedding these in all of our strategic work. These will be relaunched and promoted through spring 2025.



Practice Frameworks

In Shropshire, our work is underpinned by 4 key Practice Frameworks; **Restorative, Relationship Based, Systemic** and **Trauma Informed** – each of which complement the others and support creative working, including examples of frameworks and practices in action:



A comprehensive training offer is available to all staff (permanent and agency/temporary), delivered by the People's training team, Train with Us, which enables staff from Children's Social Care access to training opportunities previously open only to Adult Social Care colleagues (and vice versa) and provides opportunities for shared learning and development of relationships. We also encourage staff to consider co-facilitating training as part of their CPD and so have confident, knowledgeable trainers able to deliver evidence-based training sessions. We aim to build on our own pool of trainers, to include staff from across the whole Children's Social Care workforce.

The training offered is flexible, responsive, interactive and practical and "hands on" with a focus on both skills and strategy development, backed up by a theoretical understanding of why approaches work. All training is informed by research and a robust evidence base. The aim is to produce more confident and competent managers and practitioners, who are trauma aware and can deliver positive and effective support to individuals and families. There are several threads which run through all training – the need for a trauma informed and restorative approach, the importance of reflective practice and supervision and the value of peer support.

Induction

All staff are signposted to wide range of induction modules including familiarisation with the scope of Children's Social Care, Early Help and Shropshire Council, Raising Awareness of Child Protection, the role of the Designated Social Care Officer, the role of the Local Authority Designated Officer and an overview of the Supporting Families programme.

Mandatory Training

In addition to corporate training requirements, mandatory training for Children's Social Care staff includes Restorative Practice (2-day full training plus refreshers at regular intervals) and Supervision training for both Supervisors and Supervisees. All front facing practitioners also undertake the 2-day Solihull Foundation training, as well as training around chronologies, genograms and using the LiquidLogic database.

The learning and development needs of all staff, including aspirations for career development and specialisation, are captured within annual Personal Development Planning (PDP) and, through liaison with the Workforce Manager and Operations Manager for Learning and Development, appropriate training programmes and opportunities are identified. The Workforce Manager and Operations Manager for Learning

and Development also ensure that any emerging themes from research and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews are acknowledged in CPD opportunities and that the 4 key practice frameworks can be seen in every CPD opportunity.

The inclusion of Early Help staff within Social Care has brought additional, wider access across both services to training and development opportunities. This reflects the needs of the whole workforce – Social Workers, residential staff and early help colleagues. In addition, the early help training offer is extended to all external partners working with children and families as part of the Supporting Families programme at no charge.

Evidence based training

Evidence based training that staff can access, dependent on their role, includes:

- Brook Traffic Light Training
- Lego Think Bricks
- Reducing Parental Conflict
- Motivational Interviewing
- CPI Verbal Intervention
- STORM Suicide and Self Harm
- Solihull Approach Foundation
- Domestic Abuse including DASH and safety planning
- Parent Assess
- Secure Base Model
- ABE
- Neglect toolkit/GCP2
- Exploitation toolkit

Staff have access to resources and training from Research in Practice (RiP) – 132 staff have attended online sessions delivered by RiP and all front line and service managers have attended a bespoke programme face to face. During 2024 – 25, 77 new accounts have been created with RiP, 79 videos have been watched and 161 resources have been downloaded from the RiP website.

Recruitment



What do we know:

Social work recruitment can be a challenge and this is common across the UK. We often have a larger proportion of applications from Newly Qualified Social Workers than experienced workers.

Training enough social workers to meet current demand is a challenge, both nationally, regionally and locally. A number of qualifying programmes have been developed to provide choice for students and to increase the number of social workers being trained, including apprenticeships and Fast Track Programmes, like Step Up. All qualifying programmes need employers to support the variety of routes into Social Work that we have on offer in the region, by supplying Practice Placements. This requires resource from the Local Authority by means of Practice Supervisors, Educators and placements in teams.

We are working with a new HEI, Coventry University, to train our fifth cohort of social work apprentices and exploring other academic routes into social work as we are aware that the traditional university route is no longer as popular with students. This includes exploring postgraduate apprenticeships, as well as continuing to offer undergraduate apprenticeship and places for post graduate Step Up students. Our fourth cohort of apprentices recently graduated, three achieved a first and two a 2:1 degree. All five are remaining with Children's Social Care and have entered their ASYE year.

We would like to 'grow our own', as we know local people who have an apprenticeship or a placement in Shropshire are more likely to seek employment in Shropshire once qualified. Feedback from the Social Work Health Check, completed by 113 respondents from across the service (excluding early help) tells us Shropshire is a supportive place to work, Management Oversight and support is good, and teams are supportive. The profile of our workforce tells us that staff who live locally stay with us. This is why Shropshire has invested in developing a number of local qualifying routes into Social Work.

Communication with those we wish to recruit is important, where we advertise is key to that. We have found WM Jobs to be a successful vehicle for our vacancies. We have a good relationship with Radio Shropshire and have found them to be an effective tool in our communication plans, when we have vacancies or there are new opportunities, for example our Social Work Apprenticeship Programme. This year, we have also been supported to develop a social recruitment microsite, [Social Care Careers in Shropshire | It's all about the care](#) to reach a wider audience. The onboarding process has been made much smoother with successful candidates often being able to take up their posts within six weeks of interview. We are working closely with our Managed Service Provider (MSP), Opus, to ensure that our agency staff are of high quality and that we are only using agency workers where necessary to cover vacancies, maternity cover and secondments.

What we do:

Recruitment remains a priority for Shropshire.

In recognition of the increasing need to recruit permanent experienced social workers, Shropshire Children's Services have worked and will continue to work with colleagues with expert knowledge to develop:

- Re-branding of our advertising, including the development of a microsite specifically targeted to encourage people to consider social care as a career
- Targeted recruitment campaigns, including the creation of recruitment videos, including interviews with the DCS and frontline social workers and other practitioners
- Social Media campaigns with links to X, Facebook, LinkedIn

Shropshire's employment package includes;

- High quality, supportive management structure with experienced leaders
- Desirable location with excellent transport links
- A stable and well-supported working environment
- Competitive rates of pay (and Retention Payment for frontline Social Workers)
- A robust induction
- Regular reflective supervision
- Excellent professional development opportunities
- Linked Scale Progression
- Honoraria for supporting student placements
- Protected Lieu/TOIL time
- Flexible and agile working
- Free car parking
- Group/peer supervision
- A robust ASYE programme
- 27 days annual leave plus bank holidays, with 5 days extra awarded to those staff with 5 years local government service
- Shropshire Council employee benefits scheme
- Access to a wide range of wellbeing resources

Attracting the next generation of social workers and social care practitioners

Shropshire Children's Services support career events across further and higher education providers in Shropshire by promoting the profession and talking about social care as a positive career choice.

Working with local qualifying programmes, through the West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership, we offer placements to traditional route students. We have worked hard to increase the number of practice educators we have in teams, to ensure we can offer as many placements as possible, but still offer a rich learning experience to all students. We have two dedicated Advanced Practitioners to support students, apprentices and ASYEs and have a plan to ensure that our numbers of practice educators will continue to meet need in the future.

Our Workforce Manager, with the support of colleagues, tracks all Social Workers who are qualified to ensure that we offer them the opportunity to progress, e.g., when they meet the criteria for Practice Education Professional Standards or looking at post graduate training opportunities. This includes a Linked Scale Progression pathway for more experienced Social Workers who would like to develop their career in Shropshire.

Shropshire has now invested in a fourth cohort of Step Up to Social Work students. This fast-track programme is supported by Department for Education Grant funding and is a regional programme, which

runs every 2 years. This has been a valuable route into Social Work for career changers in Shropshire. Plans are in place to recruit a further cohort of 4 for 2025 – 2026.

Shropshire have developed a Social Worker Apprenticeship programme, now in its fifth year, in partnership with University Centre Shrewsbury (subsidiary of Chester University) and, latterly, with Coventry University. This trainee programme provides an additional route into social work via the Apprenticeship route. This 3-year qualifying programme is a valuable route into Social Work for local people with experience of working with children and families.

We provide an extensive Assessed and Supported Year in Employment Programme for Newly Qualified Social Workers. The programme is coordinated by Advanced Practitioners, who can provide Group Supervision, learning opportunities, training events, undertake Practice Observations and feedback to the Newly Qualified Workers, on a regular basis, over and above the support provided by the Team Manager, Senior Social Worker and team.

We provide an extensive Professional Development Programme, mapped to the Knowledge and Skills Statements for Post Qualifying Standards for Social Work and the skills and knowledge all family support workers and residential care workers need.

Converting agency staff

Shropshire Social Care also currently offer a £5,000 Retention Payment for frontline social workers and team managers who have been employed by Shropshire for 2+ years (see Retention section below for more details), which is being matched for agency social workers who wish to convert to permanent positions, as a Recruitment Payment. Those converting social workers receive a £5,000 one off payment and, after 2 years of service, will be eligible for the Retention Payment (on the proviso that this scheme is still in place).

Through the combination of competitive pay scales, the Recruitment Payment and the attraction of a stable leadership team, supportive and restorative ethos, we have managed to secure the conversion of a high number (in terms of % of the workforce) of agency social workers to permanent or fixed term contracts. We are now working with Opus, to ensure that where we do need to use agency staff, we can attract the right calibre of staff quickly and wherever possible, convert agency workers to permanent members of our workforce.

What more do we need to do:

Further develop a system wide induction offer for all new staff and those moving to new positions within the service.

Continuous evaluation of the Social Work Apprenticeship Programme to understand what has worked, identifying best practice and understanding barriers to success. Evaluations will seek to produce recommendations to support the development of the programme, scope out future potential providers and secure through the commissioning process.

Grow our Practice Education resource in teams to support student placements – this includes promoting the undertaking of the Practice Educator Professional Standards Awards and supporting staff to complete both Level 1 and Level 2. The Linked Scale Progression programme also promotes completion of Practice Educator work for those workers wishing to progress to evidence their own development in developing others. Our overall aim is to secure 5+ social workers in Practice Educator Professional Standards Awards every year – we will review progress against that target in March 2025.

Continue the focused work to convert agency staff to permanent contracts; those workers who have performed well and whose practice is aligned with our Practice Priorities. This will reduce the overall financial burden of employing high-cost agency workers and increase stability within teams.

Further develop our presence across a number of digital platforms to encourage more local residents to consider social care as a career pathway.

Retention



What do we know:

The retention of social workers and other staff remains a priority for the Senior Leadership Team. Our aim is to maximise opportunities to recruit to vacant posts, including recruiting agency social workers to permanent positions. We know that a fully recruited staffing assignment, low vacancy, low agency, low sickness, manageable caseloads and high staff satisfaction will create positive retention rates and a stable workforce. A stable workforce will create the best opportunities and outcomes for our children and families.

Ensuring workers feel supported by providing the right environment for them to do the work they need to with children and families to keep them safe is key to retention. We know that retention is strengthened by keeping caseloads manageable, providing regular reflective supervision, providing support from managers, providing structured progression routes for those staff that wish to develop and focusing on all aspects of organisational resilience. Our aim is to ensure staff feel they have the right ingredients to succeed in their work in Shropshire.

In the period April 2024 – January 2025, we have had 9 qualified Social Workers and 9 Family Support Workers leave our employ and 15 qualified Social Workers and 5 Family Support Workers join the teams: this growth in Social Workers comes from an increase in Independent Reviewing Officers and Special Guardianship Social Workers.

What we do:

We have seen the complexity of caseloads increasing across the board. It is therefore essential that we provide a secure base in which staff feel safe and able to carry out their roles. The annual **Social Work Health Check** was distributed to all staff who work with children and their families (or manage teams who do) over summer 2024, to enable us to better understand find out what will better support our practitioners in developing and sustaining resilience and how leaders and managers can help in creating positive environments that support workforce wellbeing. The findings indicate that staff value:

- Their manager
- Their colleagues / team
- Supervision

77% of respondents felt they had job satisfaction most weeks and felt supported to develop relationships with children and families.

We continue to provide regular **Reflective Supervision** to all our staff. We understand the benefits of regular reflective supervision, and this remains a practice priority for us. All Managers receive Supervision Training. A full review of the supervision policy took place in 2021, and to date, implementation is supported through mandatory training and the quality assurance framework. Further refresher training is made available to Team Managers and Senior Social Workers (where appropriate).

We also offer **Restorative Practice** training to all staff including Assistant Directors and the Senior Leadership team. Additionally, we have provided **therapeutic, clinical supervision** for individuals and teams who have been impacted by direct or vicarious trauma – this resource is not standard, but is available as required.

We provide an extensive **Professional Development Programme** tailored to specific roles across the whole workforce. This is informed by staff Appraisal, the Health Check, National, Regional and Local Learning Reviews, changes to law, research, statutory guidance and evidence-based developments in practice.

The **Linked Scale Progression programme** has been reviewed following feedback from the Senior Social Workers and the wider workforce. Social Workers were clear that they wanted a clear progression route to advance in their career. This would support them to stay in Shropshire and not look for opportunities elsewhere, as there is now scope to progress from social worker, to Advanced to Senior, to Aspiring Team Manager, receiving relevant and enhanced training opportunities to support their development. Social Workers wishing to evidence their development towards a more senior role will discuss their aspirations with their Team Manager in the first instance, ultimately leading to presenting themselves and evidence of their work at a Linked Scale Progression Panel, which are held on a monthly basis.

The **Retention Payment scheme** is available to all frontline social workers and team managers who have been in continuous employment with Shropshire Council for 2+ years – this has been a successful scheme and there is a commitment to continue this until it is no longer required, i.e., we have a fully permanent, stable workforce who are committed to and invested in Shropshire.

In Shropshire, we are keen to highlight and celebrate our staff's achievements and outstanding work. The Weekly Brief always contains compliments received by staff, published to congratulate the individual and for others to read and be inspired by.

The annual **Staff Conference** opened **Practice Week** and provides an invaluable opportunity for colleagues across the services to meet, network and develop relationships as they are appraised of key issues, developments and are given the opportunity to hear from nationally recognised key note speakers on topical issues.

The service continues to develop in key areas, we have seen business growth acknowledged with increased capacity in key areas. We have several exciting opportunities for future service development as key projects take shape. This should ensure staff feel they have progression opportunities; Shropshire is an innovative and exciting place to work and retention will be strengthened as a result of this.

Our Social Workers and Social Care Practitioners tell us that we have:

- Positive and supportive access to visible managers both in the office and online
- Good quality supervision which takes place on a regular basis
- A restorative, relationship-based practice model with both our children, families and staff
- A warm and nurturing environment to work in
- Mutual respect at all levels
- A small authority allowing direct relationships between senior managers and frontline staff
- A beautiful locality to work in
- An excellent training programme
- Great opportunities for progression

What more do we need to do?

- Continue to listen to feedback from the workforce, children, families and carers about how we are doing – learning and growing from challenge and feedback.
- Encourage increased attendance at Practitioner Forums with the Principal Social Worker – to discuss concerns and ideas in a restorative environment.
- To re-instate the offer of individual exit interviews to ensure we understand why staff may chose to leave and to determine if there are any discernible patterns that we could address.

Development



What do we know?

The needs of the workforce in terms of learning and practice development have continued to be met in a variety of ways. We offer a range of training and development opportunities flexibly; using digital platforms and face to face opportunities in a creative way, including the use of Microsoft Teams to deliver learning, developing webinars both live and recorded and we continue to engage with partner learning communities in their use of various digital methods and platforms.

How do we know?

- Our ASYE Programme continues to be well received and newly qualified workers tell us they have the learning opportunities and support they require to succeed in Shropshire.
- Scrutiny of quality assurance data ensures there is wider oversight of ASYE's performance and workload; contingency plans can be put in place if it is identified that ASYEs are not receiving the level of support that is expected, and alternative/additional support can be provided.
- ASYE Panel acts as a comprehensive feedback loop; individual's work is assessed with consideration of the quality of supervision and mentoring received, plus evaluation of the level of 'protection' offered to the worker (in terms of protected caseloads and protected time for study sessions and peer supervision).
- We have reviewed the Linked Scale Progression Panel and experienced Social Workers have access to training to gain their Practice Education Professional Standards Awards – and are encouraged to do so.
- The annual Practice Week took place in early October and was very well received, with high levels of engagement from staff – both those leading sessions and those attending. This is a relatively low-cost endeavour which is of great value to staff, increasing knowledge, skills, confidence and partnership working.
- We have engaged with a new HEI for the delivery of the apprenticeship programme, using a digital delivery model.
- Working with Opus, we are conducting a review of the use of agency staff including team managers and service managers.
- We have reviewed the induction Programme currently in place for all new starters, across the whole workforce and are working with colleagues to ensure this is a flexible digital offer with a greater opportunity for managers to have a closer oversight of their new starters.
- Our Workforce tell us we offer a comprehensive and dynamic learning and development offer, to ensure they have the skills, knowledge and experience to develop and progress.

What more do we need to do?

With the development of the Learning and Development team, our current training offer will be reviewed alongside feedback received from course participants. This means we can ensure that the training offered to staff is useful, meaningful, aligned to wider service development and advertised effectively to ensure high levels of attendance.

Shropshire Children's Social Care and Safeguarding – Principal Social Worker Annual Report 2024-25

Author: Jennie Lowe

Date: 25th April 2025

A year in review...

Shropshire Children's Social Care, Safeguarding and Early Help has faced some significant challenges over the last financial year however these have been well balanced with success, growth and development. This PSW's Annual Report focuses upon the work of the Quality Assurance Service (Independent Reviewing Unit, Quality Assurance, Local Area Designated Officers), Workforce Development and the Practice Learning Hub (responsible for the oversight and co-ordination of Social Work students, Apprentices, newly qualified social workers, the Assessed Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) and Practice Educators).

Following on from the significant staffing challenges in 2023/24, where there were vacancies of the Principal Independent Reviewing Officer (PIRO) who went on maternity leave in August 2023, the Performance, Improvement and Practice (PIP) Officer who was seconded to a new position in the Office of the Chief Exec in May 2023 and the Workforce Manager who was promoted to Operational Manager for the Joint Training Team in September 2023 – none of these vacancies began to be appointed to until January 2024, requiring the PSW to cover all of these roles in the interim – with varying degrees of success.

The impact of the absence of a PIP Officer/Quality Assurance Lead was noted within the Ofsted Focused Visit in November 2023, as was the absence of a PIRO and the understaffing (in terms of demand management) in the Independent Reviewing Unit. Renewed and proactive recruitment drives to fill these vacancies plus newly created extra capacity Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) posts were successful and, by the start of the new financial year 2024/25, we had secured a PIP Officer/QA Lead, a PIRO (interim – maternity cover), a Workforce Manager (role extended to cater for Social Care and Early Help) in place, plus 3 of the 5 additional IRO posts.

Through the hard work and commitment of these additional staff members and the initiatives driven by the service, 2024/25 has been a year where successes have outweighed and overcome the challenges and we are ending the year with some clear priorities and goals for the to strengthen our service and contribute positively towards better outcomes for children and families.

Additionally, the establishment of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) in the latter quarters of 2023/24 has had a positive impact on our services, requiring enhanced focus on specific areas of practice – PSW provided regular reports on dip sampling activities to CIB and experienced high levels of support and engagement from senior leaders and Members.

Key strengths and successes in 2024/25:

- Our annual **Practice Week** was held from Monday 30th September – Friday 4th October 2024. The week began with an Opening Staff Conference, which was well attended and well received. The theme for the Conference was “Participation” and we secured keynote speakers who were able to powerfully impress upon our staff the importance of meaningful participation and engagement of families, children and young people in our work. Practice Week continued with around 30 workshops and masterclasses delivered to staff across Early Help, Social Care, Residential services and the Virtual School – on a wide range of topics including Exploitation, impact of trauma on attachment, effective genograms, learning from case reviews, Later Life Letters and more. Total attendance number for all of the events of the week was 625 and the feedback we received was overwhelmingly positive, with staff identifying the difference their learning would have on their practice. Practice Week 2025 is already in (advanced) planning stages and we are delighted that once again a large number of our events throughout the week will be delivered by our own staff – we are keen to recognise expertise within our workforce, rather than seeking to solely engage external speakers.
- This year we were successful in securing DfE funding for a **Leadership Development Programme**, delivered by Research in Practice (RiP). This programme was developed alongside ourselves in order to make it bespoke for Shropshire, addressing the key issue of how to ensure that supervision is regular, reflective and effective, with the associated pressures of personnel management, ensuring good oversight of children’s plans and seeking to practice in an Anti-Racist manner. Team Managers (and some aspiring managers) undertook a 5 day training programme throughout Q3 and Q4, with the Senior Leadership Team undertaking a condensed and focused 2 day programme in Q4. Feedback from attendees was uniformly positive, with many managers highlighting the benefits of having the physical and emotional space away from the work environment to reflect on their practice and areas for development. Supplementary and complimentary mentoring, Action Learning Sets and development sessions have been planned with RiP to be delivered in Q1 and Q2 of 2025/26.
- The **Social Work Health Check** was undertaken and completed in the summer (Q2) 2024, garnering 113 responses. 77% of respondents confirmed that they experienced job satisfaction working for Shropshire, the vast majority of respondents shared that they enjoyed working with their team and benefitted from regular, reflective supervision. The majority of respondents reported that, despite the challenges of working in a profession that is widely understood to be stressful, they felt supported to undertake meaningful work with families and support change.
- This year 5 Social Work **Apprentices** completed their Social Work Degree course, with excellent results (Firsts and 2.1s), and moved into their Assessed Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) with focused support from the Advanced Practitioner for ASYEs. These Apprentices have benefited from 3 years of experience within social work teams whilst completing their academic studies and are entering the social work workforce with confidence and a commitment to working for Shropshire Council.

- Additionally, regional DfE funding secured allowed the creation of a post of **Advanced Practitioner for Apprentices** – the position has been filled by an extremely experienced Senior Social Worker who is utilising her skills, knowledge and expertise to support and develop our current and future Apprentices.
- This year Shropshire Council have **partnered with Opus People Solutions** to centralise and more effectively regulate our use of agency/locum staff. Opus provide a ‘front door’ for all agency providers to sign up to which controls the contracts and pay rates that can be sought, meaning that we are better able to remain compliant with our regional Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). We have developed strong links between the PSW, Workforce Manager and Opus in order to ensure this partnership is fruitful.
- The **recruitment of 5 permanent (extra capacity) IROs**, has significantly strengthened the IRU service, reducing caseloads, enabling IROs to have more oversight of the progression of children’s plans and more capacity to check and challenge as befits their statutory function. The increased IRO “footprint” evidenced on children’s records and the more efficient and effective progression of RAGs through the Dispute Resolution Process is supporting improved outcomes for children by reducing the risk of drift and delay. Morale within the IRU is significantly improved, with IROs now contributing to QA work and, most importantly, visiting their allocated children more often.
- Additionally, the IRU has been supported by the creation of the **PowerBi IRU performance dashboard** specifically for IROs (and PIRO and PSW) oversight. IROs have been enabled to move away from manual record keeping and instead utilise accurate data to ‘self serve’ and identify priority areas for action, increasing overall compliance with statutory timescales.
- Our partnership with the DfE funded **Sector Led Improvement Partners (SLIP)** from Wiltshire has been a critical area of development and progress. SLIP supported us with our Public Law Outline pathway and process, began work supporting us with updating our (currently out of date) Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) and helped us to understand ‘the art of the possible’ in respect of audit management tools. We also benefitted from SLIP colleagues providing Action Learning Sets and visiting our staff in person to deliver a range of workshops to Team Managers, Social Workers, Early Help and Residential staff. A bid has been presented to the DfE to request a further period of SLIP support to complete the work begun on the QAF and to overhaul our current auditing processes and, ideally, implement a new, more comprehensive audit management system. We are awaiting the DfE decision on this bid.
- In advance of and in conjunction with the Wiltshire SLIP support we have **strengthened our quality assurance activities** throughout the year – with a focus on Child Journey Audits (CJA). The previous Word document format for CJAs was poorly used, with auditors tending to skip questions they felt were not relevant, or just giving yes/no responses, which did not amount to good quality assurance or assist strategic oversight of frontline practice. By transferring the CJA format onto MS Forms, whilst streamlining the audit questions and areas and making the completion of all sections mandatory, including citing evidence to support gradings, we are now able to collect and collate

good qualitative and quantitative data from CJAs. This work was begun in the previous financial year however completed and refined within this year – further work to improve the tool will continue into the next financial year, ideally assisted by Wiltshire SLIP colleagues.

- **CJA compliance** has been an area of success – with submissions at only 70 for Q1 but increasing to 118 in Q4. This improvement has been due in part to the persistence of the PSW and PIP Officer/QA Lead but also reflects the developments in auditors' practice and 'buy in' to the importance of monthly CJAs. Auditors who previously rarely submitted CJAs have, upon completing these more regularly, fed back that they have found the process useful and supportive in terms of applying a QA lens to the work within their own teams. 'Lunch & Learn' sessions led by the PSW on "High Quality Auditing" have been extremely well attended by auditors who are keen to improve their practice and confidence. **Group auditing work** in End to End Leadership meetings and Performance Management Group meetings have further embedded the value of effective and focused dip sampling to identify themes and issues. It should also be noted that the consistent inclusion of the Director and Assistant Directors in auditing activities supports the emphasis on the importance of QA work.
- This year the process of audit moderation has been fully embedded by way of monthly **Moderation Panels**, which are attended by auditors on a rotating basis. Most of our auditors have now attended 1 or more Moderation Panels and we consistently receive feedback as to how helpful it is to read CJAs completed by others and consider how they form their judgements. Auditors report they have grown in confidence when completing their own CJAs and when moderating – this is borne out by the clear reduction in CJA gradings being moderated up or down at Moderation Panel.
- In Q3 of 2024/25, Shropshire Children's Social Care invested in a **pilot of Magic Notes**, an AI powered meeting summary tool. This was a considerable investment and initially rolled out to only 20 social care staff (5 Team Managers, 1 Service Manager and 14 Social Workers) with the view to those staff utilising the technology to its full potential and reporting back regularly to assist with measuring impact against KPIs. It became clear early into the pilot that the efficiency of Magic Notes technology would allow the pilot to be extended to more workers. PSW and Workforce Manager have worked together to extend the pilot group gradually, providing training and support to users. At year end there are in excess of 220 regular/consistent users of Magic Notes. Feedback from users can be encapsulated in one term; "game changer!" and our performance data evidences improvements in compliance with timescales for visits and reviews, as the administrative burden for workers using Magic Notes is significantly reduced.

Key challenges experienced in 2024/25:

- This year a full **Business Support Review** has been completed – with many positive results, particularly in terms of aligning Job Descriptions and allowing administrative support to be more flexible to meet demands across services. Unfortunately, this coincided with the Business Support element of the IRU service being significantly impacted by several workers leaving the service or being off work due to ill health,

further exacerbated by the Business Support Lead moving into a new role in Q1 and not being replaced until the latter end of Q4. With gaps in service provision and a subject matter expert no longer being in a lead role, the covering Business Support managers were unable to ensure that statutory duties – including and especially the timeliness of convening ICPCs – were met. For a period of several months, our ICPC timeliness fell far short of the statutory expectation. Focused work by the PIRO was required – including daily meetings with Business Support to co-ordinate ICPC requests with Independent Chair’s calendars – in order to rectify this issue and embed a clear understanding of our statutory responsibilities. At year end our ChAT data reported that 61% of ICPCs had been held within timescales – an improvement but the trajectory must continue to climb into next year.

- In line with the **spending controls** imposed, as appropriate, in response to the Council’s financial position, we have experienced challenges in securing external meeting rooms for ICPCs and RCPCs, which led to Business Support arranging the majority of Child Protection Conferences as online/MS Teams meetings. The PSW and PIRO were initially unaware of how many meetings were being held online, in contravention of our clear stated aim to hold all/the vast majority of ICPCs and, where possible, RCPCs as face to face meetings. The breakdown in communication with the PIRO and PSW (from Business Support and our own IROs) meant that a resolution to this issue was not secured immediately and raised questions as to the understanding of the need to escalate issues of concern.
- In Q3 SLT examined PowerBi performance data in respect of **CLA Review meetings**, due to the fact that a high proportion were reported to be out of date or having never been held. More in depth scrutiny highlighted that, in the majority of cases, CLA Reviews had been held and the content and outcomes of these meetings had been uploaded to LCS as a Word document owing to the fact that the LCS workflow/pathway had become “stuck” when the Pre-Meeting Report had not been completed by the Social Worker. It became clear that a culture of tacit acceptance of this practice had developed, where IROs had not challenged (beyond a RAG) or escalated this issue instead allowing this “stuck workflow” position to remain. Focused work was required by the PIRO and Ofsted Improvement Lead with IROs, SWs and TMs ensured that the appropriate actions were completed in order to ensure that all children’s care plans and reviews are accurately represented within LCS. IROs have been challenged by the PIRO and PSW around the need to ensure that this or a similar situation does not arise again.

Priorities for 2025/26

It is essential that we learn from the challenges we have faced this last year and build upon the strengths and successes, setting ourselves ambitious goals and priorities for the year ahead. The services sitting under the PSW are staffed with talented people who are committed to ensuring that all developments or initiatives undertaken are done so with a focus on how they will positively impact outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Our key priorities for the coming year are:

- **Learning from Quality Assurance in 2024/25** - Learning Brief to be produced based on the findings in the Quality Assurance Annual Report – to be shared within AD Updates, End to End Leadership meeting and at Staff Conference (within Practice Week).
 - **Deliver a high quality, impactful Practice Week** (29th September – 3rd October 2025), with sessions clearly linked to learning from quality assurance activities and challenges experienced this year. Virtual sessions to be recorded and uploaded to Practice Development Hub for access after the event.
 - **Deliver Staff Awards event in Q3** – a popular event held in 2022/23 and 2023/24, put on hold in 2024/25 due to sensitivity to the wider context of redundancies across the Local Authority. We are keen to hold this important event again next year to show our staff how valued they are and to celebrate outstanding practice across the service areas.
 - **Establish a Social Work Academy/Centre of Excellence** – to centralise oversight of all students, Apprentices, ASYE SWs, social workers wishing to progress to Senior via Linked Scale Progression and Practice Educators; and to lead on embedding post qualification requirements in line with national reforms.
 - *(DfE bid success pending)* **Update QAF – continuation of work with Wiltshire SLIP** on updating and launching a fit for purpose and future proof Quality Assurance Framework.
 - *(DfE bid success pending)* **Update Audit Management system** - implement a Shropshire version of Wiltshire's audit management tool (ARMA). Establish a Task and Finish/Working Group with representatives from QA, Business Analysts and IT Support to devise Project Plan.
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ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

SHROPSHIRE VIRTUAL SCHOOL



Shropshire
Virtual School



Introduction

1.0

This is the Annual Report for Shropshire Virtual School 2024-25.

This has been a year of transformation, with a restructure of the school and new additionality to the Head Teacher's role as lead for the Education Access Service alongside that of the Virtual School. This has enabled closer collaboration with colleagues across inclusion and attendance in general, bringing benefits for the children supported by the Virtual School, as well as the team itself.

At Shropshire Virtual School, we pride ourselves on living by our co-produced Core Values with them running through the veins of our team. Our aim is to be giving the right support in the right place and at the right time, using voices from our young people and colleagues to develop and evolve.

By creating an education community for young people, we can promote excellent opportunities and champion their achievements - and as part of the Corporate Parent we always take the approach of considering whether something is 'good enough for our own child'.

This year **OFSTED** recognised how our Virtual School contributed to a judgement of '**Outstanding**' - and how we provide "high-quality support that promotes our children's educational attainment and progress." OFSTED noted how the practitioners in the team "go over and above", show "tenacity" to secure suitable provision and how this enables our children to make good progress from their starting points.



Context for our Virtual School

1.1 This has been a key academic year for the Virtual School with a **new structure** that promotes development of talent and new opportunities within the team. Increased responsibilities for Virtual Schools nationally, alongside the changing position for the Head Teacher within Learning & Skills, necessitated an evolving structure especially in the leadership layers. The appendix has a visual of our current team with roles.

Key points to note are:

- A **new role** of Senior Education Advice and Support Officer – to support EASOs with complex cases and project development
- With the change in the VS Head Teacher's role across other services, the two Asst Heads have become Deputy Heads support the leadership function.
- A **new role** of Lead Education Officer to grow a middle leadership layer and support operational leading of the school on a day-to-day basis.

1.2 The Virtual School has a **Governing Body** that meets termly, it is chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Children and Families. This was Kirstie Hurst-Knight until the elections, at which point Andy Hall took on this role. In addition to the Head Teacher, members include representatives from:

- Lead for Inclusion at a MAT and a Senior LA Education colleague
- Early Years Governor
- CLA Service Manager, a member of the Virtual School team & LA Participation Worker
- A carer (parent) Governor is being recruited to.



1.3 Shropshire Virtual School (SVS) continues to have robust **partnerships** with our regional West Midlands VS Heads and has increased links nationally, including with East Midlands colleagues. Of note:

our Deputy Heads chair some of the focus groups in the West Midlands (WM)

SVS has presented at the WM Regional VS Conference on our Inclusion work - and

presented with our young people at the WM Conference for Designated Teachers.

participation arts and sports events with the WM Children in Care Foundation

The SVS Head Teacher is a trustee) [Welcome to WMVS Children In Care Foundation | WMVS Children In Care Foundation \(wmvscicfoundation.org.uk\)](#)

Shropshire Virtual School plays an integral role in Corporate Parenting. The VS organised an event in July to promote this and consider the proposed changes around the role of the Corporate Parent in the Childrens Bill. This event hosted Jaz Ampaw-Farr and included one of the few book-signing events nationally to launch her new book 'Because of You, This is Me'. Attendees included a cross section of Corporate Parents from Members, Health, Schools, Social Care and LA colleagues – and they got to view Jaz's film which had just won best short film at Cannes. The session worked on understanding the needs of and promoting the achievements of care



experienced people - and discuss how we can move forwards together into the next phase of strategic development. There was positive feedback following the session (see Compliments) and the link to a short video is here :[https://shropshirecouncil.sharepoint.com/:v:/r/sites/VitSch/Shared Documents/General/Team member folders/Jo Kelly/Participation/Jazprentices and book launch/photos and video/25-07-09 Shropshire Virtual School BOOK TOUR - Promo.mp4?csf=1&web=1&e=r3xlVe](https://shropshirecouncil.sharepoint.com/:v:/r/sites/VitSch/Shared%20Documents/General/Team%20member%20folders/Jo%20Kelly/Participation/Jazprentices%20and%20book%20launch/photos%20and%20video/25-07-09%20Shropshire%20Virtual%20School%20BOOK%20TOUR%20-%20Promo.mp4?csf=1&web=1&e=r3xlVe)

Shropshire Profile

1.4 At the end of August 2025 Shropshire Virtual School was supporting 713 Children who are Looked After from year -2 to 13 (the year in which they turn 18)

Data overview: CLA Pupil data overview by Key Stage, August 2025

Month	EYFS	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS4	TOTAL No in STATUTORY SCHOOL YEARS	KS5	TOTAL of all CIC (yr-2 to 13)
August	98	87	153	143	99	513	133	713

There has been a **+3.3% change in the numbers** of looked after children from year -2 to 13 through this academic year. (Year -2 refers to two years before Reception).



■ yr -2 ■ yr -1 ■ yr R ■ yr 1 ■ yr 2 ■ yr 3 ■ yr 4 ■ yr 5
■ yr 6 ■ yr 7 ■ yr 8 ■ yr 9 ■ yr 10 ■ yr 11 ■ KS5

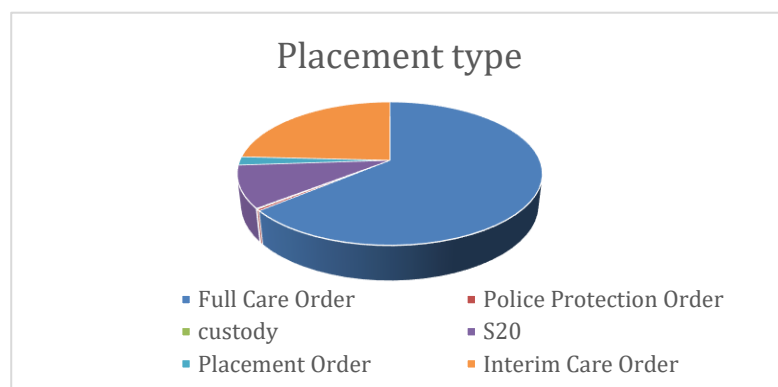


Numbers in comparison to last academic year:

- +8% change in Key stage 5
- there was a slight drop in Early Years from 103 to 98
- +3.2% change in statutory school year numbers.

1.5
Vulnerability data for CLA in the Statutory School Years and Early Years at the end of the academic year indicated:

- The proportion of our children from year -2 to 11 with an EHCP has risen from 26% to 28.4% (165 children).
- However, of these, only 89 (54%) attend specialist/independent schools i.e. **even more of our children attend a mainstream school than ever before** (46% in comparison to 42% in 23-24) and this supports demand management for the Local Authority
- A further 119 children have identified SEND.
- More of our children in this group are looked after under a Full Care Order compared to this time last year at 64% in August 2025 (vs 59% at August 2024).
- Data indicates a stable proportion of CLA attending out of authority schools at 34%.
- There are 54 children with an EHCP who attend an out of authority school, 33 of these attend a specialist/independent setting. The situation for these young people can often **impact heavily on swift access to education.**
- There has been an increase in pupils attending a **PRU**, this has risen from a range of 3-6 in any month in 23-24 to an average of 7 in a month.
- 8 are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People (UASYP)



1.6
Vulnerability data for CLA in Key Stage 5 at the end of the academic year was:

- 29 (19%) have an EHCP - which is in line with the picture for the last academic year - and a further 15 have identified SEN.
- 40% are at a provider out of area, which is a decrease on last academic year (61%)
- 68 (44%) are UASYP, which is in line with the proportion last year.
- 103 young people (66%) live outside of Shropshire.

Pupil Achievements

1.7 Our young people have achieved great things this year.



P achieved two awards from his school at the end of the summer term - one was PRIDE Pupil of the Year for Personal Excellent and another was for the highest ever number of house points in 1 year! He was accompanied to the ceremony by his SW Asst.

K raised over £150 for Macmillan Cancer Support by organising a raffle outside a local supermarket, he was very proud of his achievement.

At a PEP for N we celebrated him achieving 'man of the match' for the school



football team. He was awarded this in assembly for his great sportsmanship and attitude as well as scoring a number of goals! He has been house captain twice recently and delivered a motivational speech to the whole school, he said he enjoyed feeling proud afterwards.

One of our children has been benefiting from PP+ to maintain Greater Depth in Maths, she has been selected to represent her school at a Maths challenge at Wrekin College where she will compete against children from other schools.

One of our children in a specialist school has provided OFSTED inspectors with a guided tour of his school site. The feedback was he was thoughtful, responsible and respectful – he was able to explain how the teachers keep him and other pupils safe plus how he enjoys reading. He has earned a certificate of recognition from his Head Teacher.

Another young person has represented their school at the county final in athletics and one secondary aged pupil has received the Head Teacher's Award for Music.

One of our children in year 4 has been assessed as having a reading age of 15.3 years.

1.8 On Saturday 20th September the school came together to celebrate the achievements of our young people at a special event for the young people and their carer/family members. At the event they all got the chance to walk on the red carpet with medals, certificates and prizes being awarded along the way. There were also activities to enjoy such as the exotic zoo show, inflatables, arts & crafts, falconry and sports.

Over 100 children were nominated with categories ranging from Contribution to Community, Friendship, Helping at Home to Academic Success and Attendance. As Corporate Parents we are all proud of each and every one of them.



Thank you to David Shaw, Director of Childrens Services at Shropshire Council who attended to congratulate each young person, as did Andy Hall, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families and John Rowe who is one of the SVS Governors. A huge well done also to the Shropshire Virtual School team who made it all happen.

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers

Educational Progress

1.9

The Attainment and Progress workstream is led by a Deputy Head and fortnightly Pupil Progress Meetings focus on targeting intervention to support children in key year groups linked to performance indicators such as GCSEs, SATS and Good Level of Development.

Outcomes for summer 2025 are at present unverified. Results from Nexus are indicated to be as follows:



2.0 Good Level of Development (GLD):

Initial data indicates that Shropshire CLA achieved **above** CLA Regional and potentially by nearly 5% **above** CLA National.

2.1 Year 1 Phonics:

Initial data indicates that Shropshire CLA achieved **above** CLA Regional and potentially 11% **above** CLA National

2.2 End of Key Stage 2:

Initial data for the SSD903 cohort indicates that Shropshire CLA achieved the following:

Reading: **above** CLA Regional and potentially above CLA National by 11%

Writing: **above** CLA Regional and potentially above CLA National by 5%

Maths: below CLA Regional and CLA National, but increased by 15% compared to 23-24 results*

Combined: just under CLA Regional and CLA National but increased by 17% compared to 23-24 results

(*Early indications are that Maths attainment in the county for all learners is also below National.)

2.3 Key Stage 4 (SSD903):

These results are despite 43% of the cohort having an EHCP and 26% being on roll at a specialist provision.

Indicator	English & Maths at 4 or above	English & Maths at 5 or above
Verified summer 2023 outcomes	16.7%	4.2%
Verified summer 2024 outcomes	21.4%	10%
Unverified summer 2025	24%	10%

Additional GCSE headlines (unverified):

- 36% achieved English grade 4 or above; 21.4% achieved English Grade 5 or above
- 26.2% achieved Maths grade 4 or above; 12% achieved Maths grade 5 or above
- 26.2% achieved 5 GCSEs at grade 4 or above including English and Maths; 7.1% achieved 5 GCSEs at grade 5 or above including English and Maths
- Attainment 8 is indicated to be above National for CLA

Students who have been noted for excellent achievement or progress have been nominated for our Annual Celebration event in September. Three students will be recognised for their individual outstanding achievement as winners at the Celebration event, whether that be for 9 GCSEs with high grades or achievement despite adversity.

Some individual achievements of note are:

- KB achieved 9 GCSEs with 5 of them (including Biology and Chemistry) at Grade 6. K had target grades of 4s and received science tuition from PP+ to support her aspiration to attend a specialist sports college
- ME achieved Grade 6 in Art and Design, Level 2 Functional Skills English (equivalent to a Grade 4 GCSE) and Level 2 hospitality. This was despite facing significant changes within the exam period and having an EHCP with education at a specialist school for SEMH.
- AW achieved 7 GCSEs at Grade 4+ inc. English and maths, he has identified SEND.
- TF achieved 6 GCSEs with 2 at Grade 4 and 2 at grade 5 despite being at risk of exclusion in Key stage 4 and having multiple moves of home and school



2.4 Key Stage 5

There were some considerable successes for our students:

A level Results:

Two young people sat A level examinations; their results are as follows:

EE - 3 A levels achieved - Art B English B History C

RS – 3 A levels achieved - Biology E History E Geography E

E has an offer from Bath University, she has asked to defer for a year as she wants to have some money behind her before going. She has a job in geriatric residential care in the meantime.

R will start on a Supported Internship at a hospital.

T Level Results

T Levels are two-year courses and are broadly equivalent to 3 A Levels. The courses have been developed with employers and education providers so that students are prepared for entry into skilled employment, apprenticeship or other higher/further study. T Levels offer students practical and knowledge-based learning, plus on the job experience through an industry placement

BS – PASS. Remark requested as one mark off an A grade.

B is considering university when he completes his course next summer as his T Level gives him enough UCAS points. SVS and B's PA are working together to support and advise him.

Level 3 Results

Level 3 qualifications are generally equivalent to A levels or a combination of A levels and other qualifications. The qualification supports progression as universities accept them as entry into degree courses.

Of the 8 young people who sat a Level 3 qualification, **all passed** their Level 3 course be it A level, T Level or other Level 3.

Individual examples to note:

- HG - Achieved a Pass in Level 3 Motor Mechanics and plans to apply for the Kier Automotive technician apprenticeship which we are aware of due to our Work Experience Activity Day.
- HM has passed L3 Health and Social Care. She is currently working in a care home and hopes to become a Social Worker.
- AJ - Passed Business Administration Level 3 and was appointed by his employer.
- MU - Year 12 UASYP has achieved a Level 2 Cambridge Technical Extended Certificate in Science. He is progressing on to Level 1 Plumbing Course at College.
- RW Year 12 - has passed basic training and is now accepted into the Army.

For those young people leaving year 13 this summer, confirmations at the end of September are as follows:

- 40% have a college or training place.
- 1% have a place at a university (deferred until next year)
- 7% are employed.

The link that SVS has developed with Shropshire Quilters is benefiting our young people moving home or to university with a further donation of a hand-made quilt.

2.5 The Progress and Attainment working group identify gaps and plan for improving outcomes. Sumdog and Lexia applications were selected based on their evidence-based and adaptive learning features, which provide personalised support in an engaging format. Progress is routinely measured and reported on.





Case Study

One young person who started **Lexia** in February completed nearly 27 hours and 399 units. Her attainment has improved from foundation level to intermediate in grammar and word study, and from intermediate to advanced level in comprehension. There had been concerns that the young person had such significant gaps in her learning that she may require specialist support, however Lexia has supported to demonstrate this is now not needed.

Other examples:

- one pupil (L) who has been taking part in **Sumdog Maths** intervention, he has progressed from 'working towards' in Maths to achieving in line with '**expected standard**'.
- another pupil (J) who is also using Sumdog has progressed from 'expected' to achieving in line with **Greater Depth**.

Further tools and resources are currently being considered for home learning development.

2.6

Educational engagement

There have been national challenges such as rising exclusions/suspensions, a rise in emotional based school avoidance and increased regional attainment gaps, all of which need to be managed to continue the drive for positive outcomes for our children.

However, a **notable achievement has been 0 permanent exclusions for Shropshire Looked After Children for four consecutive academic years.**

Additionally, **12 permanent exclusions were prevented** last academic year. The impact of our work on reducing Permanent Exclusions has improved the long-term life chances for our young people.

Case Study

One young person was supported through a time of being at risk of exclusion and this escalated during a complex court case. PP+ was used to support tuition and mentoring. Advice and support from the Virtual School and collaboration with all partners ensured that the Reduced Timetable he was on supported a gradual and manageable integration – and several months later he returned full time.

2.7

The end of year summary for 24-25 indicated the following outcomes:

	Shropshire CLA (Children Looked After)	Shropshire All Learners (*DfE Attendance Portal - Shropshire)	National All Learners (*DfE Pupil Attendance in Schools Stats)
Primary	95.8% (+1.45% from 23-24)	95%	94.8%
Secondary	86.4% (+2.43% from 23-24)	91.6%	91.5%
Specialist	88.2%	84.8%	87.1%
Combined	91.9% (+1.9% from 23-24)	93.3%	93.2%



- A significant achievement was that both primary and specialist attendance figures for Shropshire Looked After Children were **above** that for all learners in Shropshire and nationally.
- Additionally, the **Persistent Absence figure decreased by 3.23% and Severe Absence by 1.75% compared to 23-24**
- Progress was evidenced for **secondary attendance with a +2.43%** on 23-24. The ILACS report identified our clear aim to improve secondary attendance as we move into the new academic year. The Virtual School will also focus on reducing the length of Reduced Timetables
- The suspensions rate reflects the national picture with increasing rates, although the rise for Shropshire CLA is minor in comparison (35.84% from 35.43% in 23-24). It was excellent to see **primary suspensions significantly reduced** from 126.5 days in 23-24 to only 9 days in 24-25.
- No Recorded School was reduced to an average of only 3 student per month.
- Reduced Timetables will be a focus for the next School Development Plan in terms of length and for those students with an EHCP

The trajectory and comparatives are indicated to be as follows:

LA	Overall absence percentage CLA 31st March 2021	Overall absence percentage CLA 31st March 2022	Overall absence percentage CLA 31st March 2023	Overall absence percentage CLA 31st March 2024
Shropshire	8.40%	8.00%	6.90%	8%
Herefordshire	10.90%	9.60%	7.90%	7.2%
Devon	No data	9.80%	9.90%	9.2%
Dorset	No data	9.10%	9.90%	10.5%
National	9.10%	7.80%	9.80%	10.3%

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/outcomes-for-children-in-need-including-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england/2023?subjectId=7344bd3a-2cc4-4b62-85d0-08dc5d2e18da>

Shropshire outcomes for absence were **better than National** and other LAs except Herefordshire at 31st March 2024.

LA	Persistent absence percentage CLA 31st March 2021	Persistent absence percentage CLA 31st March 2022	Persistent absence percentage CLA 31st March 2023	Persistent absence percentage CLA 31st March 2024
Shropshire	29.70%	21.10%	16.70%	17.6%
Herefordshire	37.30%	21.90%	20.30%	17.3%
Devon	30.50%	25.20%	23.60%	22.3%
Dorset	33.50%	22.50%	29.20%	23%
National	30.40%	19.10%	24.30%	25%



Shropshire outperformed the regions above and national for persistent absence at 31st March 2024

2.8 Data at the end of July 2025 indicated 132 students in Key Stage 5 being supported at the Virtual School and of these:

- 79% of students were in education employment or training (EET) and 21% were NEET.
Of these:
- UASYP NEET: 2 students (this is a decrease from 15 in May 2025, following the introduction of the STREAM programme)
- Citizen NEET: 27 students

The average monthly NEET figure for Shropshire CLA for December, January and February was 23% or 77% in education, employment or training, using the same calculation as the DFE.

(DFE comparisons are not yet available for individual LAs or by vulnerability, most recent data is end of 2022 [Participation in education, training and NEET age 16 to 17 by local authority, Academic year 2022/23 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)).

The national headline for All Learners was 78.6% participation for 16-18 year olds and 8.9% NEET [Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18, Calendar year 2023 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#) Note this is by calendar year so not like for like.

2.9 At the mid-September 2025 point there were 79% of Key Stage 5 students in education, employment or training (EET) and further enrolments are being supported. Of these confirmed as being in EET:

- 93% are in Further Education
- 1% are in Employment.
- 6% are engaged in training or apprenticeships.

3.0 In July 2025 the STREAM (Shropshire Transformative Routes to Education and Aspirational Minds) programme was launched. This Re-integration programme is designed specifically to support young people who are UASYP and have recently arrived in the UK to

- build confidence and a sense of belonging
- improve English language acquisition
- support progression into an appropriate KS5 course
- access information about education and training



The programme provides access to timetabled tuition by our UASYP Project Officer and is delivered in the form of live online lessons with some elements of self-study. Students are automatically enrolled on the programme if they are a UASYP and are NEET. The soft launch in July enabled a reduction in NEET by 10% and 40% (6 out of 15) of the young people who engaged with the initial roll out of the STREAM programme are now in employment, education or training. The full roll-out starts on 6th October following all endeavours to secure an appropriate course at college being exhausted.

MS, who engaged with the STREAM programme in the summer term is now enrolled at Shrewsbury College and is working towards an ESOL qualification.

3.1 So that the barriers to EET can be more accurately identified and therefore addressed, a new system for coding the reasons for young people being NEET will be introduced in September 2025. This will support our collaborative working with the Learning & Skills team for Post 16 and support preventative action in line with the RONI tool (Risk of NEET Indicator)



Key stage 5 colleagues were present on GCSE results day so that help was on hand for any student who needed a plan B, whether that be for doing better or worse than expected.

Case Study

One student had support as he achieved a higher grade than expected with 1 mark off an A grade, which meant we could seek an appeal. He also now had enough UCAS points to reconsider his destination plan. There was swift support and advice in collaboration with the Social Worker to consider University.



3.2 Shropshire Virtual School held a successful Work-Experience Day in collaboration with KIER at their Craven Arms highway depot in Shropshire for our young people from year 11 into Key Stage 5. The day started with Kier showing our young people the building, the machinery and explaining their projects in construction / highways. There was opportunity for hands on experience with our young people constructing a paper bridge that had to withstand the weight of a bag of sweets. The groups worked well together in teams to build their structure.

A Kier apprentice shared their experience from application to the interview process and then into the work placement / learning. We are very proud of our young people,

they were very engaged and one of them described the day as making them feel “intrigued, interested and invested!” Another young person said that their “Plan A is to apply for a Kier apprenticeship” and he will have follow-up support from the Virtual School to assist with next steps.

The Virtual School are committed to supporting Looked After Children to have support from their Corporate Parents to have work experience opportunities in the ‘family business’. Shropshire Virtual School are already planning further collaborative work with Kier to enhance opportunities for our young people and support them into further work and training – and there is a new work experience event in this Autumn term with another provider.



Personal Education Plans

3.3

The PEP workstream is led by a Deputy Head, their PEP Monitoring activity takes the form of regular meetings with individual team members to focus on completion and quality, as well as targeted actions for partners and schools. The School Target for PEPs was 95% in both completion and quality - this target is met or exceeded in the Combined outcome for both indicators.

The data summary for PEP outcomes is as follows:



Completion - the termly average

for Year -1 to 11 was 99.6%

for Key Stage 5 was 97.6%

The combined average per term was 99.3%

Quality - the termly average

for Year -1 to 11 was 96.6%

for Key Stage 5 was 85.3%

The combined average per term was 95%

(Data is for children in year -1 and Reception age as allocation of Vs Links for year -2 was delayed due to staff absence & recruitment activity.)

Improvements are evidenced from 23-4 where the combined termly average was 95.3% for completion and 90% for quality.

There was also an improvement in Key Stage 5 from 23-24 where KS5 PEP completion average was 79% and now stands at 88% for 24-25. This is most likely an outcome of the new KS5 PEP and the training that supported this development, along with rigorous termly PEP Monitoring activity.

A school development focus for 25-26 is increasing the number of UASYP and NEET good quality PEPs.

(The SVS Quality descriptors can be found here [Personal education plan \(PEP\) | Shropshire Council](#))

Pupil Premium Plus

3.4

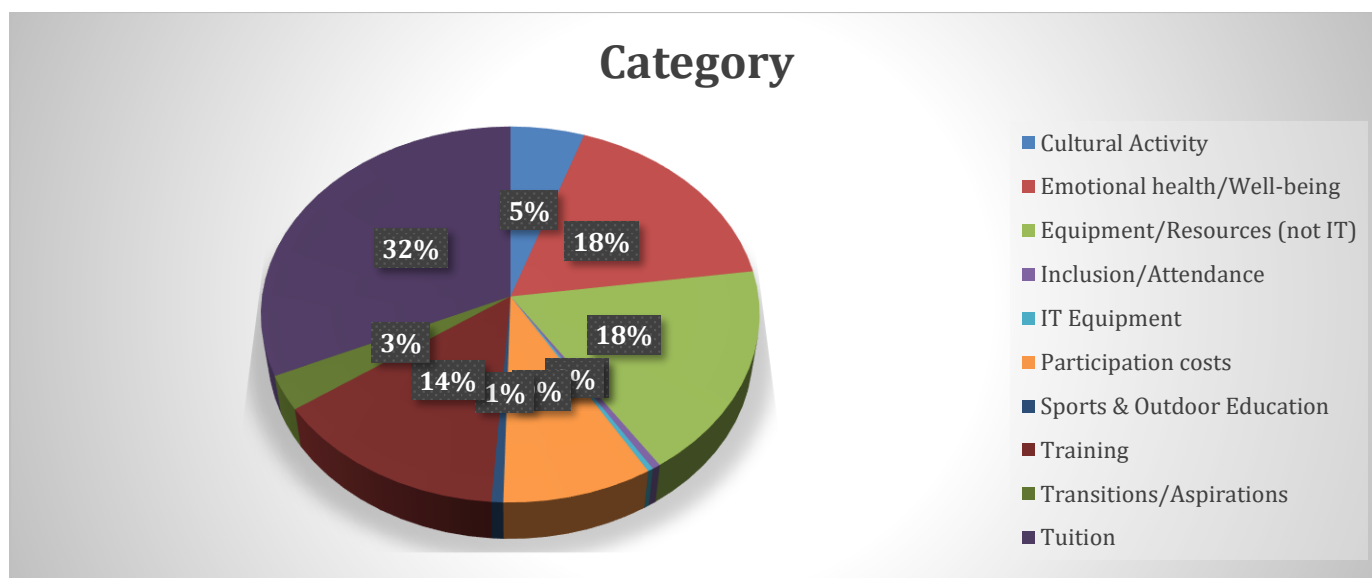
A new PP+ Policy was published for the 2024-25 financial year and is on our website at [Pupil Premium Plus | Shropshire Council](#). To drive the focus on supporting schools to successfully include our young people and provide opportunities such as cultural capital, transitions and academic achievement the Virtual School has created a PP+ support map [pupil-premium-plus-support-map-2023-24.pdf \(shropshire.gov.uk\)](#) This continually evolves as we strive to source new opportunities for engagement and progress.

3.5

Each school is sent a termly amount of £433 per term per child if there is a Good Quality PEP so they can plan for effective use of the Grant through the year. In summer 2025 the amount to schools rose to £443 per child per term. Additional requests to the VS can be made by a school at any time, just like a parent might want to for their own child. The rest of the Grant is retained and used for salaries, service level agreements with quality assured providers and training for example. A report is run at the end of the academic year to analyse the spend and plan future allocations. The PP+ Grant was fully spent in the financial year 2024-25.

A financial breakdown by category of spend for the financial year 2024-5 for retained PP+ (excluding staffing) is as follows:





Impact Summary from some of our interventions:

3.6 Tuition

The Virtual School has Service Level Agreements with two national and quality assured providers. One SLA is purely online as a response to what our young people were asking for and the other provider has online and face to face options. These inputs using PP+ supported progress (as per sections 2.0-2.5)

3.7 Aspire & Seeds of Change

This provides a bespoke careers mentoring programme for year 10 and 11 students – and this year we expanded into supporting pupils in year 9. Young people receive 1:1 mentoring to help them develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes for personal growth, being able to think positively about their future and identifying support mechanisms to help them achieve employment, education or training goals.

The most common areas of increase across the board were;



#MY VISION

100% increased their score

#MY MOTIVATION

80% increased their score

#UNDERSTAND OPTIONS

75% increased their score

#OVERCAME OBSTACLES

75% increased score

The end of year impact report from Aspire/Seeds of Change indicates positive outcomes for the young people they supported in their aspirations for progression with education, employment or training - with 80% increasing their self- assessment scores in 5 or more areas and 60% increasing their score in all 10 areas. One young person talked about their future plans as “having me own place, car and belongings, have a well-paid job and to be happy about where I was in life”

3.8 Educational Psychology

The Virtual School has a Service Level Agreement with the Shropshire Educational Psychology Service which funds assessments, intervention and 3 x roll outs of foundation level training in Attachment level 1



In the academic year 2024-25 we further developed our work with Shropshire EPs to include training on precision teaching in literacy and numeracy – plus training on FASD (Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder). The VS team benefited from EP led group supervision and were able to demonstrate how this had impacted on their approaches.

Impact was as follows:

100% of delegates rated the FASD training as “very good” and would be highly recommended to other professionals

delegates on FASD training rated relevance to their everyday practice at 9.75
(with 1 being “not relevant” and 10 being “highly relevant”)

A participant said they had “Increased awareness of some of the difficulties young people will encounter with FASD and in particular how this overlaps with other possible diagnoses”.

91% of delegates rated the Precision Teaching as “very good”

Participants valued “*The interactive element of carrying out PT and putting the probes/charting into practice*”.
“*Understanding the charting and SMART targets*”.

Attachment Level 1 Training

100% of delegates providing feedback rated this as “very good” and 100% stated they would recommend the training to another professional.

“There isn’t anything I would improve. I’d be very keen to continue and complete the Level 2 training. The content was presented brilliantly.”

“Dr Amalia Dîrnu was really engaging!”

Comments indicated the newly introduced hybrid model of face to face and on-line training options is working well, with appetite for both formats depending on individual needs.

3.9 Time for you 24-25

Time for You is a consultation offer for schools for CLA, PLAC and Children with a Social Worker, this is supported by an Educational Psychologist. This continues to be a supportive resource to our schools and has enabled increased reflectivity and containment so that several exclusions could be prevented.

The breakdown of consultation sessions by category is as follows:

Number of children who were CLA	46
Number of children who were PLAC	10
Number of Children who were CWSW	5

Feedback continues to be very positive, for example:



“I felt really comfortable talking to Eleanor. I felt valued in my role as a teacher and she listened to what I was saying about knowing the child. It felt like we were on an equal level and she was constantly asking what I thought. I didn't feel that Eleanor was dictating strategies to me, but rather giving me suggestions and then discussing what I thought and if they would work for the child. It was really beneficial and I have new strategies to try.”

“Non-judgemental. Reassurance that we are on the right track. Useful strategies to try. Good CPD for members of staff working with the child.”

4.0 Smashlife

Smashlife deliver mentoring sessions to our students, they also delivered at a whole service event to give key messages around inclusion as care-experienced practitioners. They are supporting our Jazprentices project with supporting our young people in the group with some woodlands activities to support trust building and confidence.

4.1 Bloomin' Lovely

This social, emotional and mental health intervention is provided by a Horticultural Therapist. Five young people have been supported in 33 sessions which develop sensory and therapeutic experiences, their feedback includes:

‘this is the best thing ever to play with’ -referring to compost

I feel really calm now that I'm doing this' -planting herbs

‘I like it when you come because I can do things I don't get to do anywhere else’

‘this is the best thing to play with ever!’ (another child mixing nuts and seeds with lard for fat balls).

A goals-based approach to measuring progress is used and some of the targets included achievement in the following areas. Goals Reached:

- Identify own emotions and the impact that they have on others
- Develop self-regulation strategies to reduce the number of emotional hijacks
- Identify times when YP has shown resilience and reflect on these with adults
- Promote positive interactions with new trusted adult
- Develop self-confidence, independence and self esteem
- Develop positive coping strategies
- Give YP transferable skills and experience towards employment goals.
- Encourage YP to share things about himself to a trusted adult.



Case Study:

B is a 12-year-old boy who had recently been taken into residential care, previous to which he had been in foster care. There were concerns around his cognition and learning as well as his lack of confidence in himself and his abilities. Upon meeting B, I found him to be a very social child with plenty of enthusiasm. I was asked to work on 3 goals - build self-esteem, improve emotional wellbeing, and give him transferable skills and experience towards his employment goals.

Over the 10-week programme, we co-developed a small garden together. The garden we created was inside the Year 7 break area where students sat or walked by whilst we worked. B received endless kind comments from students and teachers about the garden plot as we developed it. He seemed to enjoy the attention and appeared very proud of his garden. When asked what he was doing, he would reply 'we are creating a garden to make the school look better'.

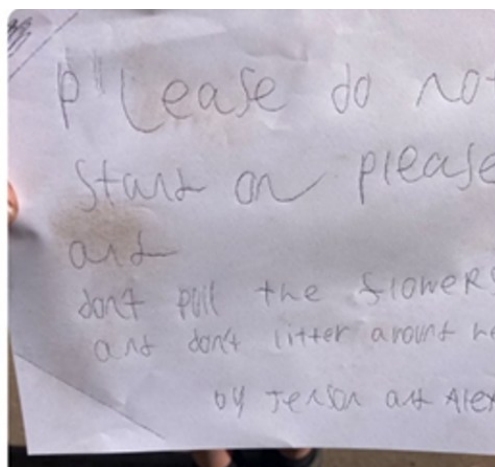
B took it upon himself to nurture his garden outside of programme time, investing time in watering his plants, adding decoration to the willow obelisk and adding signs to warn others not to stand on the plants. He also persuaded other members of staff to help him keep the garden watered during school holidays and support him to maintain the garden in term time.

Throughout the programme B had his own ideas of how to develop his garden and what we would like to put in it. We were able to give life to his ideas and, as much as possible, allowed him to see these ideas to fruition. He often changed his mind when things went wrong and would go on to develop a new idea to make things work. He would often ask teachers random questions or show them something as they walk by to get their attention for a while, seeking reassurance.

When undertaking sensory activities using soil, water, clay or soft petals, B would comment on how nice it was to feel them and spend some time in silence enjoying the sensations. When touching petals, he referred to them as 'the nicest things in the world' and when burying his hands in compost, he said 'this is the best thing ever to play with'.

B expressed an interest in becoming a gardener when he is older, like his dad. He was keen to learn new skills through the programme, and when taught new skills he wanted to master them.

We discussed possible routes into gardening and what qualifications he might need to achieve this goal. B was a joy to work with, and there was a notable difference in his confidence over the 10-weeks we worked together. He smiled and laughed a lot more towards the end sessions, and showed pride in his gardening and nature-craft work.



Other examples of children's work can be seen here:



This child didn't want to engage to start with but then made a bug house with stairs and a bed

Daisy wrote on her planter 'Love you. Where all of your dreams come true. Love Daisy.'



4.2 Lifeshed

This is a personalised mentoring service for children and young people. Interventions were delivered to 13 young people this year. An Emotional Regulation Mentoring Programme approach is used to set specific small step targets and measure progress from baseline to the end of the intervention.

Some examples of impact are:

'When I'm here, in the water, my anxiety is at zero' – M

'Life Shed is good...I enjoy learning to cook and feel calmer when going back to school... I feel more capable with confrontation in the classroom.. I feel much more calm after spending time at Life Shed and feel like I don't get as triggered by other people at school or the teachers.' - C

4.3

The Virtual School has used PP+ and other Grants to develop a comprehensive training offer:

SVS have rolled out

- **Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups to 49 schools so they can open their own accredited nurture hub/room/intervention**
- **Boxall Profile Tool training to 117 practitioners**

The Nurture Schools Summary of Findings 2024 highlights the positive impact of Nurture training across seven primary schools, focusing on improvements in pupil attendance, behaviour and attainment. Most schools used Boxall profiling to identify children for Nurture provision, targeting those struggling in mainstream settings. Staff wellbeing improved, with teams feeling better equipped to manage behaviour and recognising the importance of consistency and a whole-school approach. Nurture rooms were described as calm and purposeful, featuring supportive environments and resources like weighted blankets and zones of regulation. Parental involvement was strong, with families reporting better communication and positive changes at home.

Behaviour management saw notable improvements, including reduced exclusions and behaviour logs, and children were described as happier and more ready to learn. While data on curriculum development and transitions back to mainstream was limited, schools acknowledged the need to balance nurture and mainstream provision and shared examples of reintegration toolkits.

Overall, the report emphasises that children with significant needs are making progress and remaining in school, though it notes that meaningful impact requires time and ongoing evaluation. Next steps are tailored to individual schools, with no common themes identified for future actions



One school commented that:

“If children had been in mainstream class, then they wouldn’t be here. Children with significant need are making progress. The impact of this work has been that children with high needs have been able to stay in our school.”



Shropshire Virtual School and Coleham Primary had a visit from Claire Wilson at NURTUREUK yesterday. Claire was able to be in the nurture classroom to see the fantastic work being undertaken to support children within this project, including previously looked-after and looked after children.

Shropshire Virtual School (SVS) are working closely with many schools across Shropshire to support with training opportunities in Nurture which has a graduated approach from personalised assessment with the Boxall Profile tool to support with Whole School culture. SVS have showcased the impact of this project across regional areas, including the East Midlands and continue to promote inclusive approaches for our children and young people.

Case Study

PP+ was used to support M in year 3 with Nurture provision 4 times a week. She has started to develop more positive relationships with adults, working and playing alongside others with almost no incidents. This is a stark change from when SVS visited her in year 2 as she was very disengaged, showing hypervigilant behaviours and not connecting with learning activities. She has now achieved her 2s and 10 multiplication tables in Frog Club, has improved her handwriting and is developing a more positive sense of self as indicated on the Boxall Profile outcomes in the Developmental profile with a shift from 70 to 101 (from high level difficulty in red to now being on the cusp of amber)



Next Steps are for further impact data to be collected from schools in the next phase of roll out and delivering a Nurture Network event for Nurture practitioners in November.

4.4 Shropshire Virtual School starts a two year journey towards achieving the NNSP accreditation, this is National Nurturing School Status in alliance with NurtureUK. It is a graduated approach using evidence-based approaches to tackle social, emotional & mental health challenges and improve outcomes in attainment, attendance, well-being and behaviour. It is an opportunity for young people to co-produce how the VS develops and for us to develop our work with partners/stakeholders in line with the six nurture principles.

4.5 Shropshire Virtual School ensure there is a robust training offer for parents and carers, this can be found here [Training for parents and carers | Shropshire Council](#). PEP training is now rolled out as a multi-agency approach and develops carers understanding of how to promote their child’s education.



Other topics include

- promoting higher education
- using a coaching approach
- supporting transitions and destinations planning into post 16 and beyond
- emotion coaching
- solution focused approaches

Case Study

The “Emotion Coaching for Parents and Carers” training session held in June 2025 received highly positive feedback from all participants, who either strongly agreed or agreed that the session was useful, with most selecting “strongly agree”. Attendees reported that they gained a better understanding of child emotions and the importance of validation, as well as practical strategies for using emotion coaching both during and after emotional incidents. They highlighted the value of using a shared emotional language to foster understanding and expressed a shift from a reactive to a more empathetic and understanding approach with children. Additional comments described the course and tutor as excellent, enjoyable, and informative, with participants stating their intention to apply what they had learned in their roles.

4.6 The Post 16 PP+ Grant is to improve the outcomes of Looked After young people in Key Stage 5. The terms and conditions outline how it must be spent on well-evidenced interventions by supporting our young people towards achieving their full potential, particularly in reference to **attainment, attendance and retention**. The DFE specifies that the Grant should be spent in line with achieving duties outlined in the Guidance [Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-and-previously-looked-after-children) and that an effective spend should enable the young people to have sustained involvement in education, employment or training.

Our Post 16 PP+ offer can be found here [Key stage five | Shropshire Council](#) and includes personalised mentoring, a SLA with Shropshire Educational Psychology team, the Pathway project for tuition, training and care experienced speaker events (see photo on right), celebration event, the STREAM re-engagement programme for UASYP and an EASO post to support with PEP completion and quality.

Plans for 25-26 include consultation with KS5 providers to explore their views around developing a training offer from SVS.

Pupil Voice and Participation

4.7 The Virtual School play an integral role in the Impact Board and the Participation Strategy.



Young people from our School Council represented Shropshire at the West Midlands Virtual School Conference and led an experiential activity plus facilitated discussions with delegates (see photo). E said that they had enjoyed “everything!” about being part of our School Council - and this event - and that they had made new friends and built relationships.



One of our young people also spoke very successfully at the recent SVS Network to Senior Leaders across Shropshire. She was able to explain the aims of the Virtual School Council and what they would like to achieve – these being to improve services for young people, get their voices heard and discuss opinions.

She was also able to say that Shropshire looked after young people had made decisions about what sort of celebration event and participation activities they would like - and are currently developing the SVS website to be more young-person friendly

4.8 Our children and young people formed their own panel to interview candidates for posts in Shropshire Virtual School. They designed their own questions and scored candidates - and their feedback was included in the decision making process. They conducted themselves very well and gave this feedback about their experience:

- *“What I enjoyed most about being involved in the interviews is that I get to have a say in who is the best candidate for the job role, as after all they will be working with people around my age so it feels good to have a say.”*
- *“I’ve found the interviews really fun because it’s interesting to meet new people and learn about their experiences and interests. I also enjoy that it will help me get further in life, by giving me new skills my peers don’t have.”*

4.9 In 2024-25 our young people presented at Corporate Parenting Board and also to Cabinet on issues they find important.

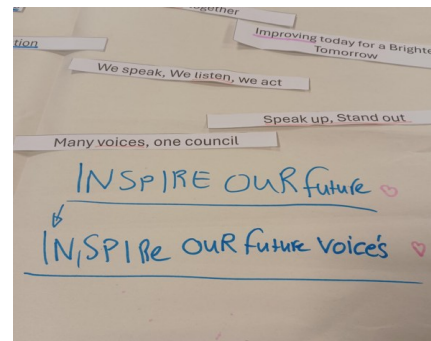


5.0 It is now our responsibility to develop the Children in Care Council for Shropshire and support our young people to influence design and delivery of services as well as report to the Corporate Parenting Board.



During the summer children and young people took part in workshops to create their own name and logo with support from an artist. They voted on their preferred logo and have chosen the following as their CIC Council name and logo:

VOICES OF TOMORROW
Young people, Tomorrow’s voices,
TODAY





The next steps are to build on their understanding of Corporate Parenting in preparation for a ‘take-over’ of the Board

5.1 SVS contributed to the Care Leavers and Key Stage 5 Celebration Festival in the summer break. It was excellent to see our young people, a number of whom are UASYP, come together for food, drink and music.

5.2 Cultural capital opportunities are very important for our children. Shropshire VS work closely with the Regional VS Heads group to create a variety of opportunities through the year. [About The Arts Programme | WMVS Children In Care Foundation \(wmvscicfoundation.org.uk\)](#) – for example our students took part in

5.3 ‘Jaz-prentices’ has been launched! This is an innovative new programme for our young people to step into the spotlight and harness the power of their voice. This group will be meeting regularly through the academic year taking part in a suite of coaching activities culminating in delivery of Roadshows to secondary school staff teams. The first session took place in July and our young people are meeting together again in September. This



is a national first and a proposal for delivery at the NAVSH Conference in March 2026 has been submitted.

5.4 Participation activities are on offer routinely and support our school team to get to know our children and develop a sense of belonging with our Virtual School as well as promote achievements, aspirations and progression. These have included visits to the theatre, exotic zoo, alpaca farm, boxing/fitness course with awards, outdoor education, composing and performing a song and online competitions to name a few.

There were a variety of activities for our children and young people in the summer holidays including paddleboarding and forest school for various age phases.



Previously Looked-After Children (PLAC) and Children with a Social Worker (CWSW)

5.5

The VS have continued to work with Together for Children across the region, collaborating closely with our partners in Stoke, Staffs and Telford & Wrekin.

There is a dedicated EASO linked to PLAC and for Children with a Social Worker - and advice is routinely given to parents, schools and practitioners. At the Designated Teacher Networks, the VS delivered specific input on guidance and the support / advice offer available for schools. The End of Year summary indicated the following advice and guidance was sought

	PLAC	Kinship	CWSW	Totals
Total number of referrals	91	7	34	132
Referral from school	23	2	5	30
Referral from parent/carer	18	1	1	20
Referral from SW	31	3	19	53
Other	19	1	9	29

Themes	PLAC	Kinship	CWSW	Totals
Attendance	5	0	18	23
Attainment & Progress	0	0	0	0
EHCP	12	1	3	16
Inclusion	25	0	6	31
PP+/Funding	6	1	0	7
SEND	19	0	1	20
Other	22	5	8	35

5.6 Shropshire Virtual School continues to be part of the Regional Network group for CWSW and presented at the Conference for WM Virtual Schools on this subject.

5.7 Our Working Together pilot has developed into a multi-disciplinary approach to swift resolution and priority oversight for children with a safeguarding vulnerability without suitable education. The DFE recorded a video of the SVS Head Teacher sharing this approach and it has been included in their Toolkit for Schools.

5.8 Progress on our Hearts and Minds Project is very positive, this is a project where data on CIN and CP is used to offer an enhanced training opportunity to a selection of schools, this is based on:



- becoming an attachment and trauma responsive (whole) school
- Emotion Coaching (whole) school
- Emotion Coaching Train the Trainer accreditation (which supports further training roll out across county)
- A bespoke element with an inclusion focus



Shropshire Virtual School has made a difference to children and young people through Training for partners, for example:

- ✓ trained over 20 Schools leaders and 25 LA practitioners from across Shropshire LA to become Emotion Coaching Trainers with the focus of the trainers delivering Emotion Coaching to whole schools.
- ✓ Three Secondary Academies and one Primary school revising their behaviour policy to prioritise a relational approach and strategies

Secondary Case Study



A key part of the transformation of one secondary academy has been a shift in Mindset with the motto **“Stay Curious not Furious”**

Among parents, 89% have stated that the school has improved in the last 12 months.

Student metrics have also improved dramatically: **suspensions and permanent exclusions have dropped to zero**, and **attendance has risen from 86.8% in 2023/24 to 91.4% in 2024/25**. The number of days lost to absence has also fallen sharply.

5.9

Concerns continue around national attendance and inclusion statistics for Children with a Social Worker. However, in Shropshire our **outcomes are excellent with lower absence than national** and all LAs cited below. Shropshire also shows **lower overall absence and persistent absence** compared to national averages, especially for CIN.

LA	Overall absence percentage CIN 31st March 2022	Overall absence percentage CIN 31st March 2023	Overall absence percentage CIN 31st March 2024	Overall absence percentage CPP 31st March 2022	Overall absence percentage CPP 31st March 2023	Overall absence percentage CPP 31st March 2024
Shropshire	14.20%	13.90%	13.8%	14.90%	17.30%	19.8%
Herefordshire	19.40%	20.10%	20.4%	25.70%	17%	21.5%
Devon	19.70%	20.30%	23.1%	17.90%	23.60%	24.6%
Dorset	18.70%	22.20%	23.4%	19.90%	23%	23.6%
National	16.40%	16.40%	17.8%	19.50%	21.70%	22.3%

LA	Persistent absence percentage CIN 31st March 2022	Persistent absence percentage CIN 31st March 2023	Persistent absence percentage CIN 31st March 2024	Persistent absence percentage CPP 31st March 2022	Persistent absence percentage CPP 31st March 2023	Persistent absence percentage CPP 31st March 2024
Shropshire	41.10%	39.60%	37.1%	41.70%	52.70%	51.4%
Herefordshire	58.50%	57.30%	50.4%	65.80%	53.80%	55.8%
Devon	55.90%	53%	54.9%	51.50%	62.40%	61.4%
Dorset	52.30%	57%	55.2%	53.40%	63.40%	54.5%
National	48.50%	44.40%	47.9%	56.20%	57.5	57.5%

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/outcomes-for-children-in-need-including-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england/2023?subjectId=7344bd3a-2cc4-4b62-85d0-08dc5d2e18da>



The VS have worked closely with the Insight Team to help develop the Power BI tool for CWSW attendance data that will give enhanced information to support improve strategic planning. CPP absence in Shropshire has risen from 14.9% (2022) to 19.8% (2024) so that will be a focus for 2025-26

6.0 SVS has made strong progress across several key areas. The extended duties practitioners in the team are now called '**Connect**' and they take a lead on new initiatives, including the development of our website which is due to go live in November. Our PLAC development work with Oak Meadow Primary school is supporting parent sessions to develop resources and training offers.

6.1 The Virtual School has delivered an **Emotion Coaching** workshop and a session on Understanding the Virtual School at the recent Social Care Practice Week. Additional training for Social Workers takes place through the year, for example regarding PEPs as well as joint delivery with the Education Access Service on Attendance. Training for Social Care practitioners can be found here [autumn-2025-social-care.pdf](#) These aim to support the knowledge and understanding of Social Workers on educational topics so there is an integrated approach towards securing best outcomes.

6.2 **Designated Safeguarding Lead Supervision Project:** Shropshire Virtual School has developed a Safeguarding Supervision Pilot running from May 2025 to July 2026. It supports 17 schools and provides individual and group supervision sessions to DSLs.

Initial audits revealed that most supervisees felt reasonably well-trained and confident in their safeguarding roles, though some highlighted areas for growth in resilience and reflective practice. Only one supervisee had previously experienced formal supervision, and most were uncertain about what to expect but hoped for a safe space to discuss cases, decision-making, and emotional challenges.

Feedback from the pilot's first sessions has been overwhelmingly positive. Supervisees have appreciated:

- ✓ the opportunity to share their experiences and emotions in a supportive environment,
- ✓ saying they had become more relaxed and open as sessions progressed.
- ✓ support with regard to the emotional toll of safeguarding work, with high numbers of cases involving neglect, parental mental health, and domestic violence.
- ✓ the chance to reflect on their work-life balance and recognised the benefits of strong school-parent relationships, particularly where Early Help was in place.

6.3

A selection of compliments for Shropshire Virtual School from 2024-25

"Best dedicated and hard-working Virtual school Team I have ever worked with – my kids have all benefited from your dedication... Working alongside your team, I know that every single child I have worked with has been in good hands with you, and that all have and will achieve their educational goals."

Pam Williams-White, Social Worker

"Engaging with Hearts and Minds has, for our school, been the best decision that we could have made from an emotional wellbeing and pastoral care point of view – both for children and staff. Being able to audit our current provision without worry of any judgement or critique from the Virtual School has been hugely beneficial, and, as a result, we have been able to access a multitude of training and resources... Our staff are more confident, our young people are more able to implement taught strategies, and our families feel better supported. Wellbeing has improved and behaviour is more effectively managed across school: children, staff and parents feel listened to and understood. Hearts and Minds really has been revolutionary in terms of impact for our whole school ethos and approach to supporting young people at our school. The Virtual School



team provide continual support, challenge and a listening ear, all in equal measures. Being part of the Hearts and Minds Project has been exactly what our school needed, at exactly the right time. We are **so** looking forward to the next phase(s) and to seeing the continued impact that it will bring for our young people.”
Claire Killick, Head Teacher Broseley C of E Primary School

“The training we have received and the advice given by the Virtual School has had a massive impact on our school community. We have a high number of children with a social worker at our Academy and we are proud that our staff have the skills to implement an attachment and trauma informed approach to supporting our most vulnerable learners to thrive.”
Mel Wright, Asst Principal holy Trinity C of E Primary School

“Just to say how moving and inspirational I found Jaz's presentation this afternoon. Thanks so much for organising. It was a terrific event. A headteacher colleague who I was sat next to and have known for a long time commented on how much the Virtual School has been transformed under your watch. 😊”
John Rowe, Governor of SVS and Head of Education Quality & Safeguarding

“I have, once again, loved working so closely with you all. Your support, expertise and passion makes all the difference in these young people's futures.”
Sarah Longhurst, Asst Head and SENDCo Mary Webb School

“I've been teaching for 30 years at the end of this term and without any question, the (Hearts & Minds) project has been, and continues to be, the most valuable and worthwhile piece of work I've ever been involved in. It has also had the most positive impact of any project/CPD that I've personally been involved with previously, both for the children and the adults in our school community... This old dog has indeed learnt some new tricks. I feel invigorated again when I walk into school and deal daily with the many challenges we all face in education and when I try and support some (our) young people...It has the potential to impact not only on Children Looked-After and Previous CLA and Children with a Social Worker, but also for all learners within the wider school context as well as staff well-being, leadership, and learning.”
Andy Parkhurst, Deputy Lakelands Academy

“It has been a great support to the school and KJ to have you and VS involved in his education and care. I firmly believe that without your support to the school we would not be in such a positive place. I have very much appreciated having you at the end of a phone or Teams listening, understanding and being so proactive. KJ now has a more positive future ahead of him and we will continue to support him and his family as best we can. Please pass on my thanks to the VS team who have contributed to this great care and support.”
Head Teacher at Ludlow Primary School



Summary of Priorities from the School Development Plan for 2023-25

There was good progress on the actions in the School Development Plan.

We did:

- further develop the voice of our young people – eg School Council will present at Designated Teacher Networks, Corporate Parenting Board and regional events.
- develop our Emotion Coaching Trainer group and roll out the training across more Shropshire schools.
- increase the number of schools in the SVS Hearts & Minds Project, supporting more schools to be attachment and trauma responsive earning the Bronze ARC Award as well as in other aspects of inclusion eg relational practice.
- further develop robust tracking of SVS data using the Power Bi Dashboard data, including for KS5 PEP reporting
- develop our new Kinship Offer – and roll out our enhanced training offer for parents/carers.
- support schools in the transition to using the DFE portal for Attendance data and introduce new integrated processes around supporting CIN, CP and CLA with access to education - including new escalation processes.
- aim to improve attainment outcomes including in Maths for the end of KS2, sustain improvements for the end of KS4, focus on improving Early Years and KS1 outcomes in GLD and for Phonics.
- train the VS team in precision teaching in Literacy and Numeracy with the support of the EP Service and implement our new learning at home strategy.
- work collaboratively with partners on minimising the time CLA are not on roll at a school and continuing to focus on preventing exclusions/suspensions.
- Undertake a revision on forecasted numbers of CLA and consider staffing to meet business need, including in line with the changed role of the VS Head.
- develop effective use of the social emotional and mental health scales in our PEP in relation to supporting positive mental health of our Shropshire Children in Care
- further progress our work experience offer in the family business and develop employability projects
- progress discussions with HR re the Protected Characteristic for CLA/CLs and how this development needs to fit with Shropshire Council's Recruitment Policy
- continue working jointly with Enable and the Care Leavers Team on a possible apprenticeship opportunity in the Café at the Guildhall
- play an integral part in developing the trauma informed workplace in Shropshire Council.

These actions are not yet completed and will be built into the next development plan

- refresh the SVS Attendance Policy
- roll out Precision Teaching in schools
- use the Audit undertaken to develop robust integrated working and ensure education is a priority area in Child in Need and Child Protection Plans.
- develop a programme in KS3 for children as part of a pathway to university programme.



School Development Plan 2025-27

A new two-year School Development Plan has been created for 2025-27 and will include the following ambitions. We will:

- be ambitious in our development of the Hearts & Minds project and supporting schools/trusts with Belonging strategies
- collect impact data for our Nurture project and use EP advice to enhance how we measure impact of such projects
- further develop tools and resources to support home learning, especially in literacy and numeracy
- Roll out Precision Teaching in schools to support literacy and numeracy
- improve our KS5 PEP with views from birth parent & carers - and enhance it for those young people who are employed/in apprenticeships
- improve the quality of our NEET and UASYP PEPs
- start working towards achieving the NNSP accreditation (National Nurturing Schools Programme) and be one of the few Virtual Schools nationally to achieve this
- increase participation opportunities in KS5, including a focus on employability and independence skills.
- Fully roll out STREAM to reduce NEET for UASYP and look to include an adapted programme which supports citizen NEET in 26-27
- enhance opportunities for KS5 students with an EHCP who need an EET programme
- develop our links with post 16 providers and expand the training offer for them
- explore ways of encouraging our students into engagement with pathway to university programmes
- develop the use of Power BI tools to support reporting and strategic decision making
- work with partners to develop robust integrated working and ensure education is a priority area in Child in Need and Child Protection Plans.
- Roll out the Inclusive Attendance conference and programme in collaboration with EAS to support pilot schools achieving Bronze accreditation.
- refresh the SVS Attendance Policy for CLA. Focus on improving secondary attendance outcomes, the rate of progress in primary school attendance and reducing leave of absence in term time
- work with our partners in EAS on revising the Reduced Timetable policy, also to reduce the length of Reduced Timetables for CLA
- work with our partners in EAS and SEND to create a new EBSA pathway for Shropshire
- evolve the Working Together approach to support strategic practice and granular support for children with a social worker, support risk reduction and increase access to suitable education

Report by Jo Kelly, Head Teacher, Shropshire Virtual School

Date:



APPENDIX

Shropshire Virtual School



Jo Kelly
Head of Virtual School and
Access to Education



Lindsay Armstrong
Deputy Head



Jo Betts
Deputy Head



Amy Foulger
Lead Education Officer



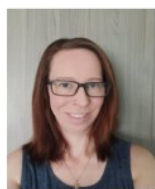
Louise Exton
Lead Education Officer



Samantha Childe
Senior EASO



Claire Wright
EASO



Gemma Trestain-Miles
EASO



Heather Hobman
EASO



Holly Morris
EASO



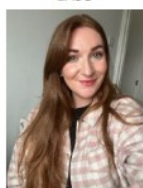
Katherine E Jones
EASO



Leni Findlay
EASO



Lisa Wildgoose
EASO



Alexandra Wheeler
EASO



Lydia Williams
EASO (maternity leave)



Marg Humphreys
EASO



Sophie Bishton
EASO



Suzie Rawson
EASO



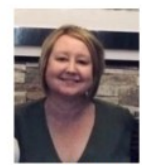
Ruby Angel
EASO



Emine Buckley
UASYP Project Officer



Kerri Jones
Participation Support Officer



Paula Edwards
Business Co-ordinator



Amy Gallagher
Administrator

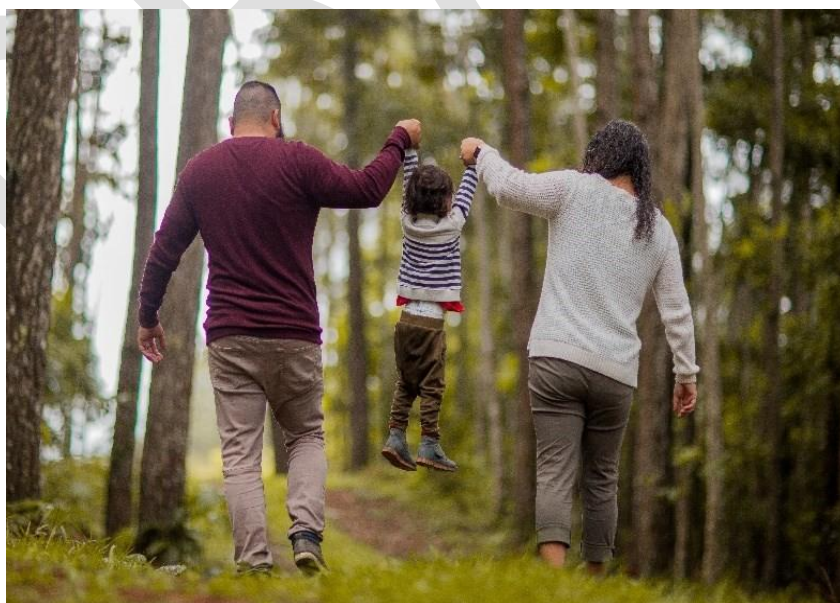
virtualschool@shropshire.gov.uk



Fostering Service

Annual Report

2024/2025



Team Managers: Karen Scardifield, Sarah Hood & Scott Chapman

Service Manager: Erika Ower

Published October 2025



1. Introduction

The **Annual Report Fostering 2024/25** provides a comprehensive overview of the activities, achievements, and challenges faced by the Fostering Service over the past year. This report highlights the dedication and hard work of our skilled foster carers and social workers, who continue to provide excellent outcomes for the children in our care.

This document covers several key areas:

Overview of Activity of CPS: Details the purpose and aims of the Children's Placement Service (CPS), including the recruitment, assessment, training, support, and supervision of foster carers.

In House Foster Carer Assessments & Recruitment: Discusses the developments in the fostering recruitment process, including the digital approach and partnership with a digital marketing agency.

Approval Data: Provides data on foster carer approvals, highlighting the successes and challenges in recruiting and assessing both mainstream and connected person foster carers.

Resignations: Explores the reasons behind foster carer resignations and de-registrations.

Foster Carer Annual Review: Reviews the annual performance of foster carers, including the completion rates and reasons for overdue reviews.

Training and Development: Outlines the training programs available for foster carers, including preapproval, induction, core, and enhanced training.

Special Guardianship: Describes the support provided for special guardianship orders (SGOs) and the assessments conducted.

Private Fostering: Details the arrangements and assessments for private fostering, including the impact of the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

This report aims to provide a clear and detailed account of the fostering service's performance, highlighting areas of success and identifying opportunities for improvement. We hope this document serves as a valuable resource for understanding the current position of our fostering service and guiding future developments.

The Shropshire Fostering Service remains busy, supported by dedicated and skilled Social Workers, Support Practitioners and Foster Carers. This collaboration results in positive outcomes for children with internal foster carers. Development of the Fostering Service is a key focus to ensure that we can meet the needs of the children of Shropshire who require a foster family.

2. Overview of Activity of CPS

The purpose of the service is to offer a range of safe and stable fostering arrangements with approved foster carers to meet the needs of children looked after by the local authority.

The pool of Shropshire foster carers includes placements for children and young people of different ages, from babies to teenagers requiring more intensive support, respite carers, and placements specifically for children with disabilities known as Family Based Shared Care.

The service assesses and supports mainstream Foster Carers, Connected Person Foster Carers. The service receives private fostering referrals and completes the assessment. Potential Special Guardians are assessed and supported to achieve permanence for Children who are looked after by the local authority and for those who are not.

The Fostering Service have been supported by a project manager since October 2023 to review the foster carers journey and enhance service delivery. Through the project further resource has been identified to support

Marketing and recruitment functions, data and insight and further development of the foster carers support offer.

3. In House Foster Carer assessments & Recruitment

Over the past year, the fostering recruitment process has evolved with the appointment of a full-time Marketing & Events Manager and increased focus on a digital approach to recruitment.

Monthly webinars have become fortnightly, with a reduction in face-to-face sessions. People were not engaging in particular drop in events being held and stronger participation has been seen with online events. The webinar sign-up process has been streamlined, including the timing within which they are held to capitalise on people's busier lives, making them more appealing to market. The goal has been to support people to access our webinars, leading onto a conversation and EOI then leading to an Initial Home Visit. People who registered but did not attend our webinars do receive follow up communications and contact inline with our strategy.

Plans were submitted internally to move to the Mailchimp communications system to allow for easier, more automated ongoing communications with both carers and enquirers.

We initiated closer contact with our digital ads agency, to ensure they are clear on what is expected to optimise our Facebook Ads and Google Ads. Ad copy was produced in-house and, overall, **enquiries for 24/25 increased to 508 from 352 in 23/24**. Our website and advertising was successfully rebranded and relaunched with a proposed website upgrade for 25/26.

The rebrand to 'More Rewarding Than Ever' involved the design and production of marketing collateral for councillor meetings and public visibility, including banners, leaflets, postcards, note pads, pens, stress balls and tote bags. Banners are now on display at numerous high footfall county venues; for example, Theatre Severn, Whitchurch Leisure Centre and Oswestry Leisure Centre.

Contacts have been made with partnering organisations, who can support our goals as a fostering service for the benefit of our Shropshire children.

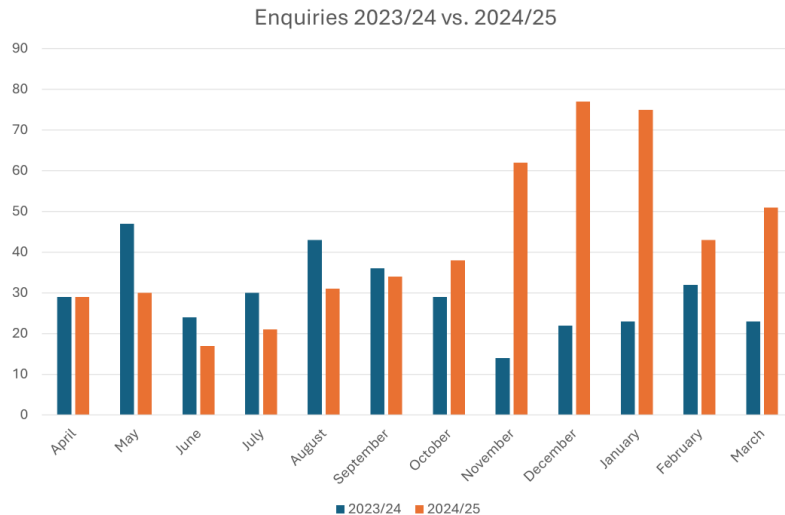
A referral scheme was also launched for Shropshire Council employees and Shropshire Fostering Carers, promoted through internal webinars and newsletters.

Digital

Digital marketing remained our primary activity. SEO work on the website enhanced our Google rankings, allowing us to give Facebook Ads more priority over paid-for Google Ads as they were delivering the most measurable enquiries. There are traffic ad campaigns running for the website and event bookings.

Facebook Ads were also enhanced by the setting up of an Instagram account for Shropshire Fostering. Further digital work saw the start of a six-month mobile banner campaign, again ran through our ads agency. These put the Shropshire Fostering name in front of c.38,000 people per month, generating c.900 clicks per month through to the website.

Increased digital exposure also started via Shropshire Live, who have a high traffic news website and online radio station. Shropshire Fostering has website banners and radio ads, with the offer to feature radio interviews regularly.



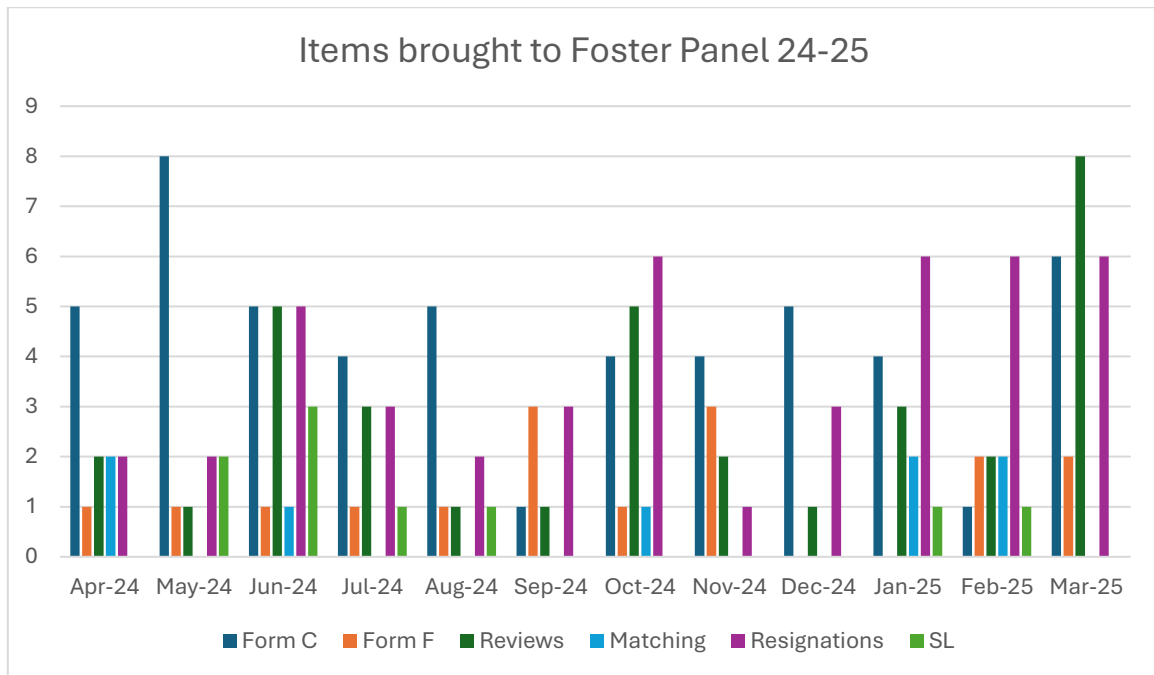
4. Approval Data

During this period, 16 mainstream Foster Carer households were presented to panel and approved.

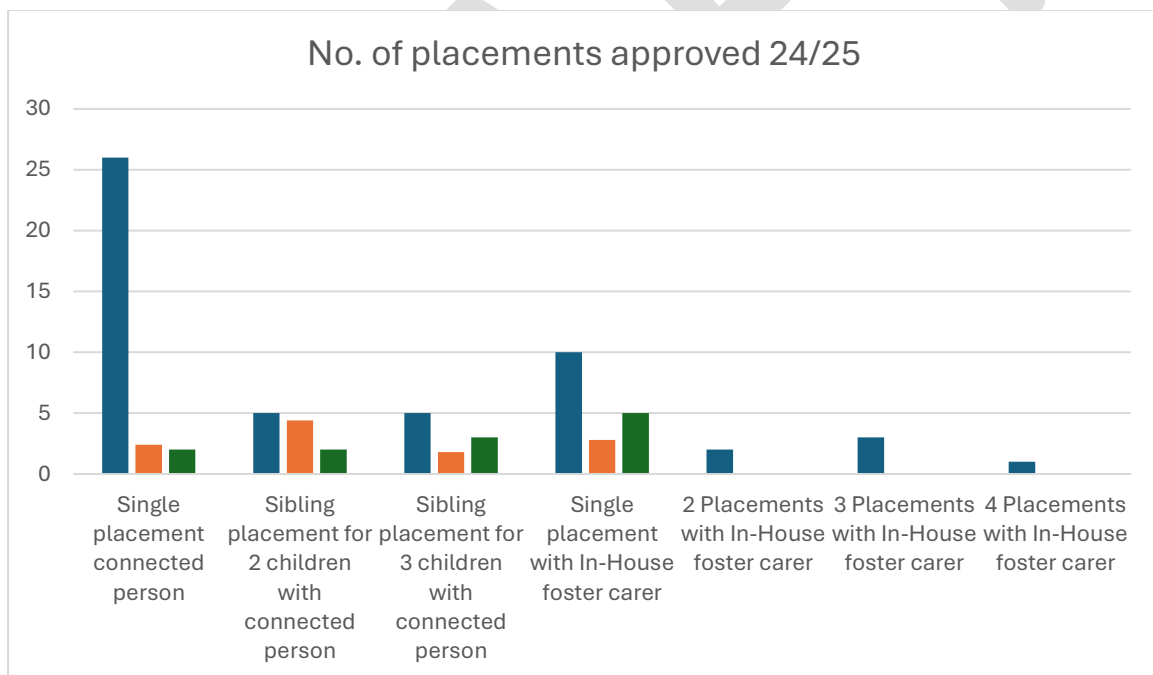
51 Connected Person Foster Carer households were presented at the Fostering Panel resulting in 38 Connected Person Foster Carer approvals. Under regulations, negative fostering assessments in stage 2 must be presented to the panel. In this period, 13 assessments had negative outcomes due to concerns about meeting national minimum standards, lack of risk insight, and inability to meet the child's needs.

Recruitment of Mainstream Foster Carers is integral to ensuring that more of our children who are looked after are cared for within loving family environments within Shropshire. In turn, increasing sufficiency and decreasing the number of children placed in IFA and residential placements. Nationally foster carer recruitment is a challenge with less people coming forward to foster. In Shropshire, through transformation and more resource we are starting to see an improving picture this year. This year we have been successful in doubling our mainstream foster carer household approvals. With developments in marketing, streamlining of processes, increased support offer, successful recruitment to key posts we aim to continue to increase these numbers.

Connected Person Foster Carer assessments have supported more children to remain living within their family network, enabling children to sustain important relationships and supporting their identity. The high demand for connected person assessments challenges the use of resources to recruit and assess mainstream foster carers. These assessments are complex and time-sensitive, often taking up most of the social worker's time. The capacity within the service is managed; the independent social worker assessments are utilised where required. The service has given due consideration to the model for the service to ensure this continues to develop and meet need.



In this period placement availability in fostering households was as follows:



This chart shows us the high number of children looked after that have been able to be placed within the wider connected family due to the assessment of connected person foster carers. This has been in line with the children's care plans. In total, 51 children who are looked after by the local authority were eligible to be placed with Connected Person Foster Carers.

The service continues to review all recruitment activity and ensure required developments are implemented to increase sufficiency within mainstream fostering. There is a continued need for Foster Carers for teenagers, sibling groups, and disabled children. Our recruitment and marketing efforts focus on these priorities, whilst aligning with our Stepping Stones project.

The Shropshire Foster Carer Association (SFCA) actively promotes foster care by organising events for peer support and interaction. They regularly meet with management to advocate for carers and contribute to service developments. SFCA representatives also participate in new projects, ensuring foster carers' voices are heard.

As of March 31, 2025, there were **179** fostering households, including in-house and Connected Person Foster Carers. This comprised of 71 mainstream and 108 Connected Person fostering households. Additionally, 16 Connected Person households under Reg 24 temporary approval currently were not included in this total.

5. Connected Person Foster Carer Viability Assessments

Before presenting a Connected Person foster carer household to the panel, a viability assessment ensures they meet basic requirements of the fostering regulations. If positive, a full assessment follows, lasting 12 to 16 weeks. During this time, a child may be placed with the applicants under Temporary Approval for up to 16 weeks, extendable by 8 weeks in positive cases, but not exceeding 24 weeks.

There were 201 new Connected Person viability requests this period, which is similar to the number of 205 from last financial year. Requests for out-of-county families and court directed multiple viabilities for the same child continue to place a demand on resources and the regional protocol is advised upon. There are on going challenges with the timescales set by the court, including demands for emergency viabilities. Working alongside our legal colleagues seeks to address issues that arise.

6. Supported Lodgings

This type of provision is not encompassed by either children's or adult's regulatory frameworks, primarily due to the focus on "accommodation-based support" rather than "care." It serves as a transitional step towards independence and is only employed when it aligns with the child's best interests. For certain children, such as those who prefer not to reside with a foster family or in a residential home, this can be an appropriate choice. Additionally, it may be suitable for some unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, though not universally applicable.

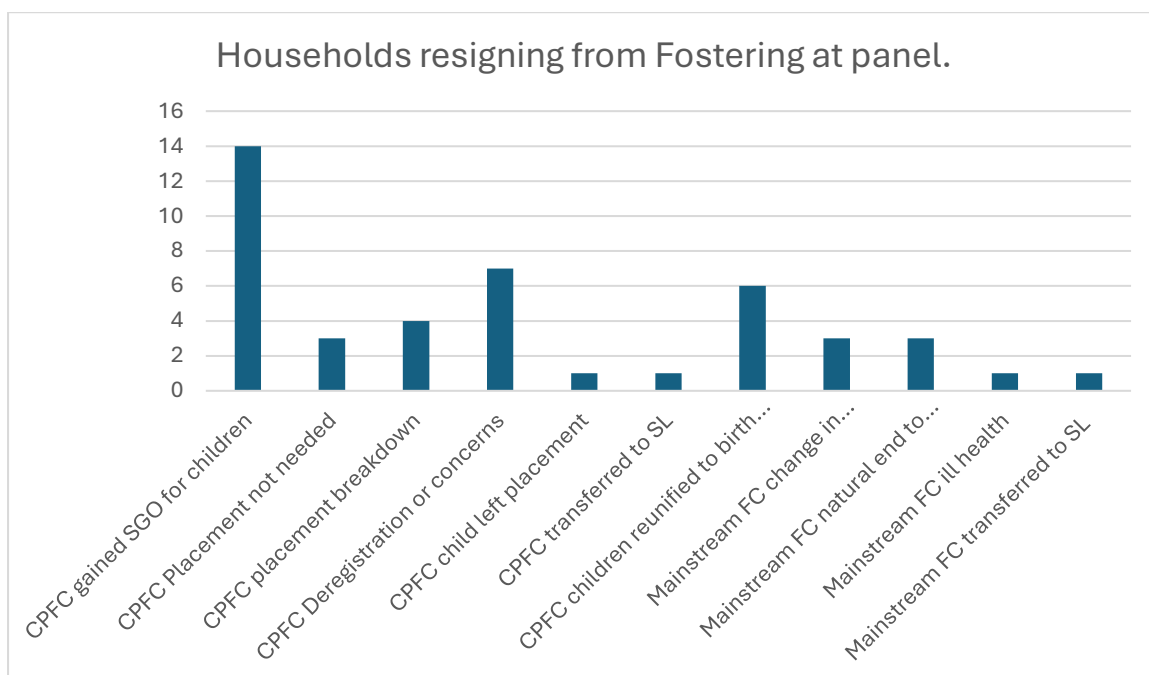
Ofsted now regulates Supported Lodging (SL) provisions as part of the government's review of unregulated care for young people.

During this period, 10 households were approved as SL providers. Supported Lodgings Social workers in the Leaving Care Team complete SL assessments, which are then presented to the Leaving Care Team Manager prior to the fostering panel. This number is made up of new applicants and also foster carers who are wanting to care for the child post 18 but not continue to offer additional fostering placements.

7. Resignations

Resignations from fostering are submitted by both Mainstream Foster Carers and Connected Person / Kinship Foster Carers for various reasons.

From 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, Shropshire had 45 foster carer resignations: 38 from Kinship Fostering Households and 7 from Mainstream Foster Carer Households and 1 Mainstream Foster Carer transferred to Supported Lodgings.



8. Foster Carer Annual Reviews

The purpose of an annual foster carer review is to evaluate the performance and progress of foster carers over the past year. This review ensures that foster carers continue to meet the required standards and provides an opportunity to address any issues or concerns. The review process includes assessing the carers' competencies in various areas, such as caring for children, providing a safe environment, working as part of a team, and their own development.

The annual foster carer review is a comprehensive evaluation that involves several key components. It includes ensuring compliance, confirming the details of the carers, such as their DBS checks and medical records, and assessing their competencies in areas like caring for children, providing a safe environment, and working as part of a team. The review also considers the views of the carers' own children and identifies any specific health issues that may have arisen over the past year. Additionally, the review process helps in identifying the future support needs of the carers and planning for their ongoing development.

Annual Reviews Between 01/04/2024 - 31/03/2025

The Fostering Service conducted 191 Annual Foster Carer Reviews, up from 152 last year. At the end of 31st March 2025, there were 179 fostering households (mainstream and Connected Person Foster Carers) who legally require an annual review every 12 months. 94 of those fostering households had their previous annual review completed within timescales, 34 households did not have their previous review completed within timescales.

Changes in staffing and the availability of the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer led to some delays with annual reviews being completed within timescale and first annual reviews being presented to fostering panel in the first quarters of the year. During the 12 months the service experienced changes within the operational delivery and staffing of the Business Support functioning that impacted the review process. The Fostering Service has had one full time Fostering Independent Reviewing Officers (FIRO) supporting the service from December 2024. This has had a positive impact on timeliness, quality assurance and practice for fostering reviews.

The Fostering Service data dashboard is monitored and alerts all professionals when annual reviews are due. The Fostering Service are exploring how IT and digital platforms can support the annual review process and feedback received.

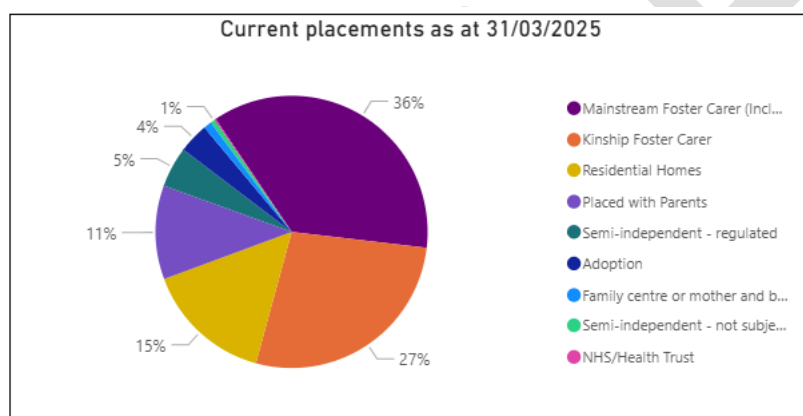
9. Matching

The process of matching in fostering involves multiple steps to ensure that children are placed with foster carers who can meet their long term needs and support permanence. Matching report is completed by the child's social worker and the fostering social worker and submitted to the fostering panel for recommendations. The matching assessment matrix considers various criteria such as the child's age, physical description, ethnicity, language, religious and cultural background, health, educational needs, emotional and behavioural development, identity, family and social relationships, and the quality of attachments.

During this period, 8 Fostering households (3 internal foster carers) were matched to the children in their care, totalling 13 children being offered long term permanency. This reflects the commitment to permanency for children in local authority care, as per the Permanence policy.

10. Placement Data and Placement moves

As of 31st March 2025, there were 727 children under the care of Shropshire Children's Services. Below is a breakdown of the placements and living arrangements for these children and young people.



Placement Type	Total
Adoption	26
Family centre or mother and baby unit & ...	7
Kinship Foster Carer	199
Mainstream Foster Carer (Including External Agency)	264
NHS/Health Trust	1
Placed with Parents	81
Residential Homes	110
Semi-independent - not subject to regulations	4
Semi-independent - regulated	35
Total	727

During this period, 12 children experienced more than 2 placement moves. These moves could include transitioning from emergency to short/long-term placements, foster care to family, or short-term to permanent options. This data focuses on children with more than 2 moves.

The data from this period do not provide any definitive conclusions regarding age and placement disruption, and there is minimal evidence to suggest that gender influences placement disruption.

11. Private Fostering

Private fostering involves a child under 16, or under 18 if disabled, being cared for by someone who is not a close relative for over 28 days. If the care lasts less than 28 days with no intention to extend, it does not qualify as private fostering. Privately fostered children are not classified as 'looked after' or in need, but Shropshire Children's Services considers them Section 17 Children In Need and assigns them a Children's Social Worker.

The Homes for Ukraine Scheme also classifies Ukrainian children up to 18 years old as privately fostered, resulting in Shropshire Children's Services involvement.

From July 2022, children under 18 traveling alone to the UK were included in the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Sponsors wanting to support a child not accompanied by a parent or guardian must have known the child's parents or guardians before February 24, 2022, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Sponsors must commit to three years of sponsorship or until the child turns 18, leading to a private fostering assessment.

Between April 1, 2024, and March 31, 2025, there were 5 referrals for Private Fostering Assessments.

Between April 1, 2024, and March 31, 2025, there were 6 Private Fostering Assessments completed. This is a decrease of 2 assessment compared to the previous year.

As of 31/03/25, there were 5 ongoing private fostering arrangements

Referrals for private fostering arrangements remain low. The number of foreign exchange students in Shropshire private schools has significantly decreased since Covid.

Shropshire Council is committed to promoting awareness of private fostering arrangements. Action is taken to ensure that the community is informed about the requirements and responsibilities associated with private fostering. These strategies include developing a programme of communication activities for local authority staff, other professionals, and agencies, as well as creating a range of publicity materials. Additionally, Shropshire Council provides advice to parents, persons with parental responsibility, those proposing to privately foster a child, existing private foster carers, and any other person concerned with a privately fostered child.

Shropshire Council actively raises awareness of private fostering through various initiatives. For example, events such as the Private Fostering Awareness Day is used to educate professionals and the public about private fostering. Social media and other communication channels are used to promote awareness and direct people to relevant resources on the website. Furthermore, Shropshire Council collaborates with organisations like CoramBAAF to host webinars and training sessions for social workers and other professionals to enhance their understanding of private fostering.

12. Special Guardianship

A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is one legal route to enable children to achieve stability and permanence without ongoing social work intervention into family life. The service undertakes SGO assessments in respect of both children who are looked after and children who are not looked after but have been residing with family or connected persons within Shropshire.

Shropshire Council has a dedicated Special Guardianship Support Team trained and experienced in the challenges kinship carers can face. This team provides pre-order advice calls to assist potential applicants to understand the SGO assessment process and the Council's post-order SGO support offer. Annual contact is made with special guardians to offer a review of the SGO Support Plan following the granting on an SGO. Types of post-order SGO support can include advice and signposting, training, mediation, and networking opportunities. In addition, an SGO assessment of need can be requested to explore accessing additional support or services, which may include an application to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) to fund a therapeutic intervention for eligible children who were looked after pre-order.

Details of all Shropshire Council SGO support is available on the Council website
<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/childrens-social-care-and-health/special-guardianship-support/>.

From 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, 23 SGOs were granted, all of these were in respect of children who had been looked after at the time of the SGO.

13. Foster carer training April 2024 – March 2025

Pre-approval Training

As part of the assessment process, all prospective foster carers are mandated to complete a preparation course titled "Skills to Foster."

During the last period 22 delegates attended pre-approval Skills to Foster training, of which 13 were approved as Mainstream Foster Carers

The activities and exercises that are completed during the Skills to Foster programme, along with the home practice activities, account for 40% of carer's Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS). These must be completed by foster carers within their first year of fostering.

Skills to Care training has been delivered for all pre-approval connected carers. This training has been well received, with 68 delegates attending on either a face-to-face or virtual basis in the last period with individuals being approved.

Delegates found the training helpful and supportive, providing them with the knowledge and skills to carry out their role as a connected carer. They also shared it was a positive way to connect with others in similar situations.

Mandatory Induction Training

Induction training for both mainstream and kinship carers comprise of 12 mandatory courses, which must be completed within the first 12 months following panel approval.

To support the Training, Support and Development Standards, the following induction courses have been matched to both sets of TSDS requirements.

- Raising Awareness of Safeguarding and Protecting Children (to be renewed every three years)
- First Aid (to be renewed every three years)
- Safer Caring and Allegations (to be renewed every three years)
- Domestic Abuse Briefing
- Exploitation and Vulnerability

The remaining areas of mandatory training are:

- Family Time
- Health Journey for Looked-After Children
- Solihull Approach – Understanding Your Child (online via Solihull Approach)
- Trauma-Informed Practice and Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Internet Safety (online via The Training Hub)
- Medication (online via The Training Hub)
- Reporting and Recording (online via The Training Hub)

*Whilst this remains a mandatory area of training, kinship foster carers can achieve their TSDS without the completion of Safer Caring and Allegations.

Core Mandatory Training

There are 5 'core' mandatory training courses within our training and development strategy:

- Cultural Humility
- Emotion Coaching
- Making a Difference at PEPs
- Trauma and Loss
- Understanding Special Educational Needs

Core training sessions, both face-to-face and virtual, have been well attended over the past year. Feedback shows that carers find these courses useful and informative, developing their skills and knowledge around our core offer.

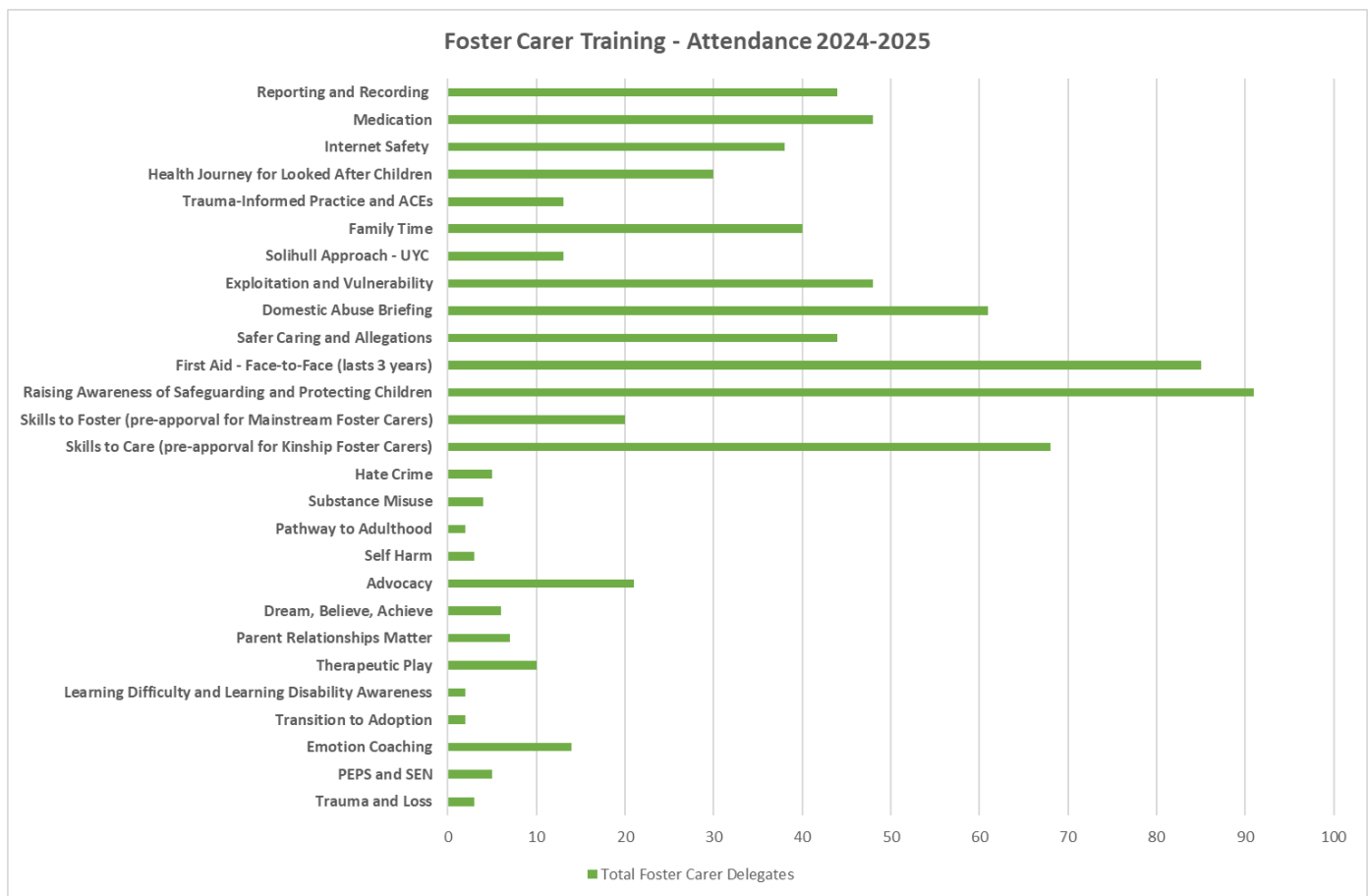
Enhanced Training

Our enhanced training is available to all carers, and covers more specialist areas of delivery:

- Advocacy
- Dream, Believe, Achieve
- Hate Crime
- Learning Difficulty and Learning Disability Awareness
- Parent Relationships Matter
- Self-Harm
- Substance Misuse
- Supporting Young People Who Identify as LGBTQI+
- Therapeutic Play
- Transition to Adoption

Evaluations indicate that carers find the enhanced training very useful and supportive in understanding their roles.

The bar chart below illustrates the attendance figures for our training programs over the past period.



Developments

The Fostering Service offers a hybrid training approach, with face-to-face, virtual (via MS Teams) and online training opportunities. We have seen the value of virtual training and will continue to use this moving forward – particularly when supporting our out-of-county foster carers and those with travel or work constraints. However, we continue to encourage face-to-face training wherever possible, as it remains the most effective learning method.

Skills to Care (pre-approval) training for kinship foster carers has been developed to include additional information and learning around family time, safer caring and allegations, recording, Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS), and post-approval training expectations.

Skills to Foster (pre-approval) training has been successfully condensed into a one-day training session, which is proving effective.

Further development is planned with the use of Leap into Learning to be used as a platform for accessing training information and providing a self-serve booking facility. We will be supporting foster carers in the transition to using this platform, whilst continuing to offer support and guidance around their training expectations and needs and ensuring compliance.

The 2024/2025 Training and Development Programme began in April, including new workshops on:

- Advocacy
- Hate Crime
- Parent Relationships Matter
- Trauma-Informed Practice and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Plans for 2025/2026

Over the next year there will be a focus on key priority areas, that we believe will support Carers to further develop their skills and knowledge to best support our children:

- Further roll out of Nurturing Attachments
- EDI / Cultural Humility
- CPI Verbal Intervention, de-escalation strategies
- Talk Boost, raising awareness of importance of reading to children.
- Supporting Young People Who Identify as LGBTQ+

Through the learning and development team, we will explore how we can offer an enriched training and support programme that gives carers and those who support them the right tools to do the job:

- Exploring opportunities for collaborative training initiatives with the wider Learning and Development Team, creating resilience and sustainability in the team.
- Implement the LEAP learning management system and support the roll out of Carer Connect and the Portals through training.
- Attendance – explore methods for improving attendance rates for kinship foster carers (non-mandatory training).
- Review how our training data is captured and shared, to provide up to date data for Managers to track compliance in one place.

14. Participation with children living within Fostering Families April 2024 – March 2025

Participation with children ensures that their voices are heard and considered in decisions that affect their lives. Shropshire Council is committed to promoting an 'open door' culture that encourages children to express their views, wishes, and feelings. The council takes steps to ensure that these views are taken into account when making decisions about children.

Shropshire Council organizes various activities and events to engage with children and gather their feedback. Monthly social group meetings support young people in providing feedback on their experiences, gathers suggestions for the next newsletters.

Children's views contribute towards foster carers annual reviews to support the service in understanding their lived experiences and support needs of the household. Further work will continue to be completed within the service to ensure different forms of communication are encouraged, supporting every child to share their views.

Newsletter: Members of the Saturday Social Group sent out quarterly newsletters. Newsletters are created by Young People for Young People. The content includes a quote for the month, interesting or humorous facts, a simple recipe, useful tips, artwork and an invitation for other young people to submit ideas. The content encourages participation and content from peers.

Monthly Social Group Meetings: During this period 11 social group meetings have been held, with 10 children participating. The group provides young people the opportunity to come together, socialise and encourages peer support and relationship building. We provide games/activities and refreshments for our young people.

Peer Support & activities: During this period 5 peer support sessions and 3 additional activities have been held including an Easter Egg Hunt, Nature Trail Walk and River Walk with 11 children participating in at least one of the activities. These activities support children to have fun whilst also aiding positive communication, build confidence, self-esteem, maintain positive relationships and address barriers to accessing support

In January 2024 two new young people joined the training programme to be peer supporters; these young people lead the Nature Trail Walk and supported some of the quieter young people attending the Saturday Social Group. Peer Supporters attended the Family Fun Day, one supporter helped with Name the Teddie, How

Many Sweets in the Jar, and the dance/music/Name that Tune... the other supporter encouraged children to play games with a football.

Links are maintained with The Hive and information about ongoing projects for all young people are passed on to foster carers.

In April 2024 the two new peer supporters attended the Cultural Investigators Launch at the Hive. The investigators had compiled information about the History of Belmont as a youth project and, the Hive in more recent years. There were photographs of the many young people, staff and musicians who had attended events, there was information about the workshops the Hive has delivered over the years; before leaving we joined in a participatory story telling session; these two young people previously attended the 2nd Podcast Group

In August 2024 NHS Community Mental Health funded an art project, to produce artwork on boards to decorate spaces for young people in two of their buildings, Stirchley Medical Practice & Coral House, Shrewsbury. A professional artist from the Hive lead 4 x day sessions, 5 of our young people attended along with 2 young people from the Mental Health Project.

15. Permanence

Children need a safe, stable and loving home environment that can support them throughout their childhood and beyond. They need carers who are able to support them developing secure attachments and strong foundations from which they can thrive. They need the commitment from their carers to provide them with opportunities that grow their confidence, self esteem and resilience to navigate life. Children need their identity to be supported and life-long links to be maintained, ensuring a network of support that will last through to adulthood. They need to be involved in plans about themselves.

Planning for permanence needs to be a feature of all our interventions with children we work with, in order to avoid delay and ensure all options are considered.

We have a duty to prioritise the welfare of the child while collaborating with both children and their parents, considering their wishes and feelings.

All legal options must be explored on the basis of the 'least' state intervention required to safeguard the child and meet their assessed permanence needs.

For most children, all of these needs will best be met by being enabled to remain with or return to live within their birth family, and with their brothers and sisters. Where this is not possible other permanence options must be progressed without delay.

The Permanence Forum consists of the Strategic Lead for Permanence, the Permanence Coordinator, Principal IRO and representatives from Stepping Stones, Fostering, Adoption, and SGO support services.

All children under the age of 16 who started to be looked after in 2024-2025 had their permanence plan discussed at Permanence Forum. The majority of children did not have 1 single plan at this point and social workers were following a number of parallel permanence plans. Permanence Forum assisted in prioritising tasks to pursue each plan and identifying the pathways and who could assist.

Permanency Forum has been up and running in Shropshire since April 2018 to support social workers in their permanency planning for children.

Newly looked after children are booked onto Permanency Forum agenda as soon as they become looked after and prior to their second CLA review.

In 2024 - 2025 there has been a total of 102 children who have attended Permanency Forum, 76 attended prior to their 2nd review and within timescales to have their plans ratified. 26 attended but were out of timescales for their review but their plans were overseen by their IRO.

16. Mockingbird Project

Shropshire continuing to support and hold one constellation within the county. This is well established since 2022.

Mockingbird is a way of supporting foster carers and empowering them to support each other through the development of constellations with 8 families in the constellation, including one hub carer. Our hub carer is an extremely experienced foster carer who is well known amongst carers and staff. The constellation continues to have a positive impact on development and support for carers, social activities for children and supports stability of childrens placements through the offer of peer to peer consultation and respite.

The role of the Liaison Senior Social Worker has been vacant, and we are currently recruiting to this position following the success of the previous liaison worker. This person is tasked with supporting the constellation and looking at creating further constellations within Shropshire.

Feedback has been extremely positive with children and carers enjoying developing new relationships, opportunities to strengthen peer support, attending social events and coffee mornings/ training. We have continued to see very good results regarding the support of foster carers and do anticipate the continued improvement and development of Mockingbird within Shropshire.

17. Conclusion

Children in Shropshire benefit from the dedication and hard work of our skilled foster carers. Social Workers have been instrumental in achieving positive outcomes for the children in our care. The service has adapted in the last 12 months, engaging with project management support to review service needs and delivery. The service has implemented changes that have supported marketing and recruitment whilst raising the profile of Shropshire Fostering both internally and externally.

As we move forward, our focus will remain on enhancing recruitment and assessment processes, expanding training and development programs, and providing robust support for carers. We will focus on supporting more children to achieve stable homes that are safe and built on love, enabling more children to achieve permanence through SGO's and maintain a strong support offer for carers and Special Guardians. Additionally, we will continue to raise awareness of private fostering arrangements.

We will engage with our Foster Carers and provide opportunities for participation that supports service development for our children and carers. The service will continue to work with the SFCA to support our fostering community in Shropshire.

We are committed to building on our successes and addressing areas for improvement to provide the best possible care for the children and young people we serve. Practitioners have worked hard to ensure children's placements remain stable and provide strong offer of support. Trauma informed intervention for carers will continue to aid understanding of the impact of trauma on children and development of carers skills to meet childrens needs. The service is committed developing our therapeutic offer for carers and children.

We will work to ensure we address learning behind foster carer resignations and deregistration's. Improving the annual review process and feedback, we aim to ensure that our fostering service remains responsive, effective, and child centred.

The service will continue to address the demand of multiple court ordered assessments for connected persons and timescales, working closely with our legal colleagues. These factors continue to impact mainstream fostering recruitment and assessment. Managing these demand ensures a balanced and effective fostering service that meets the needs of all children in our care. Reviewing the model for the service and structure will continue to aid growth of the fostering service to meet the needs of the children in our care.

Next Steps 2025-2026

Our priorities in the coming year will be:

Fostering Transformation

Implement, review and progress Marketing Strategy to increase fostering sufficiency and support retention. Development of Marketing and Communications functions, assessment and recruitment journey, support and development offer and insights. To enhance opportunities for our Foster Carers and raise the profile of fostering for councils we will engage with local businesses and networks in support of Fostering Friendly employees in Shropshire.

Fostering Teams

Maintain a stable workforce that ensures Foster Carers receive consistent support, advise and feel valued. Support carers in ensuring children receive quality care, stable and safe home environments where their voice is heard and their identity is promoted.

Efforts will focus on supporting children in achieving permanence, aiding transitions to birth family and connected persons, support long term matching and helping more families to progress Special Guardianship Orders with dedicated workers aiding the process where this is the plan for the child.

Developing support services including the Mockingbird model to benefit a greater number of carers.

Teams will focus on quality of practice with managers ensuring quality assurance measures and regular performance monitoring; ensuring children receive quality care within our fostering households.

In House Fostering - Recruitment and Assessment

We will develop and deliver on our Marketing and Communication strategy to increase fostering sufficiency and ensure we are able to support more children coming into our care to live with fostering families.

To enhance recruitment, we will utilise digital marketing, increase automation and host informational events virtually. Our partnership with a digital marketing agency will be strengthened, and social media strategies will be reviewed to increase foster carer enquiries and referrals. Additionally, there will be a focus on developing in-house foster carers to support children transitioning from residential care.

Dedicated social workers and recruitment staff to streamline the assessment process for new foster carers and develop peer support opportunities from the start of a foster carers journey.

The teams will implement and the new Form F and Form K template. Working inline with good practice guidance.

Social Workers will provide robust induction, ensuring Foster Carers are well prepared and supported in their role.

Assessing Social Workers will promote a range of caring options and work with Stepping Stones in identifying opportunities for children in residential placements to be matched with fostering families.

Fostering Panels

We will continue to ensure delivery of an effective and efficient panel. We will seek to increase diversity within the panel representation and membership to support this being reflective of society, experiences and knowledge. Increasing feedback from carers and children will aid service delivery. Training and development will reflect learning and development needs for the service.

Retention and Recognition of Existing Carers

Retaining and recognising existing carers is essential for maintaining a stable and experienced pool of foster carers. Efforts will be made to gain further understanding of the support needs of carers, provide wider range of

support, and acknowledge their contributions. This includes offering opportunities for professional development, recognising their achievements, and ensuring they feel valued and supported within our fostering community.

Addressing Resignations and deregistration's:

Understand and address the reasons behind foster carer resignations and deregistration's. This will help in retaining foster carers and ensuring that they feel supported and valued.

Training and Development:

The Fostering Training and Support Review 2025 examines the current training offer and proposed therapeutic fostering models and their associated training frameworks. The review highlights the importance of trauma-informed approaches in fostering, with emphasis on adapting parenting strategies to meet the individual needs of children who may have experienced trauma. Key findings emphasise the widespread availability of training modules focusing on trauma and attachment, the value of ongoing support groups, and the necessity of evidence-based trauma informed training programmes. This comprehensive approach is critical for improving therapeutic fostering outcomes and marketability.

Improving Annual Reviews:

Enhance the process of annual foster carer reviews to ensure they are completed on time, receive quality feedback and meet the required standards. This includes quality assurance, compliance, performance monitoring and ensuring that carers receive the necessary support and development opportunities.

Support for Special Guardianship:

The service will maintain the strong support offered to Special Guardians. This includes conducting thorough assessments and providing post-order support to ensure that children achieve permanence with minimal social work intervention and families continue to have access to specialist support services post order where required.

Private Fostering Awareness and Support

Increase awareness and understanding of private fostering arrangements within the community. This involves organizing events, using social media, and collaborating with organizations to educate professionals and the public.

These priorities aim to improve the overall performance of the fostering service and ensure that children in care receive the best possible outcomes.



For more information, please visit

[Foster Care In Shropshire](#) | [Shropshire Fostering](#) | [Home](#)

END OF REPORT

Together4Children Permanency Partnership

Adoption Agency Annual Report
1st April 2024 - 31st March 2025



Report produced by Sarah
Havill, Regional Head of
Together4Children.

Together4Children Partnership Model

Together4Children is a partnership between Shropshire Council, Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Telford & Wrekin Council. We are working together to improve outcomes for those children who enter care and are not able to return to their birth parents.

Our Vision is to ensure that our children achieve emotional, physical, and legal permanence; growing up in loving homes with adults who provide them with a strong sense of security, continuity, commitment, and identity.

We aim to:

- Make best use of our collective resources to recruit, assess and support prospective adopters across the region.
- Improve the quality and speed of matching for children through better planning and by having a wider choice of adopters.
- Provide high quality support to children and their families delivered through a combination of direct provision and effective partnerships.
- Provide all children and their families the right support at the right time through a consistent permanency support offer across the region.

Preface

This is the fourth Annual Adoption Report produced by Together4Children since the partnership went live on 28 September 2020. It is the fourth report that covers the activity and performance of the Partnership over a full year cycle.

This report fulfils the obligations in the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002, to report to the "executive side" of the local authority. This has guided the structure and information set out in this report. The report covers the full year 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, covering the overall work within Together4Children, the progress with adopter recruitment and the service specific for each of the four partner agencies.

Introduction

Foreword from Sarah Havill, Head of Together4Children



As I reflect on the past year, I am pleased to present this Annual Report, which highlights the work undertaken across the region, celebrates our achievements and addresses ongoing challenges.

A central focus this year has been developing the knowledge and skills of adoption and children's social workers across the region in respect of the modernising adoption agenda, and I am proud of our team's commitment to maintaining links for our children and families. A new appointment to our Marketing, Recruitment and Communications Manager has also led to a re-energised approach to recruitment, in response to the challenges around adopter sufficiency. Ensuring we have the right families for our children has been and continues to be a key priority.

National Context

Whilst representing a small part of the total children's social work sector, adoption continues to have a high profile politically, with the government's renewed commitment to strengthening adoption services and its recognition of the vital role adoption plays in providing permanence for children who are unable to remain with their birth or extended families.

In April 2024, Adoption England, a collaboration of regional adoption agencies including Together4Children, and a small national team, launched the new adoption strategy for England 2024-27, outlining the overarching commitment for achieving permanence for children and giving them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging.

The National RAA Leaders group, attended by Sarah Havill, the Head of Together4Children, is working to deliver against key areas of the strategy in line with the key priority areas identified in the plan for 2024-2027:

- Adopters from diverse communities are recruited, prepared, and supported to meet children's needs.
- Adopted people maintain relationships with people important to them and have a good understanding of the reasons why they were adopted.
- Children and young people, adopted adults, adoptive and birth families are listened to and have an influence in the services and practice provided nationally and regionally.

- Children move in with their permanent family in a timely way. Their needs are understood and met, and their feelings are held in mind and responded to sensitively.
- Adopted people and their families get tailored help and support when they need it.

There has been a decline in adopters in the last two years, with less registrations of interest to adopt overall, but with regional variations. The Adoption England 'You Can Adopt' campaign saw some of their most successful results to date in the 2024/25 financial year, in terms of engagement and cost-effectiveness, and Together4Children have supported the national campaign in our recruitment efforts.

The current cost of living crisis is a significant threat to the number of approved adopters. Nine out of ten prospective adopters say the cost-of-living crisis is affecting their decisions about adoption, according to Adoption UK's December 2022 survey.

Along with the sector-led improvements being driven pan-regionally and nationally through the Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA) Leader's Group, the pace of change, and expectation in relation to modernisation and improvement across the adoption system remains very high and we are ambitious in our plans to embed practice that improves outcomes for adopted children and adopted people.

Regional Context

The Local Authority Partnership that delivers Together4Children has continued to mature and work on strategic priorities over the past 12 months, with the support of an improvement plan that addresses our key areas for development. A review of our key central functions, including family finding and panel are underway, with the objective of achieving consistency and improved outcomes for our children and families.

On the ground, managers, practitioners and business support staff have worked incredibly hard to deliver a good service. We have worked together to understand and address many of the issues that have presented themselves, continuing to review practice, policy, and procedures in line with new research, to support effective service delivery. I am proud of the way our staff have shown an openness to how we can improve our service and their continued commitment to strive for excellence.

Together4Children continues to be an active member of the Midlands Together Collaboration (MTC). Whilst all RAA's are working to ensure sufficiency for approval of adopters to meet the needs of children with an adoption plan, Together4Children still uses a relatively high number of inter-agency placements. Securing regional links is preferable to placing children at a distance. The focus this year has continued to be to embed the University of East Anglia (UEA) model of moving children onto adoption, and we continue to deliver regional adoption and child permanence training across the region, on a rolling basis.

As part of our pan regional working, Together4Children, alongside Adopt Birmingham, Adoption@Heart and Adoption Focus, have scoped a proposal for grant funding to support adoption support initiatives, including the development of a Family Hub Support Network and peer support and engagement. The four regional adoption agencies within the West Midlands have the benefit of being part of established structures already and given the previous collaboration in respect of shared approaches to Early Permanence Practice, we are positive to how collaboration with adoption support will be beneficial.

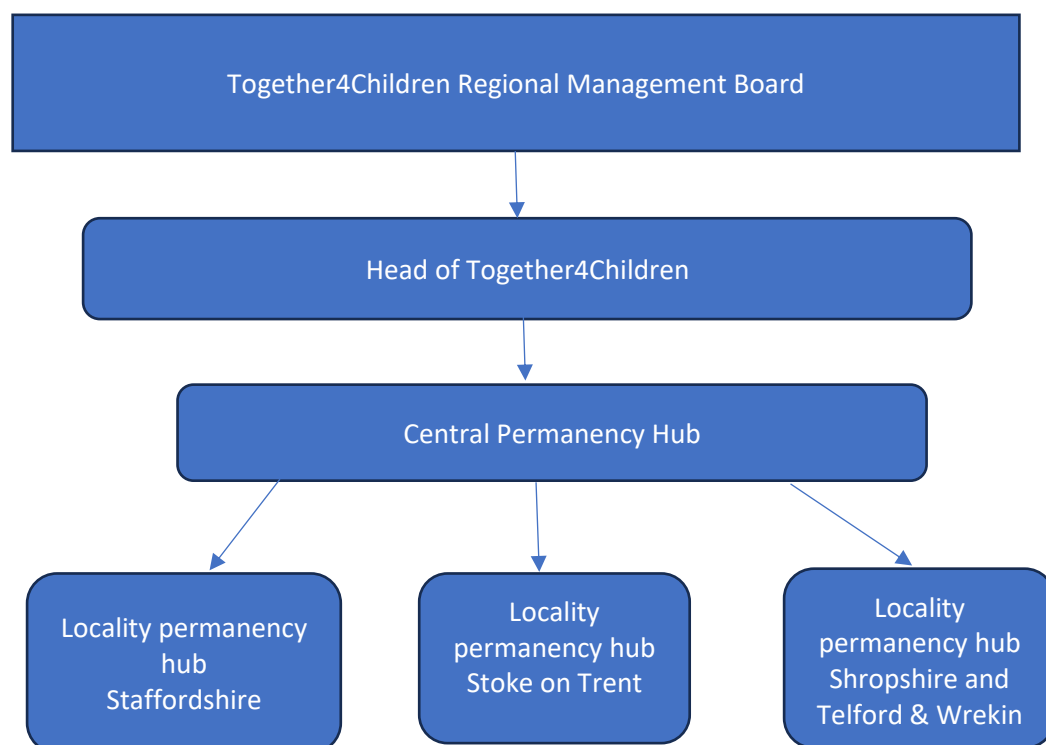
We know how important it is to secure children's permanency through adoption in a timely way. We regularly have approved adopters willing to offer early permanence; however, the lack of adopters generally means they are often matched with children already waiting.

Together4Children delivers the adoption service for our partner Councils via a hub and spoke model – a combination of core central functions and networked regional delivery (via a Central Permanency Hub).

Partner Councils retain direct service delivery functions within Locality Permanence Hubs, working within the Together4Children practice framework whilst maintaining clear links to local Children & Families Services.

Section 1: Together4Children Partnership Arrangement

1.1 Partnership Governance and Operational Structure



The Partnership is governed via the Regional Management Board, which is chaired by the Executive Director for Children Services and Public Health for Telford & Wrekin Council. Each partner council is represented on the Board by the Assistant Director (or equivalent) with responsibility for Children in Care.

Senior operational leadership is provided through the Together4Children Senior Leadership Team, which is comprised of the Head of T4C, the Principal Manager for the Central Permanency Hub and the Head of Service (or equivalent) with responsibility for Adoption in each partner council.

Further operational leadership and management is provided through the Wider Leadership Team, which comprises of operational managers across the central and locality hub functions.

1.2 Central Permanency Hub Functions

The Central Permanency Hub has a small team of staff who provide functions and undertake activity for the whole region. The core central functions are:

- Central co-ordination of functions across the Partnership
- Adopter Recruitment
- Regional Family Finding
- Adopter Training
- Children's (Permanency) Tracking
- Adoption Panel Advice and Management
- Adoption Panel Coordination



1.3 Locality Permanency Hub Functions

There are three Locality Hubs across the region. These are based in Stoke (Stoke-on-Trent City Council), Uttoxeter (Staffordshire County Council) and Shrewsbury (Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council).

Each Locality Hub has:

- 1 x Assessment & Support Team - undertaking adopter assessments (including non-agency) and supporting prospective adopters through to the granting of an Adoption Order.
- 1 x Permanency Support Team – supporting adopted children and their families through a variety of activities.

Staff within these Hubs support children's social work teams in relation to permanence planning and adoption, providing in-reach advice and support.

Section 2: Recruitment, Preparation and Assessment of Adopter Households

2.1 Marketing & Recruitment Overview

A new marketing, communications and recruitment manager started in post in December 2024 following the previous post holder's departure in June 2024.

A new recruitment strategy has been approved with a digital search campaign and increased presence on social media going live at the start of March 25. This has led to an increase in initial enquiries from a 24/25 average of 28 per month (prior to this activity (April 24-March 25)) to an average of 44 per month once the campaign went live (March 25- end July 25).

Other developments have included the development of a pre-recorded information event, which is available for people who are unable to attend a live online event or if waiting for an event would cause delay. The full enquiry form (which triggers potential allocation of the household to localities) is now on MS forms and is shared directly after an event (previously this was an emailed word document) meaning a speedier and more efficient progression for enquirers coming through to allocation.



Monday 15 September 2025 at 18:00

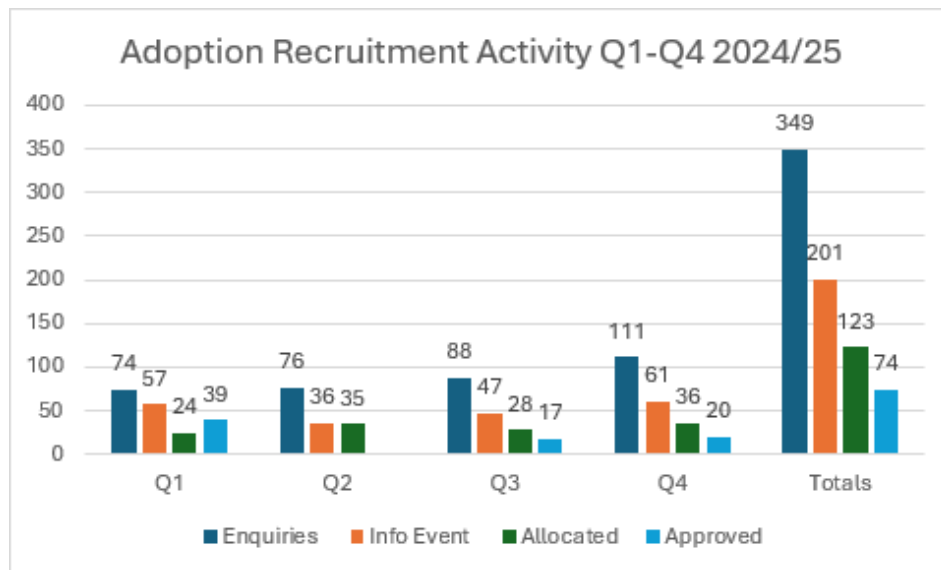
Online Introduction to Adoption Information Event

Additionally, there has been a considerable strengthening of internal processes, data collection and systems (utilising and expanding the functionality of the ISL system) as well as an investment into the human resources needed to provide a quality service at the 'front door' whilst also building increased strategic direction and oversight. This has been a key priority to ensure that there is appropriate response and follow up, suitable tracking is undertaken and that data sources are robust, visible and validated.

Outcomes for 2024/25 are as follows:

Adoption Recruitment Figures 2024/25	Actual Figures	Conversion
Enquiries	349	
Attended Info Event	201	57%
To Allocation Meeting	123	61% (of above) 35% of enquiries
Approved	74	60% (of above) 21% of enquiries

By breaking down outcomes into quarters we can begin to see the positive impact of the marketing strategy which went live end Feb 2025, leading to an increase in initial enquiries that has been sustained into Q1 2025/26.



2.3 Assessment and Approval of Adopters

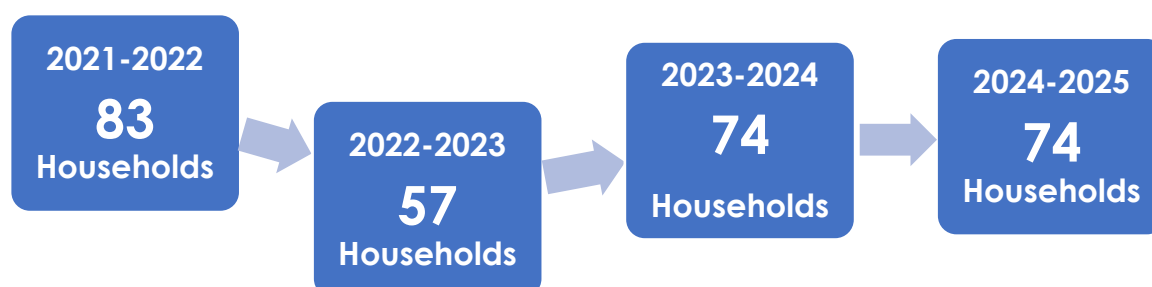
National Picture

The national adoption landscape reveals a persistent gap between the number of children needing adoptive families and the number of approved adopters. Adopter activity is at its lowest for the last 5 years. Over the last three years there have been more placement orders granted than adopter approvals, meaning that children have been entering the adoption process at a higher rate than adopters.

An increasing number of adopters have withdrawn from the adoption process, and the reasons for this are varied. The cost-of-living crisis is a significant threat to the number of approved adopters. Nine out of ten prospective adopters say the cost of living crisis is affecting their decisions about adoption, according to Adoption UK's December 2022 survey. Adopters are withdrawing from the process as they are concerned about not being able to afford the cost of caring for children. Additionally, some prospective adopters lack confidence in their suitability, capacity, and capability to be 'good enough' adopters; there is a lack of trust in the process, particularly amongst minoritised groups. Furthermore, variability in support being provided and a fear that the right support will not be available at the right time also plays a factor in adopters' decision making.

Regional Picture

Together4Children have done an excellent job in reversing a two-year declining trend in adopter recruitment. Through strategic initiatives and dedicated efforts, we saw a growth trend in approving new adopter households during 2023/24, and this has been consistent in 2024/25, with the same number of households approved for a second year running. Current data provides an indication that this will continue into the coming year, with a likely increase again on adopter approvals. To meet the projected number of children that we expect will have a plan of adoption in 2025/26, we need a **13.5%** increase on the number of households approved in 2024/25, which we feel is an achievable target.



Completing Stage 1 (gathering statutory information) of our adopter assessments within our target has continued to be a challenge over the year. External factors such as the time it takes for applicants to complete medicals (usually provided by their own GP) and getting safeguarding checks back from other Local Authorities create challenges that most adoption agencies are experiencing at the current time.

	Stage 1	Stage 2
Together4Children	123	143
National Target	60	121
National average	128	147

Once the required information has been obtained, stage 2 of the process, which involves the social work assessment, completion of the Prospective Adopter Report and presentation to Adoption Panel

is completed on average in **143** days, which is in line with the previous year, but is also outside of the national target. Factors that can affect this timescale are when additional assessment visits are required, or sometimes the work or holiday commitments of the prospective adopter household or assessing social worker.

Our timescales are under that of the national average however for 2024/25 as provided by the ASGLB.

2.4 Adopter Training Activity

Together4Children have delivered Regional Adopter Preparation & Training since January 2021 through our dedicated Regional Training Officers, who are supported by practitioners from across our locality teams.

Preparation Training

During this period, we have delivered **13** Adopter Preparation Training Events for **85** prospective adopter households. An increase of 5 households from the previous year. We deliver 'core' preparation training over 3 days. This enables participants to learn about the adoption journey, understand about the children we need to find families for, and learn about the support that they can access.

"We really appreciated the guest speakers explaining their journey to us to give us greater insight."

Fantastic, engaging leaders of the course. Very approachable.

In January 2025 we took the 350th booking for Prep Training since the conception of T4C.

Early Permanence

We have strengthened the training that we offer prospective adopters considering offering a child early permanence.

It is positive to see that **92%** of households attending preparation training also attend the Early Permanence module.

"At first we were 90% decided about not going down the EP route we still wanted to keep it as an option but after today's session we have found ourselves a lot more open to it and maybe even for it to be our preferred route."

We have delivered **13** Early Permanence Training Events for **78** prospective adopter households.

Brothers and Sisters

We have delivered **13** Adopting Brothers/Sisters workshops for **76** prospective adopter households. A pleasing **89%** of households attending preparation training.

"This session we found very useful as we have been considering just 1 child, but we may now be open to 2 children."



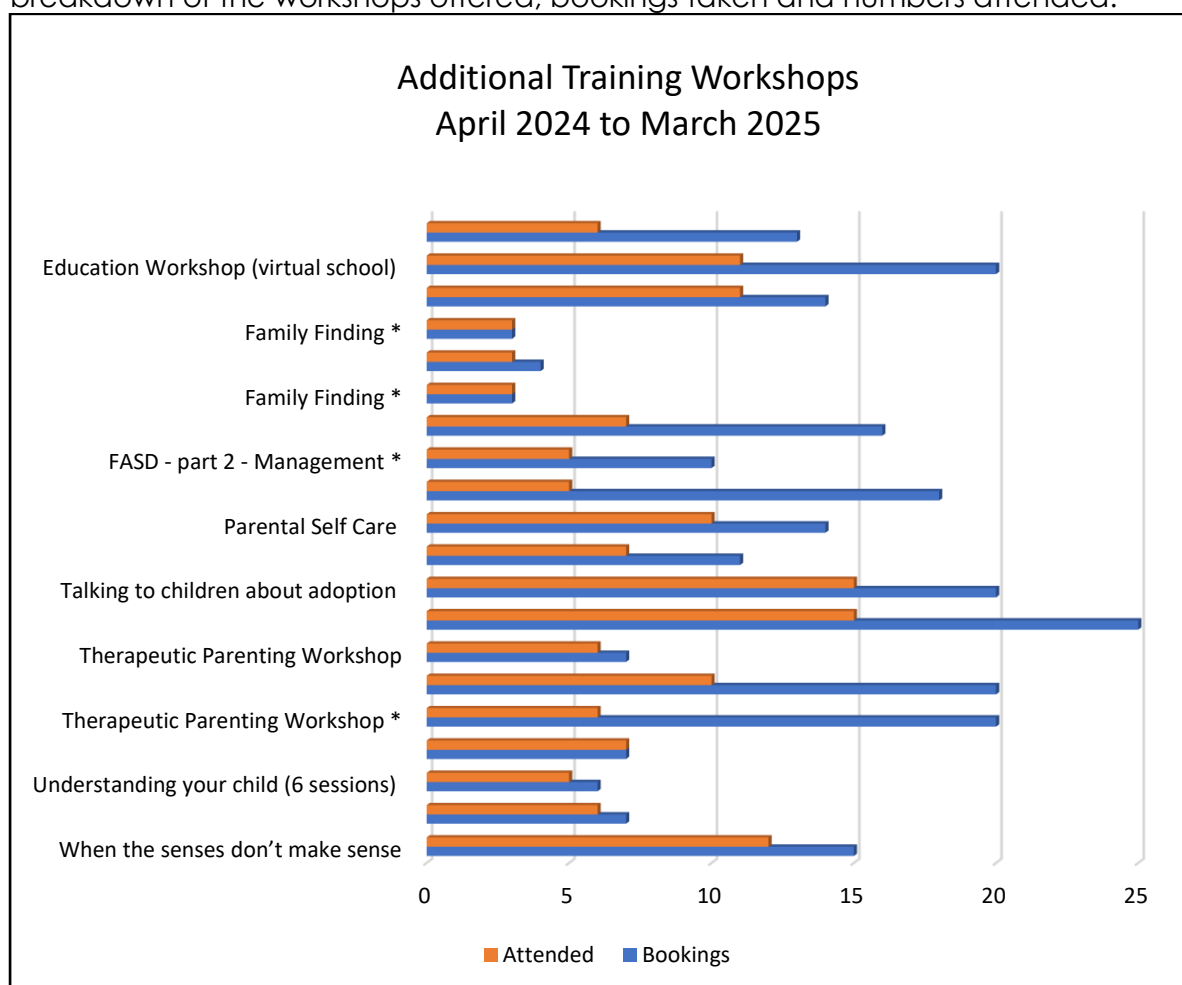
Family & Friends

Over the year, we delivered **12** workshops for family and friends of prospective adopters. These are held virtually to allow as many people as possible who are in the prospective adopter's support network to attend. The workshops help to inform the prospective adopters' network about adoption, and how they can best support their friends/family members who are considering adoption through the process and once a child moves in. **190** screens attended with multiple family/friends behind those 190 screens.

"My awareness was raised about the many difficulties the child may have experienced before they are adopted".

Our Broader Training Offer to Adopters

In addition to our core training offer, we held **20** workshops for our adopters during 2024/25 with **153** households (screens) attending across the 20 workshops. Below is a breakdown of the workshops offered, bookings taken and numbers attended.



2.5 Non-Agency Adoption

Together4Children provide the non-agency adoption provision for our partner local authorities. This work includes all those categories of adoption where the adoption agency and the adoption panel do not play a part in the placement of the child for adoption. These are:

- Partner adoptions (formally known as stepparent adoption)
- Anyone who has had care of the child (for any 3-year period in the past 5 years)
- Local authority foster carer(s) proceeding without the support of social care after a child has been living in their care for over 1 year.

All non-agency adoptions have similar characteristics and there is a basic format comprising referral, consultation, provision of written information, assessment, and preparation of the Annex A report for court.

Maintaining this activity within the adoption provision of the Partnership ensures that the expertise, knowledge, and experience required to undertake this specialist work under the adoption regulations is maintained.

The table below shows the level of non-agency adoption activity across the region. For 2024-2025, Together4Children received **107** referrals for non-agency adoption provisions, which is an increase of 73% from the previous year. We undertook **38** assessments, which is in line with the previous year. At 31/03/2025 the service had **28** assessments on-going and a further **30** assessments awaiting allocation, which is an increase of 114% as a result of the increase in referrals received. This statutory activity is managed alongside our adopter assessment activity, and our primary responsibilities in relation to the adoption of children from care.

Non-agency Adoption Activity 2024-2025				
	Staffs Hub	Joint Hub	Stoke Hub	T4C
Referrals received	41	35	31	107
A16's (Notification of Intent) sent out	21	15	10	46
A16's returned	18	12	7	37
Non-agency Assessments completed	15	16	7	38
Ongoing assessments @ 31/03/2025	12	4	12	28
Waiting for assessment @ 31/03/2025	11	11	8	30

Section 3: Activity & Outcomes for Children in 2024-2025

3.1 Regional Children in Care Trends

During 2024-2025, all our partner local authorities experienced a decrease in their total number of children in care, with us seeing an overall decrease of 2.7%. This is following a trend of increasing numbers in the children in care population over the last 3 - 4 years across the region. Stoke on Trent saw the largest decrease of 7.8%

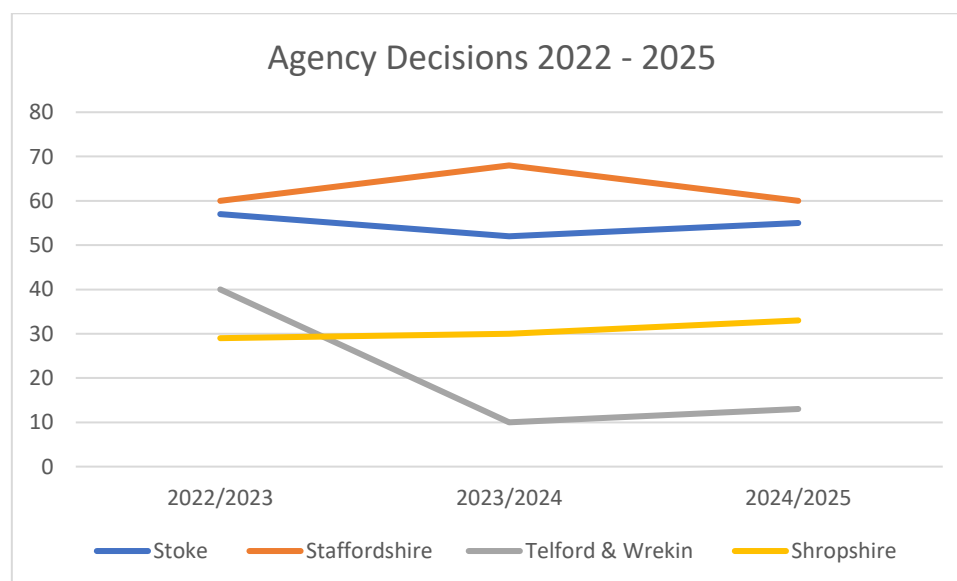
	Total CIC @ 31/03/2024	Total CIC @ 31/03/2025	% +/- Last 12 Months
Shrops	720	717	-0.4%
Staffs	1310	1308	-1.5%
Stoke	1151	1059	-7.8%
T&W	412	410	-0.5%
Total	3593	3494	-2.7%

When we look at the children in care numbers of children aged 0-5 years, we saw a decrease across 3 of our 4 partner local authorities and an overall decrease across Together4Children of 8%

	Total CIC Aged 0-5 @ 31/03/2024	Total CIC Aged 0-5 @ 31/03/2025	% +/- over 12 months
Shrops	189	170	-10.1%
Staffs	307	315	+8%
Stoke	308	261	-15%
T&W	85	72	-15.3%
Total	889	818	-8%

3.2 Agency Decisions for Children's Plans of Adoption & Placement Orders

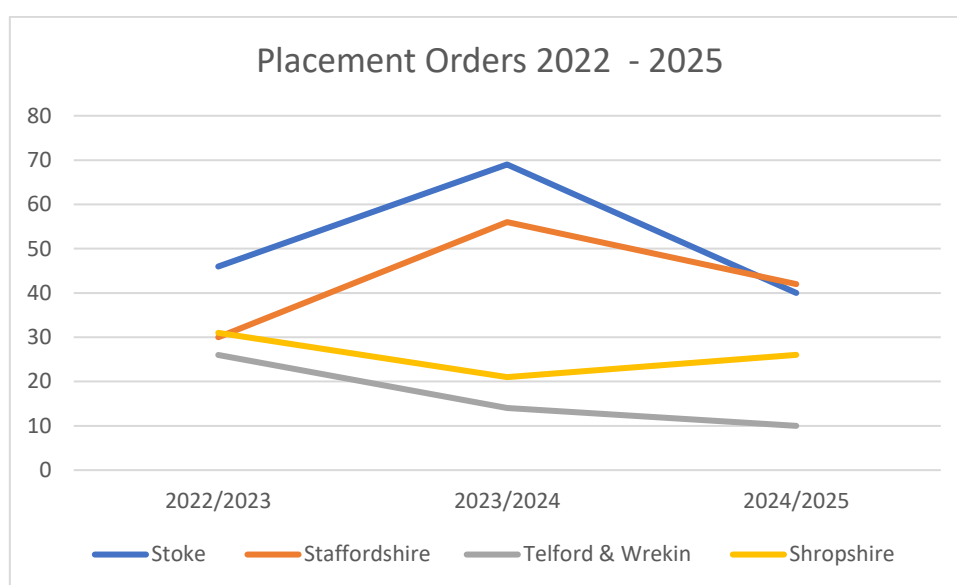
The decision to place a child for adoption is recognised as being one of the most significant decisions about a child's life that a Local Authority makes through the discharging of their statutory children's social work duties. Together4Children supports senior managers in our partner Local Authorities by providing formal Adoption Agency Advice for all children where a plan of adoption is proposed.



During 2024-2025, Together4Children saw an overall increase of only 1 agency decision from the previous year. The line chart illustrates that Telford & Wrekin saw a significant decrease in numbers, going from 40 agency decisions in 2022-2023 to 10 in 2023-2024.

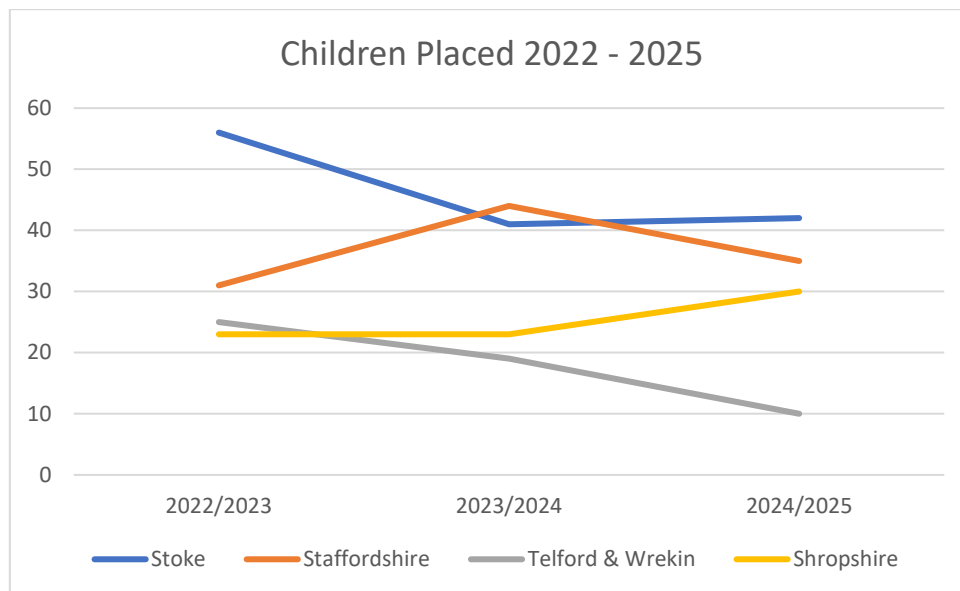
A total of **161** agency decisions were made in 2024-2025 compared to **160** the previous year, a 0.6% increase. Nationally, there was an increase of 4% in children's agency decisions. (DfE's *Children looked after in England including Adoption 2024 data*)

Together4Children saw a decrease of **26%** in the number of Placement Orders granted by our Courts which provide legal authority to Local Authorities to place a child with prospective adopters; from **160** in 2023/24 to **118** in 2024/25. Three of the four partner local authorities saw a decrease, whilst Shropshire saw a slight increase from 21 in 2023/24 to 26 in 2024/25. Nationally, we saw a 4% decrease in Placement Orders granted during 2024-2025.



3.3 Children Placed for Adoption

The activity above has led to increasing numbers of children who need adoptive families to meet their needs for permanency through adoption. During the period 2024-2025 we have found homes for **117** children, an 8.5% decrease from **127** children placed for adoption during 2023-2024, with two of our Partner Local Authorities (Staffordshire and Telford & Wrekin) placing fewer children than the previous year. The year-on-year decrease in children placed in Telford & Wrekin, is a direct correlation to the reduction in children's agency decisions and Placement Orders.



3.4 Where we Found Homes for our Children in 2024-2025

One of the main aims of Together4Children is to ensure that, where we can, we find homes for our children within our region. This supports good transitions, which we know are a critical part of the adoption journey for children and adoptive parents; and helps us to support children and their families into the future, without the need to transfer support arrangements at the statutory 3-year point, post Adoption Order.

Where no families are identified who can meet the needs of children within our region, we will always look quickly to other agencies across the Midlands and nationwide to ensure that we explore every possibility of finding the right families for our children in a timely way.

By utilising our existing pool of adopters, we were able to find homes for **88** children (75% of the total 117 children we placed) with our own Together4Children adopters.

75% of the children we placed for adoption during the year were placed with adoptive families from within Together4Children.

The table below shows where the adoptive families came from for those children who were matched with their new families and moved in moved into their new homes during 2024-2025.

Children Placed With:	Shrops	Staffs	Stoke	T&W	Total
T4C Adopters*	29	26	26	7	88
Other RAA/VAA Adopters**	1	9	16	3	29
% Children Placed within T4C	97%	74%	62%	70%	75%

* Adopters approved by one of the Local Authorities within the T4C Partnership.

** Adopters approved by another Regional Adoption Agency or by a Voluntary Adoption Agency

One of the ways we have been able to place our children closer to the region is via the Midlands Together Collaboration arrangements, where we seek to make potential adopters from the wider midland's region available for children. This means that when we do have to look outside of Together4Children for prospective adopters we are able to draw on the resources of agencies within the wider region.

Whilst every effort is made across our regional family finding team to place children with Together4Children approved adopters, it is important to recognise that use of inter-agency adoption has always played a role in ensuring that suitable placements can be found for children to meet their needs in a timely way.

3.5 Early Permanence

Early Permanence is a child-centred practice that aims to ensure that those children unable to live safely with their birth families are placed with their permanent substitute families at the earliest opportunity, avoiding the need for multiple moves and the associated trauma of separation from, and loss of, attachment figures.

Throughout the year, Together4Children has worked closely with colleagues across the locality children's teams to develop Early Permanence practice, specifically around the use of 'Fostering for Adoption'.

In this model, the Local Authority is primarily progressing towards a decision for the care plan to be adoption, and family reunification appears unlikely based on known factors relating to birth family. The child is placed with prospective approved adopters who are also temporarily approved as foster carers for the specific child in question. In the event of a Placement Order being granted they could, subject to the outcome of a further legal and regulatory process, go on to adopt the child. They will also be prepared to support rehabilitation to birth family should that become the plan for the child.

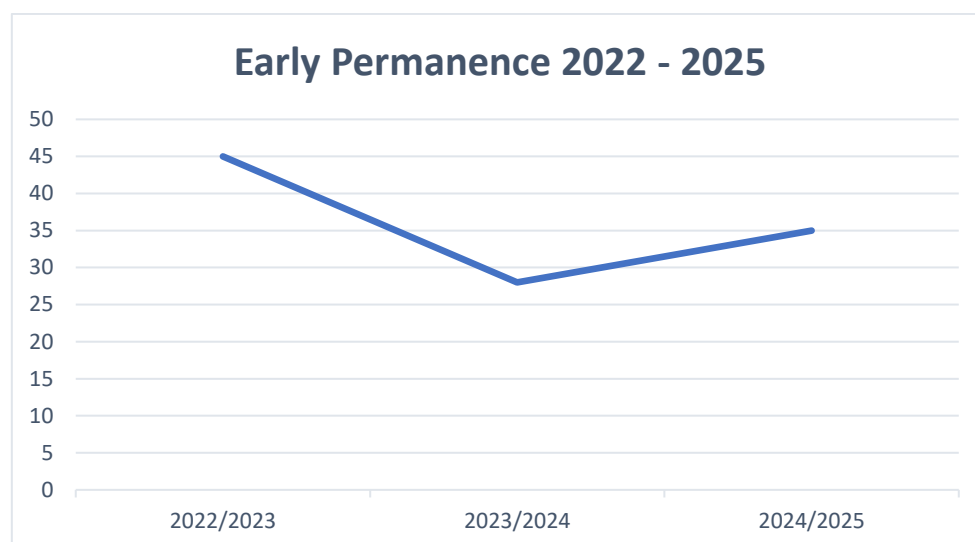


	Shrops	Staffs	Stoke	T&W	Total
Children Placed in 2023-2024	30	35	42	10	117
Early Permanence	8	11	15	1	35
% Children placed EP	27%	31%	36%	10%	30%

The table above shows the percentage of children placed in an early permanence arrangement, showing that Together4Children placed 30% of children via an early permanence arrangement. This is a pleasing increase of 8% from the previous year.

Where it is appropriate, Early Permanence is considered for all children across the region, and we continue to embed consistent practice across the partnership. As outlined in the adopter training activity, early permanence training is now mandatory for all prospective adopters and a priority for 2025-2026 will be to grow the number of adopters able to consider early permanence.

The below graph shows the increase from 2023/2025 in children placed via early permanence arrangements, but we are still not reaching the number from 2022/2023, where we placed 45 children via early permanence. This is indicative of a reduced number of adopters available and able to consider early permanence placements. National data indicates a 4% decrease in early permanence placements.



3.6 Timescales for Achieving Permanency for Our Children

A10: This is a national performance indicator which measures the average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family, adjusted for foster carer adoptions.

It is reported as both an aggregated figure averaged over the preceding 3 years (to account for the fact that a child's journey to adoption will normally take longer than 1 year to achieve), and against the reporting year.

A10 Indicator – 3-year Average	2020-2023	2021-2024	2022 - 2025
Target	426 days	426 days	426 days
England Average	480	475	475
Together4Children	488	495	491
Shropshire	421	465	438
Staffordshire	413	450	476
Stoke-on-Trent	548	568	510
Telford & Wrekin	553	498	539

The most recent national measure we have for this timescale across local authorities in England is 475 days.

From the table above we can see that the overall A10 indicator for the Together4Children region is 491 days, which is above the target number of days (426) and above the England average (475), though it has come down slightly. Shropshire remain below the England average across three years, and Staffordshire is in line with the England average. Whilst Stoke on Trent are above the target and the England average, they have achieved a reduction in their timeliness during the last 3 years, whilst Telford & Wrekin have seen an increase. It is important to understand the context for this, as often it can be due to the circumstances of individual children.

By comparing year on year performance, we can see the general trend in terms of the average time it takes for a child to move in with their adoptive family.

We can see from the table below that 3 of the 4 Together4Children partner councils have seen a positive reduction in timeliness during 2024 – 2025, with Shropshire seeing a significant reduction of 207 days and with Stoke on Trent seeing reduction of 115 days. Telford & Wrekin have seen an increase of 80 days, but this is due to individual children that have affected the overall average. We will continue to work with partners across the region to ensure that we support practice improvements to reduce the overall time it takes for a child entering care to move in with their permanent family.

A10 Indicator Trend	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024 - 2025	Trend
Shropshire	440	507	300	↓
Staffordshire	505	468	454	↓
Stoke-on-Trent	463	574	459	↓
Telford & Wrekin	635	464	544	↑

A2: This is the second key national indicator and measures the average time between an LA receiving court authority to place a child (Placement Order) and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family.

A2 Indicator – 3-year Average	2020-2023	2021-2024	2022 - 2025
Target	121 days	121 days	121 days
England Average	197	197	205
Together4Children	221	218	214
Shropshire	176	180	174
Staffordshire	199	202	195
Stoke-on-Trent	211	258	237
Telford & Wrekin	282	234	249

The most recent average timescale measure we have for local authorities in England is **205** days (ASGLB Q4 Data Set 2024-2025). At **214**, the overall timescales for the Together4Children region are longer, but within range of the England average of **205** days and the target of **121** days.

Again, it is reported as both an aggregated figure averaged over the preceding 3 years and for the 12 months of the current reporting period. This indicator is a measure of how quickly we can find the right families for children once the court has given us authority to place for adoption. It reflects the capacity of services to 'family find' for children, and the sufficiency of adopters locally, regionally, and nationally.

A2 Indicator Trend	2022-2023	2023 - 2024	2024 - 2025	Trend
Shropshire	179	192	167	↓
Staffordshire	182	209	178	↓
Stoke-on-Trent	148	304	224	↓
Telford & Wrekin	208	254	314	↑

We know that some children wait longer than others because finding families who want to adopt older children, children in sibling groups, and children with additional needs is more difficult. It also takes longer to find families for children where there are considerations around ethnicity and faith.

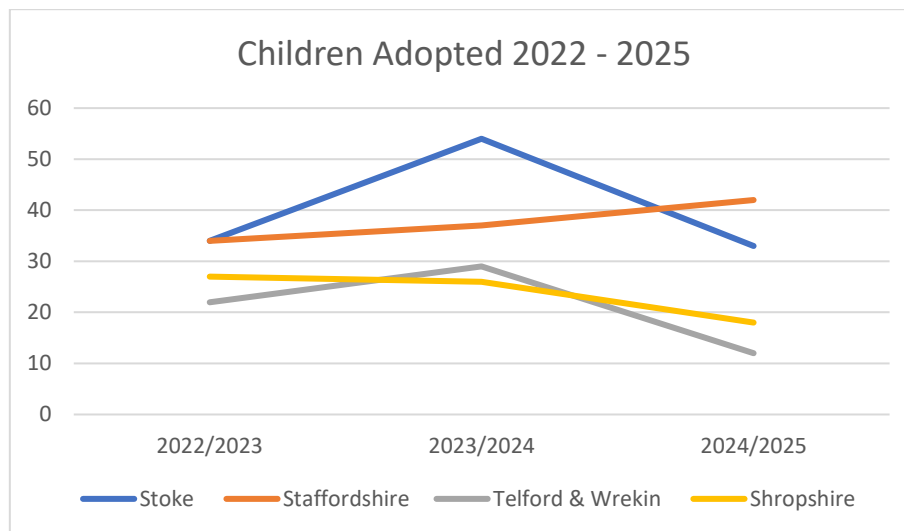
The above table indicates that 3 of the 4 local authorities have seen a positive decrease in timeliness, whilst Telford & Wrekin have seen an increase of 60 days.

It is important to note that we are ambitious when it comes to finding permanent homes for our children, even when we know that it will be a challenge. This ambition for our children can also lead to drops in overall performance measures (where it has taken us longer to find a family that can meet a child's complex needs, for example). We know of children where this has been the case in Telford & Wrekin, which has impacted on their overall timeliness.

To understand the reality behind these indicators in detail, Together4Children partners look at the unique journeys of the individual children that together, make up the cohort that this indicator relates to. This analysis is explored in more detail in the localised information in separate locality reports.

3.7 Children Adopted During 2024-2025

105 Adoption Orders were granted for children across our region, securing their legal permanence within their new families. This was a decrease of 41 from the previous year. Nationally, there continues to be more Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) granted than Adoption Orders granted, with SGOs accounting for 58% of permanence orders.



The graph above shows that 3 of the 4 local authorities within Together4Children have seen a reduction in the number of adoption orders granted, bar Staffordshire who have continued to see a year-on-year increase since 2022. Of the 105 children adopted, 9 children were from an ethnic minority background, 38 children were part of a sibling group, and 15 children were over 5 years of age.

3.8 Overview of Regional Family Finding Activity

Our Regional Family Finding team utilises a variety of resources to support them to find the right families for our children:

- Regional Matching Meetings.
- Linkmaker (a web-based tool used to support family finding regionally and nationally).
- Exchange days & Activity days (Regional/Pan-regional/national events where adopters can find out more about and potentially meet children who we are family finding for).
- Use of professional relationships and networking opportunities.

Since the launch of Together4Children we have been working hard to embed regional family finding arrangements, implement new working practices, integrate IT systems, and develop our pan-regional networks.

On the rare occasions that we are unable to find homes for children with our own approved adopters, we work across a collaboration of five Regional Adoption Agencies and three Voluntary Adoption Agencies based in the Midlands to try and identify homes for our children, before considering prospective adopters from across the whole of the country. This means that we avoid placing children at a significant distance, which supports good transitions, and helps us to provide the right support to families in the critical early stages.

3.9 Children with a Plan of Adoption on 31 March 2024

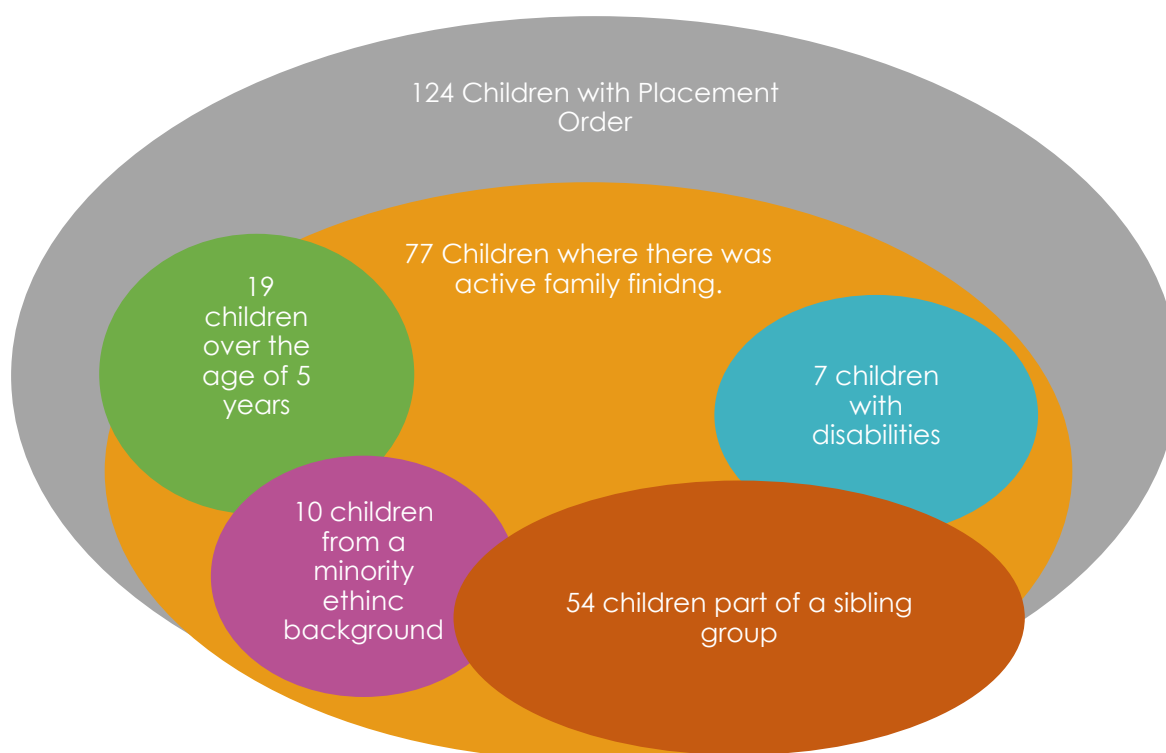
At the end of the current reporting year, there were **180** children across our region where Agency Decision Maker's across our partner local authorities had decided on a plan of adoption.

Of these, **124** children had a Placement Order granted by the Court, giving their agency the authority to place them for adoption. These children had not yet been formally matched with their adoptive family (which involves an Adoption Panel making a recommendation approving the match, and an Agency Decision Maker agreeing).

Of those **124** children with a Placement Order, who had not yet been matched with their adopters, on the 31 March 2024:

- **16** children had been linked with their prospective family and were progressing to a match.
- **8** children had their plan changed away from adoption and were awaiting their placement order being revoked
- **23** children where family finding had stopped for another reason, such as on-going assessment

This left **77** children for whom we were actively looking for an adoptive family. Of these children, 54 were part of a sibling group, 19 were over the age of 5 years, 10 were from a minority ethnic background and 7 of the children had disabilities. These are known as harder to place characteristics. Together4Children are aspirational for children, but it can take longer to find families for children when there are additional considerations.



3.10 Regional Overview of Placement Disruptions

A placement disruption is defined as an adoptive placement that comes to an end before the granting of an Adoption Order. These usually occur with the first weeks or initial months following the placement of the child with their prospective adopter. Whenever an adoption disruption occurs, a meeting is conducted with all relevant parties, and a disruption report is compiled by an experienced adoption manager who was either external to, or independent of, the children's services practitioners and teams involved in the Care Planning, matching and placement decisions. The learning from placement disruption is fed-back within the agency, with the adoption panel, and with the social work teams and practitioners involved.

Across the region, during 2024-202, 2 placements disrupted affecting 2 children, both of whom were placed with inter – agency adopters. Whilst we would never want children to experience a further change in their care, this represents a relatively low rate of disruption as a region.

T4C Region Placement Disruptions 2023-2024	T4C Adopters	Inter-Agency
No. of Placement Disruptions	0	2

4.0 Together4Children Regional Adoption Panel Activity

Our Regional Panels came together in December 2021, and we have been continuing to integrate and embed activity to fully support our regional adoption arrangements throughout 2024-2025.

Over the year a total of **47** adoption panels were convened across the partnership. Our adoption panels are fully combined and operate from the central hub of Together4Children, and each panel hears matches and approvals from across the partnership.

Over the year our panels have reviewed and made recommendations upon 117 matches for children with their prospective adopters, 74 adopter household approvals, 4 de-registration and 2 relinquished children. In total, Adoption Panels across the region heard 202 cases in the year 2024 - 2025.

We have three Adoption Panel Advisors and three Independent Panel Chairs who are allocated to panels. We have also appointed new panel members across our panels and have completed a process to bring our Central List of all panel members together. Panel members and Panel Chairs regularly come together for development sessions, which are held bi-monthly and enable them to discuss current themes, topics of interest and areas of practice/research which will contribute to their development within adoption panel.

Alongside making recommendations about the approval of prospective adopters, and matches for children with their adopters, adoption panels provide vital quality assurance feedback to the Regional Adoption Agency. This includes whether the

requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 have been met, and whether there is a thorough, rigorous, and fair approach across the service in the assessment of whether a child should be placed for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the proposed placement.

Our Quality Assurance Feedback form has been developed and ensures that meaningful reflection and analysis of the documents provided is gathered. This is then fed back to social workers through supervision with their respective managers in the Partnership.

Across all panels, we ask our members to consider: Prospective Adopter Reports, Matching Reports, Child Permanence Reports, Adoption Placement Reports and Adoption Support Plans. Quality Assurance feedback is obtained by Adoption Panel members prior to panel. Forms are sent out with the paperwork and then collated by the panel advisor after panel. Any additional comments can be added to the quality assurance form by the panel advisor.

Panel have highlighted the following as consistent areas of strength:

- Adopters come across in person as they do in the PAR
- Analysis and Reflection is demonstrated by the social workers throughout the PAR
- Social Workers can support the adopters when needed and answer questions panel may have
- Matching paperwork enables a good sense of the child and how the adopters can meet the needs of the children
- The UEA model of introductions is being implemented across the partnership
- Child Permanence Reports are updated and include recent photographs of the child. Most of the Child Permanence Reports include photographs of siblings and parents which panel have commented will be important as the child grows up
- Keeping in touch plans have usually been well considered and are becoming more child led.

Panel have commented on the following regarding areas for development:

- Where a child has been placed under Early Permanence it would be helpful for there to be more input from the fostering service as to how the Fostering Standards have been met and their overall view of the placement. It could be through a report or through the fostering social worker attending panel.
- How diversity is covered within reports could be further developed although is improving

Whilst opportunities exist to further develop this aspect of our reporting, a sample of the information collated over the year gives an indication of the overall good quality of adoption practice across the region.

4.0 Together4Children Regional Adoption Support

It is recognised that early life adversity impacts children developmentally, emotionally, cognitively and socially and requires therapeutic support for children to thrive. We know that some of the most valued support for adopters and their children comes from other adopters. Through our core services and innovative partnerships, we aim to offer a range of peer support options so that everyone can be a part of our adopter community.

Where families need something more, we have skilled and experienced, multi-disciplinary practitioners on hand to provide specialist support. Working alongside key partners, we can support access to therapeutically trained practitioners, play therapists, social workers, clinical psychologists, and others with specific skills and qualifications.

We know that adoption is a lifelong journey, and we always aim to provide the right support for children and families at the right time.

4.2 Permanency Teams Early Support Offer

Our three locality Permanency Support Teams based in Shrewsbury, Stoke on Trent and Uttoxeter deliver a range of statutory and other adoption support provision across our region. These include:

- Signposting to other appropriate services
- Targeted information, advice and guidance regarding behavioural, attachment and other difficulties
- Advice and guidance via the Together4Children Virtual School Network
- Support with contact between an adopted child and his or her birth family (post-box/direct contact)
- Meetings, events, and activities to enable groups of adopters and adoptive children to get together and support each other.
- Training to help adopters to meet the needs of their adoptive child.

4.3 Referral & Assessment Activity

Where more specific support is required, our specialist practitioners undertake an assessment of need. During the year, our teams completed **397** adoption support assessments, working directly with children and their families to identify and review their support needs and plan the right interventions. This is a slight decrease of 12 (3%) from the previous year.

Adoption Support Referrals 2024-2025				
	Staffs	Stoke	Joint Hub	T4C
Referrals Allocated	221	75	101	397
Allocated Children	209	90	219	518

Our teams made **506** applications to the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) for the specialist therapeutic interventions required to meet needs identified for adopted children through our assessments. This is nearly a 12% decrease from the previous year, where 572 applications to the ASGSF were made. A small number of these applications (only 2%) were match funded with the local authority.

The table below shows that Staffordshire make nearly 60% of the overall number ASGSF applications.

Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Fund Referrals 2024-2025				
	Staffs	Stoke	Joint Hub	T4C
New Applications	300	69	137	506
Applications (match funded)	9	0	0	9

Our specialist practitioners have supported **123** adopted people to access their adoption records.

Access to Records	Staffs	Stoke	Joint Hub	T4C
New referrals	77	10	28	115
Referrals Allocated	98	10	15	123
Intermediary Services				
New referrals	9	0	0	9
Referrals Allocated	8	0	0	8

We understand the impact that the adoption of a child has on birth parents and the wider birth family during the adoption process itself, and for life. We work hard to ensure that we offer the right support to birth families that is independent of the local authority children's social work services.

This is a short extract from an adopted adult from a letter of thanks to one of our Permanency Support Teams.

Our support includes:

- Providing information about the process of adoption
- Signposting to other support services, such as housing, benefits, and counselling
- Face to face meetings or support over the phone.

"the care that was shown was so treasured and made what was at times a difficult journey, much more manageable"

- Helping birth parents and birth family members to consider information that they may wish the child to have in the future.
- Delivering birth family support groups
- Support with maintaining contact.

Over the year, our teams supported **2683** 'Post Box' exchanges, facilitating, and supporting the exchange of information between birth families and adoptive parents.

Post Box	Staffs	Stoke	Joint Hub	T4C
Post Box received	1380	866	1412	3658
Post Box exchanged	1111	579	993	2683

Throughout the year our teams have continued to deliver other important activities to support and bring together adopted children and their families including:

- Virtual Drop in Coffee Mornings
- Winter Support Event
- Toddler Groups
- Social Events and Woodland Walks

5.0 Together4Children Financial Information 2024-2025

The Partnership has faced some financial pressure within the central permanency hub this financial year, as identified in the table below, with a overspend of £77,681.

Whilst we are working hard to ensure that our provisions are delivered within budget, this year's financial outturn should be viewed in the context of the Together4Children partnership achieving adoption for a significantly higher number of children than when the partnership commenced.

	2024-2025 Budget	2024-2025 Outturn	Variance
Central Permanency Hub	£334,730	£421,110	£77,681

The overspend mainly relates to the costs of the panel chair and members £53,376, as a budget had not originally been set for 2024/25. The remaining overspend of £24,305 relates to in year agreements for specific posts to be recharged out to various partners.

Any expenditure incurred against the T4C Central Permanency Hub is fully recharged to partners based on agreed percentage splits.

Locality Permanency Hubs			
	2024 – 2025 Budget	2024 – 2025 Outturn	Variance
Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin	1,184,260	1,112,751	-71,509
Staffordshire	1,484,200	1,411,843	-72,357
Stoke -on-Trent	865,510	765,977	-99,533
Total	3,533,970	3,290,571	-243,399

The locality permanency hubs include the adoption assessment and permanency support teams. Costs for the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin locality hub (based in Shrewsbury) are shared across the two councils under arrangements that preceded the Together4Children Partnership.

The underspend totalling £243,399 reported for 2024-2025, is mainly due to all partners having significant underspends due to vacancies and maternity leave not being covered.

5.1 Inter-Agency Expenditure

The table below shows an overspend of £121,425 on interagency expenditure through to the end of the financial year.

Expenditure	Budget	Outturn	Variance
Inter-Agency:			
Staffordshire	143,960	260,924	116,964
Stoke-on-Trent	361,730	598,689	236,959
Shropshire	209,970	74,124	-135,846
Telford & Wrekin	270,000	173,348	-96,652
985,660	673,140	1,107,085	121,425

The overspend comes from only Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent, which is offset by underspend for Shropshire and Telford. This is in line with performance data, which shows that both Shropshire and Telford have placed the majority of their children with T4C adopters.

The table below shows a significant under-achievement of income for adopters approved by Staffordshire, against the target set for that locality hub. This is a historic budget target for Staffordshire, which is unachievable, but cannot be corrected as savings would need to be identified in other areas of the budget, to revise this target.

Income	Budget	Outturn	Variance
Inter-Agency:			
Staffordshire	-216,740	-32,051	184,689
Stoke-on-Trent	0	0	0
Shropshire	-31,000	0	31,000
Telford & Wrekin	0	0	0
T4C Total	-247,740	-32,051	215,689

The inter-agency budget is managed and maintained at a local level for each Partner authority within the T4C Partnership.

It is important to note that whilst the use of IA placements impacts as a significant one-off cost, overall costs are avoided where:

- a) A child's plan of adoption would otherwise not be achieved meaning that they would most likely remain in foster care.
- b) The timescales for a child moving in with their adoptive family is reduced, avoiding the on-going cost of maintaining the child in care.

6.0 Key Achievements 2024 – 2025

I. Renewed recruitment strategy

This year we have renewed our recruitment strategy and invested in modernising our enquiry process, to improve the experience of those who enquire with Together4Children. We have already started to see an increase in enquiries as a result of this work.

II. Continued to embed regional practice based on the UEA model

A moving on to adoption policy has been agreed and training across the region has been developed that is delivered on a rolling basis to social workers, foster carers and Independent Reviewing Officers.

III. Improved timeliness for children with a plan of adoption

We have worked hard to reduce the time it takes to match children with their permanent families. We have developed flowcharts that outline the process for matching children with adopters (internal and external to Together4Children) so that we improve consistency. This is ongoing work that we will continue to focus on during 2025 – 2026.

IV. Enhanced a sense of regional identity

We have implemented staff newsletters to improve the sense of shared identity and culture across staff within Together4Children. The newsletters provide an update of what is happening across the region, shares examples of best practice and research updates.

7.0 Key Priorities 2025 – 2026

I. Increase adopter sufficiency

We plan to continue to build upon the successful recruitment strategies used this year, to continue to increase our approval of adopter households. We want to:

- Continue to reach more people interested in adoption with accurate, open and honest information
- Use an evidence-based approach to 'what works' in communicating with people around adoption
- Promote adoption for children with complex needs
- Update the website with increased, relevant information
- Increase social media presence and digital content, including a diverse representation of adoption
- Ensure follow up and tracking of prospective adopters
- Include more adopters in recruitment and communication

II. Maintaining significant relationships

We know how important it is for all involved to get arrangements for keeping in touch right. This should start at the earliest point in the planning stages of a child's journey, but support should be available when it is needed right through an adopted person's life course.

III. Learning from disruptions

Though our disruption rate is low, when things do not go as planned, we can learn from this experience to prevent this happening again. It is important that learning from disruptions is improved across the regions for adoption social workers, family finders, children's social workers, panel members and agency decision makers.

IV. Timely Adoption Support

One of the main challenges we face is that the demand for adoption support services is exceeding the resources currently available. Addressing this imbalance will be a priority, to enable the partnership to continue to provide high-quality support to all adoptive families.

Sarah Havill

Head of Together4Children Permanency Partnership

08/09/2025

Contributors

Wider Leadership Team T4C

Senior Leadership Team T4C

Performance Leads

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Residential Service Annual Report 2025

Author- Daniel Old, Residential Service Manager

Overview

This report intends to give an overview of Shropshire Councils Residential Service for the year 2025. Shropshire Council's Residential Service operates 6 children's homes, all with their own specific Statement of Purpose as part of an overall strategy aligned with children's services and the local authorities key priorities for Shropshire children. The report will explore key areas for each home.

Vision, Mission and Values

Our Vision: We aspire to ensure all of our children have the opportunity to live in a home that enables them to achieve their full potential.

Our Mission: To provide our children with nurturing and homely environments where they can thrive with people that care.

Our Values:

Pride- We take pride in achievements

Acceptance- We care for others unconditionally.

Resolve- We are committed

Empathy- We show compassion

Nurturing- We create growth through support and challenge

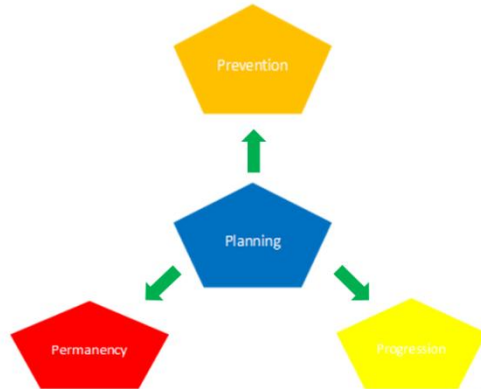
Taking responsibility- We take ownership

Adventurous- We find creative and innovative solutions.

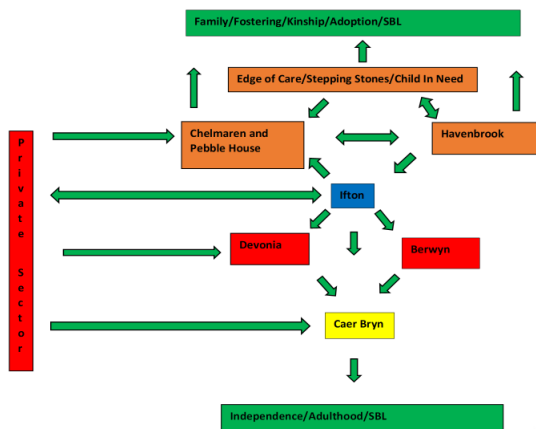
Loyalty- We are genuine and honest.

Our strategy (interdependency framework): Prevention, Planning, Permanency and Progression

The four P's



Interdependency framework



Chelmaren



Statement of Purpose:

Age range: 7-17

Profile:

Short to Medium Term

Children on the edge of care who need intervention to remain living with family.

Children looked after within the residential private sector with a plan to return to living with family or alternative setting outside of residential care.

Support package: Multi-disciplinary team working around the child and family.

Assessment of what needs to change for the child to return to the family home/alternative setting. Clear plan created with the child and family to support the return to family home/alternative setting.

Ofsted Inspection:

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 March 2025

Rating:

Overall experiences and progress of children- **Outstanding**

How well children are helped and protected- **Good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers- **Good**

Report Feedback:

“The managers and team of carers are excellent advocates for children’s education, understanding how to stimulate children’s enthusiasm for learning. One child is making exceptional progress in a mainstream school after education professionals were considering specialist education.”

“Carers are resourceful in helping children to achieve their ambitions, such as visiting football stadiums and meeting their favourite players. These experiences are inspiring and motivating for children.”

Carers are dynamic advocates for children’s equality, diversity and inclusion. Carers support children to express and be proud of their diversity.

General Overview:

Chelmaren has undertaken a significant change in Statement of Purpose to align with Stepping Stones, working in a multi-disciplinary approach to enable children in stepping down to foster care or re-unify with parents. The two services work closely together, children are supported by stepping stones workers assisting in progressing care plans and a psychologist undertaking consultation with the team to promote individualised therapeutic practice. Ofsted recognised Chelmaren as an Outstanding home for the outcomes they achieve for young people. The home is focussed on further embedding the team around a child approach with help from an educational psychologist to input therapeutic practice.

Key outcomes for children:

Child A - 11 Years Old

Previous placement: Family Home, serious concerns regarding domestic violence, physical abuse and substance use.

Step down process: Moved to Havenbrook for immediate short break with sibling. No Foster carers came forwards to look after the siblings. Moved to Chelmaren with a clear transition plan between the homes. Chelmaren assessed needs and supported change, giving opportunity to explore Foster Care again. Child A moved to live with a foster carer whom he had a strong established relationship with.

Time at Chelmaren: 1 year 2 months

What is happening now: Child A has transitioned to a foster family.

Outcomes: Child A is safe from abuse. Child A will return to a family environment, Child A’s needs and trauma linked behaviour are reduced, Child A has had opportunity to develop permanent relationships with people who care.

Pebble House



Statement of Purpose:

Age range: 5-12

Profile:

Short to Medium Term

Children on the edge of care who need intervention to remain living with family.

Children looked after within the residential private sector with a plan to return to living with family or alternative setting outside of residential care.

Support package: Multi-disciplinary team working around the child and family.

Assessment of what needs to change for the child to return to the family home/alternative setting. Clear plan created with the child and family to support the return to family home/alternative setting.

Ofsted Rating:

Inspection dates: 21 and 22 May 2025

Rating:

Overall experiences and progress of children- **Outstanding**

How well children are helped and protected- **Outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers- **Outstanding**

Report Feedback:

“Children living in this home make exceptional progress from their starting points and have positive day-to-day experiences. Children receive care from extremely committed staff who are child centred and value the open and honest relationships they build with children.”

“Staff undertake high-quality, individualised and purposeful work with children.”

“Managers are committed to ensuring children receive the highest standards of individualised care, not just for now but in the future.”

General Overview:

A business case was agreed in October 2023 to expand the Residential Service further and bolster it's provision for younger children as part of an early intervention/prevention strategy. Pebble House looks after children aged 5-12, aligning with Stepping Stones, working in a multi-disciplinary approach to enable children in stepping down to foster care or re-unify with parents. Pebble House was registered by Ofsted in October 2024. Within it's first Ofsted inspection Pebble House achieved Outstanding in all areas. The home has maintained a consistent staff team, where innovative and creative practice has been highlighted as a strength in all external scrutiny. Pebble House is currently looking after two siblings who are now ready for foster care awaiting the right home to come forwards, and another child with a reunification plan back to family home.

Key outcomes for children:

Child B and C – 6 and 13 years old

Previous placement: Foster care, serious safeguarding concerns relating to violence and intra-familial sexual behaviour.

Step down process: Moved as siblings to Pebble House to ensure the children could be kept together.

Time at Pebble House: Ongoing

What is happening now: The children are living at Pebble House, a range of professionals have worked with the children to help assess and address needs.

Outcomes: Home has given opportunity for the siblings to stay together in their home county and complete necessary work needed for a future in foster care. The children are ready for Foster Care. The children have achieved significant outcomes in education, speech and language and key developmental milestones.

Havenbrook



Statement of Purpose:

Age range: 7-17

Profile:

Short breaks and Immediate Short Breaks

Children who are struggling to cope with living in the family home where having breaks away from the family home can facilitate work to be done with families and the child; preventing escalation to care proceedings.

Children that need an immediate safe place to stay whilst the local authority intervenes to make safe arrangements for them at home or in alternative arrangements (up to 17 days).

Support package: Skilled workers address needs of the child in the home through a clear placement plan. Social work teams create a clear plan with the family to address any difficulties in the child living at home.

Ofsted Rating:

Inspection dates: 28 and 29 January 2025

Rating:

Overall experiences and progress of children: **Good**

How well children are helped and protected: **Good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: **Good**

Report Feedback:

“The home’s nurturing ethos supports the children to make excellent progress in many areas of their lives and develop lifelong skills and interests that build their self-esteem and sense of identity.”

“Children’s views are central to the running of the home. Carers consult the children in all aspects of their care and support the children to take increasing control of decisions that affect them.”

“Children grow in confidence and self-esteem. Some develop skills that increase their independence. Others are able to communicate their needs or socialise with other children with whom they can share interests, hobbies and enjoy social time.”

General Overview:

Havenbrook continues to offer short breaks to children on the edge of care as part of the service early intervention/prevention strategy. Havenbrook also provides children with an immediate short break which allows the local authority the option to plan around a child when options are limited due to short notice changes. The home continues to place emphasis on providing clarity of purpose and a targeted intervention plan in place for children which supports them to maintain safety and stability. A new Registered Manager has brought forwards ideas which has strengthened the culture in this area.

Key outcomes for children:

Child D– 9 Years Old

Previous placement: Child D lives at home with his mum, step father and brother.

Support process: Child D began having short breaks as part of the plan to keep him safe and address concerns in his family home. There were concerns about parents leaving the children for long lengths of time to travel to other parts of the country, not meeting the children’s basic care needs and lack of appropriate supervision in the community. The support plan helps to ensure Child D can remain living at home, as well as giving a safe space for professionals to ensure intervention work can be completed.

Outcomes: Child D is able to live at home with support, rather than becoming looked after and needing to be looked after in care.

Devonia



Statement of Purpose:

Age range: 12-17

Profile:

Looked after children with complex needs that mean they need to continue to be looked after in residential care and external local authority options are limited.

Children who have experienced or are likely to experience multiple home breakdowns due to escalating risks.

Support package: Skilled workers look after the children in a small group environment to deliver stability through an individualised care package.

Ofsted Rating:

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 October 2024

Rating:

Overall experiences and progress of children: **Good**

How well children are helped and protected: **Good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: **Requires Improvement**

Report Feedback:

“The child’s education attendance improved significantly. This is because staff provided a consistent and stable environment where the child felt more certain about their daily routines.”

“The interim management team worked hard to implement routines, boundaries and clear expectations with the child. This contributed towards the child feeling increasingly safe and secure.”

“Staff say they feel supported and enjoy working in the home. They feel that the

approach of the interim management team has had a positive impact on their practice and the progress of the child living in the home.”

General Overview:

Devonia went through a number of challenges in 2024. Following a Safeguarding disclosure from a young person, Ofsted increased oversight of the home which resulted in a number of issues in practice being identified. The service quickly took action to resolve improvement areas and implement change. Within 12 weeks all areas of concern were addressed and the home was rated Good with Ofsted within its Ofsted inspection. Following a child moving on from the home in October 2024, Devonia became non-operational whilst the service works hard build staffing levels to ensure it can begin to look after children again in a safe and planned way.

Berwyn



Statement of Purpose:

Age range: 12-17

Profile:

Looked after children with complex needs that mean they need to continue to be looked after in residential care and external local authority options are limited.

Children who have experienced or are likely to experience multiple home breakdowns due to escalating risks.

Support package: Skilled workers look after the children in a small group environment to deliver stability through an individualised care package.

Ofsted Inspection:

11 and 12 March 2025

Rating:

Overall experiences and progress of children: **Outstanding**

How well children are helped and protected: **Outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: **Outstanding**

Report Feedback:

“Children living in this home make exceptional progress from their starting points and have positive day-to-day experiences. They receive care from extremely committed staff who are child centred.”

“Staff and professionals work collaboratively to help children to be open and talk about their experiences. Children are regularly encouraged to express their feelings and wishes through a variety of methods such as informal conversations, monthly newsletters, one-to-one sessions and debriefs.”

“Managers are highly ambitious for children and the quality of care that they receive. They strive to ensure continuous improvements to children’s care, which helps support children to make exceptional progress.”

General Overview:

Berwyn continues to provide a small, homely environment for children with more complex needs. There has been a change in the children living in the home, with children moving on to more independent accommodation. There has also been changes in management of the home. Despite periods of change, the home has maintained excellence in its practice, highlighted through all external scrutiny. Trauma linked behaviour of the children living there has reduced considerably, one has a plan to step down to foster care and the other a reunification plan back to home, this is exceptional for both children given concerns for them previously.

Key outcomes for a child at Berwyn:

Child E - 12 years old

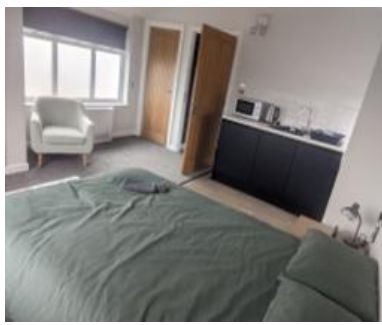
Previous placement: Chelmaren

Step down process: It became apparent that Chelmaren was a difficult environment for Child E to live in due to her individual needs and that she required a longer term home to give enough time to help her. A transition plan between the homes helped Child E to build relationships and experience a positive move. Since living in the home risks for Child E have reduced considerably, allowing professionals to consider a reunification plan home and begin work towards this.

Time at Berwyn: 9 months

Outcomes: Child E feels safe, happy and secure in a place she can call home. A plan is in place to help her return to live with family.

Caer Bryn



Statement of Purpose:

Age range: 16-17

Profile:

Children with a plan towards independence who need additional support to achieve this. Children living out of the county who would benefit from re-integration within the local community before independence.

Support package: Specialist environment designed to support independence skills. Team of skilled workers to assist and support children to build independence skills through an individualised placement plan.

Ofsted Inspection:

10 and 11 September 2024

Rating:

Overall experiences and progress of children: **Good**

How well children are helped and protected: **Good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: **Good**

Report feedback:

“Children receive individualised care. Staff understand the children’s needs and the support they require to progress in all areas of their development.”

“Children develop their independence with support from staff. This includes practical skills, such as cooking, budgeting and keeping their bedrooms clean. Children learn how to live safely in the community.”

“When children share concerns, staff support them to explore their views and come to resolutions safely.”

General Overview:

Caer Bryn was registered by Ofsted in January 2024, within its first inspection in September it was rated Good in all areas. Caer Bryn has looked after a number of young people, supporting them on their journey to more independent living. Children have left the home prepared for work, education and adulthood. The home experienced some change in management due to maternity leave, this was supported internally and led to continuity of quality of care which was recognised by Ofsted.

Key outcomes for a child at Caer Bryn:

Child I - 18 years old

Previous placement: high-cost placement, 1:1 staffing, reporting high risks and unlikely to cope with independence.

Step down process: Moved to Caer Bryn. Reduced support over time; managing medication, supervision levels, unsupervised time with friends. Engaged in key independence skills; cooking, laundry, budgeting. Education promoted.

Time at Caer Bryn: 1 year 3 months

What is happening now: Child I moved from Caer Bryn to the supported accommodation attached to the home with continuing support from the team within established relationships. Child I was able to explore his independence from a safe a secure base with support when faced with any challenges. Child I celebrated his 18th birthday with the Caer Bryn team and was supported to undertake qualifications for employment. Child I moved on to live with his dad.

Outcomes: Child I is better prepared for independent living and has an understanding of how to keep himself safe. Child I is able to live with his family, attend work and has he has a support network around him.

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