Shropshire Council
Legal and Democratic Services
Guildhall,
Frankwell Quay,
Shrewsbury
SY3 8HQ

Date: Tuesday, 25 November 2025

Committee:
Cabinet

Date: Wednesday, 3 December 2025
Time: 10.30 am
Venue: The Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury, SY3 8HQ

You are requested to attend the above meeting. The Agenda is attached

There will be some access to the meeting room for members of the press and public, but this will be limited. If you wish to attend the meeting please email democracy@shropshire.gov.uk to check that a seat will be available for you.

Please click here to view the livestream of the meeting on the date and time stated on the agenda

The recording of the event will also be made available shortly after the meeting on the Shropshire Council Youtube Channel Here

Tim Collard Service Director – Legal, Governance and Planning

Members of Cabinet
Heather Kidd
Alex Wagner
Bernie Bentick
Roger Evans
Andy Hall
Ruth Houghton
James Owen
Rob Wilson
David Vasmer
David Walker

Your Committee Officer is:

Ashley Kendrick Democratic Services Officer
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AGENDA

1 Apologies for Absence

2 Disclosable Interests

Members are reminded that they must declare their disclosable pecuniary interests and other registrable or non-registrable interests in any matter being considered at the meeting as set out in Appendix B of the Members' Code of Conduct and consider if they should leave the room prior to the item being considered. Further advice can be sought from the Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting.

3 Minutes

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2025.

TO FOLLOW

4 Public Question Time

To receive any questions from members of the public, notice of which has been given in accordance with Procedure Rule 14. Deadline for notification is not later than 12 noon on Thursday 27 November 2025.

5 Member Question Time

To receive any questions from Members of the Council. Deadline for notification is not later than 12 noon on Thursday 27 November 2025.

6 Scrutiny Items

a **Scrutiny Item – Report of the Station Gyratory (LUF2) Task & Finish Group**
Lead Member – Councillor Ed Potter, Chair of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Lead Officer – Claire Braddock, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

REPORT TO FOLLOW

b **Scrutiny Item - Improvement Plan**
To receive a verbal update from the Chair of the Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Contact – Councillor David Minnery

7 All Age Autism Strategy 2025 - 2030 (Pages 1 - 128)

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

Lead Officer - Laura Tyler, Service Director - Commissioning

8 **Improvement Plan** (Pages 129 - 184)

Lead Member – Councillor Heather Kidd, Leader

Lead Officer – Rachel Robinson, Director of Public Health

9 **People Plan** (Pages 185 - 228)

Lead Member – Councillor Heather Kidd, Leader

Lead Officer – Rachel Robinson, Director of Public Health

10 **Financial Monitoring Period 7**

Lead Member – Councillor Roger Evans, Portfolio Holder for Finance

Lead Officer – James Walton, Executive Director (S151)

REPORT TO FOLLOW

11 **Treasury Management Update Quarter 2 2025/26** (Pages 229 - 252)

Lead Member – Councillor Roger Evans, Portfolio Holder for Finance

Lead Officer – James Walton, Executive Director (S151)

12 **Treasury Strategy 2025/26 Mid-Year Review** (Pages 253 - 276)

Lead Member – Councillor Roger Evans, Portfolio Holder for Finance

Lead Officer – James Walton, Executive Director (S151)

13 **Fees and Charges Pricing Policy** (Pages 277 - 306)

Lead Member – Councillor Roger Evans, Portfolio Holder for Finance

Lead Officer – James Walton, Executive Director (S151)

14 **Pre-Budget Report**

Lead Member – Councillor Heather Kidd, Leader

Lead Officer – James Walton, Executive Director (S151)

REPORT TO FOLLOW

15 **Setting the Council Tax Taxbase for 2026/27** (Pages 307 - 336)

Lead Member – Councillor Roger Evans, Portfolio Holder for Finance

Lead Officer – James Walton, Executive Director (S151)

16 **Children's Services Annual Reports 2024-25** (Pages 337 - 648)

Lead Member – Councillor Andy Hall, Portfolio Holder for Children and Education

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

17 **Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement 2025**

Lead Member – Councillor David Walker, Portfolio Holder for Planning

Lead Officer - Eddie West, Planning Policy and Strategy Manager

REPORT TO FOLLOW

18 **Update on the School Library Service (SLS)**

Lead Member – Councillor Andy Hall, Portfolio Holder for Children and Education

Lead Officer – David Shaw, Director of Children's Services

REPORT TO FOLLOW

19 **Exclusion of Press and Public**

To resolve that, in accordance with the provisions of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and Paragraph 10.4 [3] of the Council's Access to Information Rules, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items

20 **Exempt Minutes**

To confirm the exempt minutes from the meeting held on 19 November 2025.

TO FOLLOW

21 **Date of Next Meeting**

To note that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 21 January 2026.

Cabinet
Wednesday 3rd December 2025

Item

Public

All Age Autism Strategy 2025 - 2030

Responsible Officer:	Laura Tyler		
email:	Laura.tyler@shropshire.gov.uk	Tel:	01743 253178
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Cllr Ruth Houghton		

1. Synopsis

Public consultation reviewed the recommendations and vision of Shropshire's All-Age Autism Strategy 2025–2030. Cabinet is asked to consider the recommendations below, which align to the Shropshire Plan and embed the strategy supporting autistic people of all ages.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 The All-Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030 recognises autism as a life-long condition, updating Shropshire's adult only Autism strategy 2016 – 2020 and aligning with the National All Age Autism Strategy 2021-2026. The strategy sets out a vision for systemic and cultural change to create a county where autistic people of all ages are understood, supported and empowered to thrive.

2.2 The strategy reflects the significant shift in trajectory for autism nationally, and locally, the increased awareness and understanding and importantly the impact autism has on the delivery of our services. Nationally the prevalence of autism has increased from 1:700 to 3-4% of the population. Referrals for autism assessment in Shropshire have seen an

increase of 107% for Children & Young People and a 45% increase in adult referrals between August 2024 & August 2025.

2.3 The Shropshire All Age Autism Strategy 2025–2030 sets out a bold vision for Shropshire to become an inclusive county where autistic people of all ages are welcomed, supported, and valued for their unique strengths. Systemic goals have been identified throughout the strategy which details recommendations across the key domains of Heath and Assessment, Education, Employment, Housing and Social Care and the Criminal Justice system. The strategy presents a shift to needs-led support for parent carers, families and adults and a shift to early intervention and prevention to reduce deterioration in well-being that can include social isolation, stigma, lack of independence, poor mental health, not achieving educational potential, low employment, supported living and social care needs and a vulnerability to the criminal justice system. The strategy presents an opportunity to address the systemic challenges, to fully understand the impact of autism across Shropshire's population and services, to appreciate the financial and workforce capacity burden it places on the delivery of our services and recognise that we need to act now to drive, and enable, positive change for autistic people in our county.

2.4 The updated strategy is fully aligned with The Shropshire Plan, and aligns with the new direction priority outcomes to implement the national children's social care reforms and provision of high quality social care for vulnerable adults, through supporting autistic people of all ages to live healthy and fulfilling lives; the strategy commits to a healthy organisation by focusing on data-driven, and evidence based, service provision and close collaboration across sectors. It emphasises the importance and value of lived experience, co-producing services with the autistic community, and creating clear, accessible information to improve how people navigate available support. The strategy proposes measures that help autistic adults live independently and enable families and carers to participate more actively in the workforce. This includes providing accessible housing, easing service navigation for carers and encouraging voluntary and peer-led employment opportunities within the community.

Embracing the Shropshire Plan priorities reinforce the Council's broader vision of a healthier, more inclusive Shropshire with positive impact on the local economy and local organisations.

2.5 The strategic objectives set out a broad vision for cultural and systemic change requiring a joined-up systemic approach to drive positive change, enabling autistic people to thrive in their communities, schools and employment, with equal opportunity and ambition, to lead happy, fulfilling and independent lives.

The all-age strategy has focussed on key priority areas identified in stakeholder events that align with the National All Age Autism Strategy covering Health and Assessment, Education and Preparation for Adulthood, Education, Housing and Social Care and finally the Criminal Justice System. Strategic objectives that cut across all domains are summarised below:

- **Needs-Led, Person-Centred Support:**
  The strategy commits to delivering support based on individual needs, not just diagnosis status. It aims to improve access to community-based, needs-led support, promote reasonable adjustments across services, and empower autistic people to understand and advocate for themselves.

- **Prevention and Early Intervention:**

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A proactive approach is prioritised, embedding early intervention and prevention across all age groups to reduce crisis situations and escalation of need. Social prescribing and community-based support are central to this model.

- **Improved Access and Capacity:**
  The strategy addresses long waiting times for autism assessments and support, aiming to increase capacity for both online and face-to-face assessments, and to develop integrated diagnostic and care pathways for all ages.
- **Empowering Families and Individuals:**
  Parent carer and lived experience voices are placed at the heart of referral and support processes. The strategy seeks to reduce stress and anxiety by improving communication, navigation, and access to specialist support.
- **Workforce Capability and Systemic Change:**
  Mandatory autism and neurodiversity training for staff in education, health, social care, and the criminal justice system is a cornerstone, ensuring consistent understanding and delivery of support.
- **Communication and Information Sharing:**
  The strategy calls for clear, consistent, and empowering information, improved digital systems for tracking progress, and regular updates for families and individuals.
- **Fostering Inclusion and Community Engagement:**
  Increasing visibility and support through community hubs, co-production in service design, and reducing stigma are key to building an autism-friendly Shropshire.
- **Data-Driven Planning and Accountability**:
  Improved data collection and sharing across sectors will underpin planning, service delivery, and evaluation, ensuring resources are targeted where they are most needed.

2.6 Domain-Specific Priorities:

- Health & Assessment: Integrated care pathways, reduced waiting times, and accessible community support to reduce escalation and crisis
- Education: Inclusive school environments, consistent support, and improved transitions to adulthood.
- Employment: Doubling employment rates for autistic adults by 2030 is a national ambition. In Shropshire we need to understand our baseline, before embracing national ambition, and provide data confirming the number of autistic people in employment.
- Housing & Social Care: Person-centred housing solutions, independent living skills, and robust planning.
- Criminal Justice System: Systemic change, consistent training, and equitable support for autistic people in contact with the justice system supported through working with neighbouring LA's and community safety boards

2.7 This strategy is the result of extensive co-production and engagement with autistic people, families, carers, and professionals. It sets out a comprehensive framework for action, rooted in listening, empowerment, and collaboration. Success will depend on sustained commitment, transparent accountability, and a willingness to adapt. By embedding these principles, Shropshire aims to lead the way in autism-friendly practice, ensuring that no one is left behind. This strategy will inform the development of a delivery plan by 31st March 2026 adding clear milestones and accountability for delivery.

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3 Recommendations

3.1 To approve the Shropshire All-Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030

3.2 To endorse the development of an All-Age Autism Strategy delivery plan to embed the recommendations included and inform policy overseen by the Service Director for Commissioning in consultation with the Portfolio holder for social care.

3.3 To review progress and implementation at People Scrutiny in 12 months, December 2026

3.4 To commit Shropshire Council to be a neuroinclusive employer

Report

4 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

4.1 On-going risks, which Cabinet are asked to consider include:

a) **Capacity and Resource Constraints**
Risk: increases in autism assessment referrals and long waiting times place pressure on diagnostic services, education, lack of employment, reliance on social care, and housing, causing delayed support and escalation of need.
Mitigation: develop and promote early intervention and prevention accessible to all ages

b) **Inconsistent Data and Recording**
Risk: Poor data capture across sectors limits understanding of prevalence, identification of support needs, local authority service gaps and the impact on well-being.
Mitigation: joined-up systems and shared data protocols support strategic planning

c) **Variable Understanding and Training**
Risk: inconsistent understanding of autism may delay delivery of needs led, person-centred support and signposting to/provision of support, causing escalating needs and deterioration in well-being
Mitigation: mandatory training in all domains and awareness of support services

d) **System Fragmentation**
Risk: Disjointed pathways between children's and adult services, across health, education, and social care, result in gaps in post 16 transitions. Limited coordination between local authority, NHS, and voluntary sector partners may delay integrated service delivery.
Mitigation: embed systemic and collaborative approach to delivering positive outcomes for autistic people

e) **Cultural and Structural Barriers**
Risk: Stigma, lack of awareness, and deficit-based language in workplaces and public services hinder inclusion.
Mitigation: Adopt policy of neuro-affirming language and needs led support to ensure a strength based and inclusive approach

f) **Limited Engagement and Representation**

Risk: under-representation of autistic people of all ages including CYP, those without formal diagnosis, and those in marginalised communities.

Mitigation: ensure lived experience is integral to service review, redesign and implementation

g) **Financial Support limitations**

Risk: Workforce capacity and funding limitations may challenge the scope and impact of delivery

Mitigations: review as part of delivery plans and develop financial forecasts

4.2 Risk table

Risk	*Mitigation*
Capacity and Resource Constraints	Review and promote early intervention & prevention support for CYP and adults to ensure the provision of needs-led/person centred support to reduce escalation of needs. This will help respond to the rise in local trajectory for assessments and provide improved support whilst waiting.
Inconsistent Data and Recording	Implement a consistent approach to the data capture & recording of autism across all local authority services to ensure clear and robust understanding of Shropshire's autistic population and the impact on support services. Improved data will provide a pipeline of demand to plan future services, to avoid crisis and reduce costs.
Variable Understanding and training	Mandate training for all local authority staff within social care services to ensure consistent understanding of autism presentation and provision of needs-led/person centred support
System Fragmentation	The adoption of an all-age multi-disciplined approach, supported by quality data will ensure a collaborative system approach and integrated service delivery to meet the needs of autistic people.
4.5 Cultural and Structural Barriers	Introducing mandatory training and the use of neuro-affirming, non-deficit-based language together with driving cultural and systemic change in schools will reduce stigma and encourage a society that accepts difference and contributes to ensuring CYP have a positive experience in school reducing social isolation, home education and exclusion.
Limited Engagement and Representation	Introduce the roles of **autism champions** to lead peer support through schools, employers, housing and the criminal justice system to capture the all-age voice of lived experience. Ensure all support offers and communication are widely accessible and available in a range of accessible formats including translation tools.
Financial Implications	To be reviewed as part of the delivery plans and generation of financial forecasts

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,
- delaying implementation, or
- extending delivery timescales.

5.2 A financial evaluation will take place as part of the delivery planning and financial profiling will be completed. There is no budget set aside for the delivery of the autism strategy. There is minimal existing financial contribution to autism support services but significant financial and operational impact on the delivery of local authority services as the prevalence of autism continues to rise at rates that far exceed assessment capacity. The financial impact on the delivery of statutory services is significantly underestimated without a system approach to robust and accurate data recording to ensure we understand the prevalence of our autistic population and impact on our service delivery.

5.3 Below is a summary of current council expenditure on autism support services**:**

Children and young people

- Neurodiversity Practitioners, £136,500, providing targeted support in schools
- Universal Autism Support offer, £56,208, jointly commissioned with the ICB, to provide information, advice and guidance to parent carers, families and autistic children, under the age of 19 years

Adults

- Shropshire Autism Hub – small contribution made to reduce property rental costs.

There is no financial contribution made to an early intervention and prevention support offer through the adults autism hub however the strategy makes a strong case for this to minimise the impact on Adult Social Care. Given the pressures in this area across children's and adults, and increasing waiting lists, it is imperative that community assets, groups, social prescribers are embedded in neighbourhood planning to increase needs led support.

6 Climate Change Appraisal

6.1 Shropshire All-Age Autism Strategy 2025–2030 and its potential impact on a Climate Change appraisal, specifically regarding energy and fuel, renewable energy generation, carbon offsetting, and climate change adaptation. The strategy does not explicitly reference climate change, energy use, renewable energy generation, carbon offsetting,

or climate adaptation and there are no dedicated sections or strategic goals that directly address these topics however there are indirect impacts and opportunities:

a. Housing & Social Care: the strategy advocates for supported housing integrated into local neighbourhoods and access to green spaces. While not directly referencing energy or climate, this opens opportunities for

- Sustainable building design (e.g., energy-efficient homes, use of renewables).
- Inclusion of green infrastructure (gardens, outdoor spaces) that can support climate adaptation and wellbeing.
- Collaboration with developers to include inclusion of low-carbon and climate-resilient construction standards.

b. Community Hubs & Service Delivery: the strategy promotes community-based support and hubs which could support the following:

- Serve as models for sustainable public buildings in Shropshire.
- Provide access to support in communities improving local services and reducing the need for transport

c. Transport & Accessibility: linking to the above & improved community support:

- Improved service navigation and access could reduce travel needs for autistic people and families, potentially lowering transport emissions if digital and localised support is prioritised.

d. Employment: the strategy aims to increase employment rates for autistic adults, including remote and flexible working. This could reduce commuting and associated energy use, especially if digital infrastructure is prioritised.

6.2 **Gaps & Recommendations for Climate Change Appraisal**

a. Energy & Fuel: whilst there are no direct commitments to energy efficiency and fuel use reduction in this strategy, there are opportunities for indirect benefits arising from the measures above.

b. Renewable Energy Generation: there is an opportunity to consider renewable energy installations in new or refurbished autism-friendly housing and community hubs.

c. Carbon Offsetting: there is an opportunity to consider offsetting schemes for unavoidable emissions, especially in new developments or council-run facilities.

d. Climate Change Adaptation: the strategy contains only indirect links via access to green spaces and community resilience, but no explicit adaptation planning.

6.3 **Strategic Alignment & Co-Benefits**

a. Person-centred, inclusive design can align with climate goals: e.g., sensory-friendly environments often benefit from natural light, good insulation, and quiet, which are also energy-efficient.

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b. Community engagement and co-production could include autistic voices in climate planning, ensuring that proposals are accessible and inclusive.

6.4 Summary Table: Potential Impacts & Recommendations

Area	Current Strategy Impact	Current Strategy Impact	Climate Appraisal Recommendation
Housing & Social Care	Green spaces, integration	Green spaces, integration	Add energy efficiency, renewables, adaptation
Community Hubs	Local support	Local support	Retrofit for energy, renewables, climate resilience
Employment	Flexible/remote work	Flexible/remote work	Promote digital infrastructure, reduce travel
Transport	Service navigation	Service navigation	Encourage sustainable transport options
Procurement	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Add low-carbon procurement policies
Carbon Offsetting	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Consider offsetting for new builds/services

6.5 Conclusion

The draft strategy offers several indirect opportunities to support climate change objectives

7 Background

7.1 The All-Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030 recognises autism as a life-long condition, updating Shropshire's adult only Autism strategy 2016 – 2020 and aligning with the National All Age Autism Strategy 2021-2026. The strategy sets out a vision for systemic and cultural change to create a county where autistic people of all ages are understood, supported and empowered to thrive.

The increasing trajectory on autism prevalence has a significant impact on local authority statutory duties to support individuals with disabilities. These duties form part of broader legislative framework that aims to protect and support individuals with autism, ensuring they have access to the services and support they need to lead fulfilling lives.

National Perspective

7.2 The strategy reflects the significant shift in trajectory for autism nationally, and locally, the increased awareness and understanding and importantly the impact autism has on the delivery of our services. Nationally the prevalence of autism has increased from 1:700 to 3-4% of the population. Referrals for autism assessment in Shropshire have seen an

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increase of 107% for Children & Young People and a 45% increase in adult referrals between August 2024 & August 2025.

> "*A rise in diagnoses loops backs to increased awareness, which impacts on how people identify themselves, which leads to a call for more assessment centres, which has led to a greater rise in diagnoses,"*

7.3 Autism is a life-long condition where timely and appropriate access to assessment, diagnosis and support services contribute to the well-being, achievement and independence of autistic people. While awareness of autism is widespread—reaching 99% of the population—it is true understanding that paves the way for meaningful change. Implementing real improvements requires this understanding at every level: within families, both before and after diagnosis, in schools, workplaces, housing, and across the wider community. Early intervention, coupled with improved understanding, can foster acceptance, transform environments, reduce harmful labelling, and help society embrace difference so that everyone is valued and included.

7.4 Currently, all age support before and after diagnosis is inconsistent, incomplete, and often difficult to navigate. Addressing these gaps and recognising the links to well-being, educational achievement, independence and social isolation are essential. Poor school experience has a lasting and often damaging effect on mental health and well-being which in turn impacts educational achievement, employment and in some cases the Criminal Justice System. The national autism strategy placed a focus on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities System (SEND) enabling autistic children and young people to access the right support, within and outside of school supporting children to reach their potential, and to show that fewer autistic children are permanently excluded or suspended from school due to their behaviour. Improvements within schools included the support autistic people get in their transitions into adulthood, so that more autistic people can live well in their own communities, find work or higher education or other opportunities. This was cited in the national strategy as important in preventing more young people from avoidably reaching crisis point or being admitted into inpatient mental health services.

7.5 Post education, the national autism strategy highlighted the need to make progress on closing the employment gap for autistic people, ensuring that more people who are able and want to work can do so and that those who have found a job are less likely to fall out of work. Current national employment levels for autistic people in 2025 is reported at 30%. Local engagement in Shropshire reported difficulties in sustaining work, lack of provision for reasonable adjustments, stigma in the workplace and a lack of understanding at employer level. The engagement report highlights the necessity for improved understanding within the workplace and the need to create more opportunity for autistic people to work and live independently, increasing well-being and reducing reliance on social care. The suitability and availability of housing support and social care provision is also cited as a priority area, linked to escalation of need, lack of community support and inappropriate housing placements.

7.6 Finally, but by no means least, is improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems. Autistic people are more likely to be victims and witnesses of crime than offenders however the widespread misunderstanding of behaviours can lead to inappropriate support and sentencing for some autistic people. The aim of the strategy priority is to improve the police and wider criminal and youth justice system understanding of autism, to ensure autistic people are more able to receive the right support, adjusted to their needs, as well as ensuring that different parts of the justice system – from prisons to courts – become more autism-inclusive.

7.7 The national strategic priorities, when taken together, represent a holistic approach to supporting the needs of autistic people throughout their life journey and recognise the significant impact that lack of support and understanding deliver at each phase. To provide equity, a system-wide approach is needed to prevent often unnecessary escalation of need and above all, positive outcomes for autistic people.

Shropshire perspective:

Autism Prevalence

7.8 In June 2025 Shropshire autism assessment referral data confirms 1381 CYP 5-17 years are on the waiting list for assessment; 1365 adults and 114 0-5 years– a total of 2,860 representing all age waits, with wide impact on the individuals, their parent carers and families. Of these the holistic approach offered by the 0-5 years pathway is the only data showing a downward trajectory but, overall, the all-age data shows a 66% increase in referrals for assessment between August 2024 and June 2025 which should not be ignored. Assessment referral data shows comparable increases with national rates – a 767% increase for children and young people (CYP) with the longest wait over 2 years. Increases of 31% are reported for adult assessments referrals, with an average wait time of 4 years, system partners are working to address this.

7.9 Shropshire population data is expected to increase by 15.1%, June 2025 Office of National Statistics figures, showing growth areas in adults aged 25 years and over with marked growth in 65 years and over. Using current national prevalence data we are able to forecast the impact of autism and neurodivergence for our population in Shropshire; the data has been used to indicate the prevalence of autism at 4% and neurodivergence at 15% by age group; the numbers are significant increases from previous prevalence rates of 1:700 and represent significant capacity challenges for health and local authority services, including education, employment, housing and social care and the Criminal Justice System.

Age	2023	2047	Change	% Change	Autism Prevalence 2027 - 4% Population	Autism Prevalence 2047 - 4% Population	ND Prevalence 2023 - 15% Population	ND Prevalence 2047 - 15% Population
0-4	14521	13805	-716	-4.9%	581	552	2178	2071
5-14	35324	30747	-4577	-13.0%	1413	1230	5299	4612
15	3979	3318	-661	-16.6%	159	133	597	498
16-24	26973	25460	-1513	-5.6%	1079	1018	4046	3819
25-44	71,954	81338	9384	13.0%	2878	3254	10793	12201
45-64	95821	104357	8536	8.9%	3833	4174	14373	15654
65-84	75647	100987	25340	33.5%	3026	4039	11347	15148
85+	11653	26644	14991	128.6%	466	1066	1748	3997
Total	**335,872**	**386655**	**50783**	**15.1%**	**13435**	**15466**	**62500**	**68998**

7.10 There is often unrecognised impact on parent carers/families navigating the autism assessment process for their children, the current referral process can be overwhelming and frustrating to parents with a wider impact on employment, income and well-being.

7.11 In Shropshire we are improving our understanding of our autistic population by mapping autism referrals in conjunction with community and school support; this is now

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being used to inform the location and demand for support needs in our communities. We have piloted all age autism events in county hot spots raising awareness of available services and connecting with Community and Family hubs to meet people where they live. In addition, we have held focus groups with parent carers and autistic adults, listening to their experience of the assessment pathways, identifying issues and gaps in provision which would improve their experience and the outcomes for the child/young person or adult in their family. Neurodivergent CYP are 3-6 times more likely to have other mental health difficulties such as anti-social behaviour, depression and anxiety and research confirms links to school exclusion and links to the Criminal Justice System.

Education

7.12 With national and local increases in the prevalence of autism comes deeper impact on local services. Locally commissioned support services need to keep up with demand, parent carers and families need help to understand autism and strategies of support for themselves and their children; our schools need sufficient understanding and resources to support autistic children to have a positive experience in education recognising the impact on social isolation, anxiety, mental health, friendships, academic achievement and ultimately being able to live happy, healthy and fulfilling lives. Autistic children and young people should be supported through transition stages into further or higher education – a key life stage for all young people but a significant risk for some autistic young people anxious about next steps. Data on autism in Shropshire schools must be improved, we are unable to see the impact on elective home education, SEND hubs, exclusion, Post 16 risk of Neet (not in Education, Employment or Training) school avoidance and mental health support in schools. All anecdotal and pilot evidence indicates a high proportion of autistic and neurodivergent children are affected whose needs are not being met in mainstream schools.

7.13 In Shropshire, the Office for Standards of Education (Ofsted) / Care Quality Commission (CQC) Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) Local Area inspection in January 2020 identified priority areas for Shropshire to address, one of which was the significant waiting times for children and young people (CYP, 0-25 years) on Neurodevelopmental Assessment pathways. In 2021, a Neurodiversity (ND) Workstream was created to enable a partnership response to meet the needs of neurodiverse CYP and was instrumental in the coproduction of Neurodiversity Practitioner (NDP) posts. Three NDPs were appointed and started in January 2024 supporting 50 primary and secondary schools, free of charge, in the pilot year (33% of Shropshire's mainstream schools) focussing on systemic and cultural change in schools. NDP roles support the children, teaching staff and parents to understand, and meet, the needs of autistic children. NDP support contributes to a positive school experience where the voice of the child is heard, these often simple environmental and organisational changes in schools consider the sensory adaptions, classroom support and reasonable adjustments needed to support autistic children. Whilst the NDP roles have been made permanent, Year 2 operates under an Education Psychologist managed traded model where funding and school priorities determine whether NDP support is in place, not the needs of the autistic children in their schools.

Employment

7.14 At national level the Annual Population Survey 2020 reported that 21.7% of autistic adults are employed and are more likely to be in roles below their skill level or in unstable employment. Being unemployed excludes people from society. It limits their ability to support themselves and impacts their mental health. Lack of diagnosis, education, awareness and stigma associated with disclosing autism are all reasons attributed to the low percentage. By November 2024 the Annual Population survey shows an improved employment rate of 30% reflecting improved identification of autistic people and greater prominence and topical coverage of autism however data recording of autism is limited with no coverage of wider neurodivergent needs. The cost of low employment nationally is estimated at over £10 billion annually. In Shropshire we are unable to report on the number of autistic people who are employed, we need a broader shift to recognising the value of autism to employers, where businesses and society benefit from the diverse abilities of autistic individuals, highlighting strengths helps challenge stereotypes and unlock potential in the workplace. We have taken part in a national accreditation scheme called the Neurodiversity Employer Index, this reviews workplace practices supporting neurodivergent people and awards a bronze, silver or gold award to participating organisations who employ five staff of more. Enable achieved a Silver award and such achievement should be used to roll out a Shropshire wide programme and lead by example using a scheme that provides visibility of employers who positively support neurodiversity.

7.15 The wider economic cost of low employment is the impact on Universal Credit/ Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and the links to independent living, housing costs, supported living and wider support costs associated with not being able to work. The recent launch of the 5 year Connect to Work programme, managed by Enable, creates an opportunity to report accurately on the support provided for autistic people in Shropshire and successful work placements – this cannot be successful on its own however and employer awareness and support of neurodivergence plays a critical part.

7.16 Valuable insight has been gathered locally through the Employment survey which was completed by 195 people endorsing the employment struggles for autistic people and the need to ensure equitable access to sustainable employment in all sectors. There is a clear lack of understanding of autism and workplace reasonable adjustments, as specified in the Equality Act 2010, for both employee and employer and a need for education rather than awareness in driving staff understanding of autism and neurodivergence, a cultural shift that accepts “difference”. In conjunction with broader employer awareness consideration should also be made to the need for improved preparation for adulthood for young people and the transition from education to employment. In strategy discussions the consideration of how an EHCP (Education Health and Care Plan) could be developed beyond mandatory education to support further education or employment. This was identified as a gap in support provision recognising the daunting leap to employment that, for some, is impossible.

Housing & Social Care

7.17 Current data shows an increasing trajectory of autistic adults being supported by adult social care and current average annual costs of £64,476 per person. Through the strategy work and engagement with lived experience interventions have been discussed that are designed to work together to create a more responsive, inclusive, and forward-planning system of housing and social care for autistic adults. These include:

a. Mandatory autism training for professionals in commissioning and social care.
b. Person-centred, needs-led support with improved communication.
c. Development of housing specifications tailored to autistic needs.
d. Independent Living Skills programme to assess and support practical independence.
e. Internal resources for timely Housing Needs Assessments.
f. Clear communication of prevention offers using visual and written formats.
g. Collaboration with national studies to understand the burden of waiting and inform future services.

7.18 Working collaboratively with health, a focus is needed to identify ageing adults living with ageing parents. Support needs are frequently unknown but there is a significant risk presented by this cohort of people that could be supported by early intervention and prevention, assessing independent living skills, community resources, financial independence to reduce pressures on social care. Working collaboratively with the autism hub is an opportunity to utilise local expertise and data to support forward planning and identify gaps in support needs.

Criminal Justice System

7.19 National research suggests that systemic change is required across the Criminal Justice System. There needs to be a shift to a consistently person-centred approach that meets the needs of autistic individuals, helping them to understand themselves and the consequence of their behaviour/actions. Systemic failure to diagnose and provide needs led support attribute to the vulnerabilities and risks of autistic people to be victims of crime and autistic people who are often misunderstood within the Criminal Justice System can be more at risk of inappropriate sentences due to a lack of understanding. Autistic people report fundamentally different experiences and needs in the Criminal Justice System that are frequently associated with challenges and difficulties in interpersonal interactions/communication, environments, and processes not being very neuroinclusive. Within the strategy sub-group, autism support has been reviewed as a "system" – a joined-up approach essential in ensuring a shared ambition to support autistic people through their Criminal Justice System journey, to provide a consistent level of understanding, provision of reasonable adjustments and recognition that many autistic individuals are vulnerable adults who are the victims of crime.

7.20 We have shared a Criminal Justice System survey with all contributors to the strategy sub-group including West Mercia Police, Criminal Courts, Probation, Youth Justice, and HMP Stoke Heath. The survey aimed to understand current practices, identify gaps, and explore opportunities for improvement in supporting neurodiverse individuals within the system. The results confirmed sub-group findings that inconsistent systems, data capture and training and education, contribute to a lack of accuracy and prevalence across the Criminal Justice System. The wider cost and impact of autism to the Criminal Justice System is not available but locally it is estimated that 50% of prisoners in HMP Stoke Heath are undiagnosed autistic/neurodivergent, with an annual cost of £39 million. Collaborative working and shared ambition cited in the strategy provides an opportunity for a system approach, one that puts the needs of the individual first and recognises the wider impact on our social care services of not doing so.

The strategic priorities set out a broad vision for cultural and systemic change requiring a joined-up system approach to drive positive change, enabling autistic people to thrive in their communities, schools and employment, with equal opportunity and ambition, to lead happy, fulfilling and independent lives underpinned by cross-cutting themes:

a. Needs-led rather than diagnosis-led support.
b. Mandatory autism and neurodiversity training for professionals.
c. Early intervention and preventative models.
d. Co-production and involvement of families and carers.
e. Improved data capture and joined-up systems.
f. Continuity of support through transitions.
g. Reducing stigma and promoting acceptance

8 Additional Information

8.1 The increasing trajectory on autism prevalence has a significant impact on local authority statutory duties to support individuals with autism. These duties form part of broader legislative framework that aims to protect and support individuals with autism, ensuring they have access to the services and support they need to lead fulfilling lives most prominent of which is The Equality Act 2010.

8.2 **The Children & Families Act 2014** – includes Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCP's) requires councils to help young people move into adulthood in a way that supports their independence and social inclusion & Section 8 of the SEND Code of Practice "Preparing for Adulthood from the Earliest Years"

8.3 Under the **Care Act 2014**, councils have a duty to provide information and advice on available local services and support arrangements. The Care Act 2014 also places a legal duty on councils to promote individual wellbeing for adults in need of care and support, inclusive of ways to delay and prevent care needs escalating.

8.4 Under the **Housing Act 1996** Councils have a generic duty to assess and accommodate the housing needs of their residents, including young people with a learning disability and autistic young people.

8.5 The **Equality Act 2010** legally requires councils to prevent discrimination and ensure equal access to public services and community life. Councils are also obligated to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that autistic people, can access services without facing discrimination

8.6 The **Mental Capacity Act 2005** protects the rights of people over the age of sixteen to make their own decisions unless there is clear evidence they cannot do so.

8.7 **Autism Act 2009** and Subsequent Guidance: **Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and NHS Organisations (2015):** This guidance mandates that local authorities should include the employment support needs of autistic adults in local planning and service provision.

8.8 Mandatory training about learning disability and autism for health and social care provider staff | Local Government Association Councils should ensure that health and social care staff receive suitable and appropriate training designed to better equip them

with the skills and knowledge to care for individuals with learning disabilities and autism, such as the Oliver McGowan training

8.9 **Local Authorities must provide the following services:**

a) **Assessment and Provision**: Local authorities must assess individuals with autism and provide necessary services to support their needs and ensure that any person carrying out a needs assessment under the Care Act 2014 has the skills, knowledge and competence to carry out the assessment in question and is appropriately trained. Local authorities should ensure that people with autism are aware of the right to access a Care Act assessment (for the adult) and a carer's assessment (for the carer).
b) **Support and Advocacy**: Local authorities are required to provide advocacy services for individuals with autism, ensuring they have a voice in their care and support plans.
c) **Equality and Accessibility**: Local authorities must ensure that services are accessible to all individuals with autism, including reasonable adjustments to remove barriers
d) **Support for Families**: Local authorities should support families of individuals with autism, providing information, resources, and assistance to help them navigate the services available.

9 Conclusions

9.1 The All-Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030 recognises autism as a life-long condition, updating Shropshire's adult only Autism strategy 2016 – 2020 and aligning with the National All Age Autism Strategy 2021-2026. The strategy sets out a vision for systemic and cultural change to create a county where autistic people of all ages are understood, supported and empowered to thrive.

9.2 Across health, education, employment, housing, social care, and the Criminal Justice System, the strategy identifies clear priorities and actionable goals. It recognises that autism is a lifelong condition requiring lifelong support, and that meaningful progress depends on collaboration, data-informed planning, and the voices of autistic individuals and their families.

Autism, and increasing prevalence, is a thread that transcends all service provision and Shropshire Council as a local employer.

9.3 As a local authority we have a statutory duty to support people with autism, both as an employer and a public service provider, stemming primarily from the Equality Act 2010 and the Care Act 2014, supported by the Autism Act 2009 guidance.

In conclusion we are looking for endorsement of the following recommendations set out in **3:1** of this report.

- To approve the Shropshire All-Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030
- To endorse the development of an All-Age Autism Strategy delivery plan by 31st March 2026 to progress, from April 2026 onwards, the recommendations included and inform policy
- To review progress and implementation at People Scrutiny in 12 months, December 2026

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- To commit Shropshire Council to be a neuroinclusive employer

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

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]

1. Draft All Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030
2. Neurodiversity Employment Survey May 2025 – public
3. Criminal Justice System Survey June 2025 – strategy group organisation representatives only
4. Public Engagement Survey – to follow (closes 6th November)

Shropshire Council

Draft

Shropshire All-Age Autism Strategy 2025 – 2030

Draft for public consultation

September 2025

www.shropshire.gov.uk
General Enquiries: 0345 678 9000

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Foreword

It is my privilege to introduce the Shropshire All-Age Autism Strategy 2025 - 2030 - a bold and compassionate vision for making Shropshire a truly inclusive county for autistic children, young people, and adults. This strategy is the result of extensive engagement, co-production, and partnership with autistic individuals, families, carers, professionals, and stakeholders across our community.

Our vision is clear: Shropshire will be a place where autistic people, regardless of diagnosis status, are welcomed, supported, and valued for their unique strengths and perspectives. We are committed to promoting a cultural shift across all services, adopting an all-age approach to autism as a lifelong condition, and ensuring equality of access so that no one is left behind.

The strategy sets out a comprehensive framework for action—spanning health and assessment, education, employment, housing, social care, and the Criminal Justice System. It recognises the need for joined-up, proactive, and autism-accessible services, and places the voices of lived experience at the heart of planning and delivery. Our approach is rooted in listening, empowerment, and acting on feedback, with priorities and objectives shaped by local need.

We acknowledge the challenges faced by autistic people and their families, including long waits for assessment, inconsistent support, and barriers to employment and independent living. This strategy outlines clear goals to address these issues: person-centred support, early intervention, improved service navigation, workforce development, and robust data collection. It also champions the importance of prevention, inclusion, and community engagement.

The work underpinning this strategy has been transparent and collaborative, welcoming all views and ensuring recommendations are robust and agreed by those who contributed. Our thanks go to everyone who has shared their experiences, expertise, and passion for change—your contributions have been invaluable.

As we move forward, the success of this strategy will depend on sustained commitment, transparent accountability, and a willingness to listen and adapt. Together, we can create a healthier, more inclusive Shropshire, where autistic people of all ages are empowered to thrive.

Let us celebrate strengths, embrace difference, and ensure that Shropshire leads the way in autism-friendly practice.

Ruth Houghton

Portfolio Holder for Social Care
Shropshire Council

Vision

“Great minds think differently”

“There are numerous reasons to better understand autistic people, the most important being to make the world a kinder, more inclusive place for everyone.”

David, a late-diagnosed autistic adult, Autistica

Our vision is to ensure that Shropshire is a place that offers opportunities to all autistic children, young people and adults, regardless of diagnosis status, to live healthy and fulfilling lives, where people’s contributions to their local communities are welcomed, supported and valued, and no-one is left behind. The strategy will promote a cultural shift across our services adopting an all-age approach to a life-long condition with recognition of the need for a more joined-up, proactive, timely and autism-accessible offer so that autistic people have equality of access and do not fall through the gaps in service provision.

The work underpinning the strategy is based on engagement, empowerment, listening to people and acting on their feedback. It aims to provide a clear plan for support across Shropshire identifying priorities and objectives which reflect local need.

“Many folks don't realise that each autistic person's autism is unique to them. There are so many characteristics of autism, with each characteristic ranging widely in its degree, from limited to significant. Each autistic person is unique, just as each non-autistic person is unique.” (1)

This draft of the Shropshire Autism Strategy 2025–2030 sets out our (2) collective ambition to create a community where autistic people of all ages can thrive, participate fully, and are valued for their strengths and perspectives. Drawing upon the insights and lived experiences of autistic individuals, families, carers, and professionals, our approach is rooted in collaboration and co-production.

We recognise the unique challenges faced by autistic people and are committed to delivering support that is responsive, inclusive, and shaped by those who know best. This strategy outlines the framework and principles that will guide our actions, ensuring meaningful progress towards an autism-friendly Shropshire.

Introduction

"Autism is an all services issue"

"Autism is a "golden thread" that goes through all stages of individual support from early to advanced years, parenting, schools, education, preparation for adulthood, employment, housing, social care and the Criminal Justice System, impacting ALL teams"

Not everyone who is autistic has had or would like a diagnostic assessment, however any recommendations or initiatives promoted by this strategy will benefit autistic and other neurodivergent children, young people and adults whatever their diagnosis status.

Our strategy adopts an all-age approach, recognising that autism is a life-long condition impacting individuals at different stages across their lifespan, and is committed to providing person-centred, needs-led support. We aim to increase autism training and education, prioritise early intervention and prevention, and enhance clarity and navigation of support services through accessible, visual information. Central to our work is a deep understanding of the needs of autistic people, ensuring their involvement in planning future services and securing or working towards accessible provision with reasonable adjustments. We advocate for Autism Champion roles, strive to improve data collection and prevalence reporting across all sectors, and foster improved pathways through robust partnerships. Additionally, we need collaboration to evaluate value for money, acknowledging funding pressures while prioritising positive outcomes, and work to ensure this strategy is embedded within wider local authority initiatives to include our partners in the NHS and Telford & Wrekin Council

Our aims to make the system more joined-up, working collaboratively to ensure services are inclusive and accessible will improve the well-being of autistic children, young people and adults and their families and improve efficiency across the service system. Improving clarity and navigation of support services is identified as a priority area.

Our approach has ensured a wide number of stakeholders and autistic people with lived experience have been involved with the strategy development from the start; the process has been transparent and collaborative welcoming all views to be aired freely ensuring strategic recommendations are robust and agreed by those who contributed to discussions.

The Shropshire Autism Strategy closely aligns with the Council's key priorities, strengthening support for autistic individuals across the region. In promoting health and well-being, the strategy sets out interventions such as expanding training for independent living skills, developing Autism Champions to lead peer support, and ensuring that professionals receive dedicated autism training with the aim of achieving consistent understanding and accessible support, for all autistic people. By improving access to community-based preventative services, the strategy aims to reduce crisis situations and foster independence for all.

To support a healthy local economy, the strategy proposes measures that help autistic adults live independently and enable families and carers to participate more actively in the workforce. This includes providing accessible housing, easing service navigation for carers, and encouraging voluntary and peer-led employment opportunities within the community.

The strategy advances inclusive community living by promoting supported housing that is integrated into local neighbourhoods and offers access to green spaces. Thoughtful service planning ensures resources are distributed fairly, reaching both rural and urban areas.

Finally, the strategy commits to a healthy organisation by focusing on data-driven, and evidence based, service provision and close collaboration across sectors. It emphasises

capturing lived experience, co-producing services with the autistic community, and creating clear, accessible information to improve how people navigate available support. Together, these efforts reinforce the Council's broader vision of a healthier, more inclusive Shropshire.

Improving support and understanding for autistic people of all ages needs to be embedded in all of our processes and services to ensure we meet individual needs at the right time, preventing escalation, and making the best use of limited and collaborative resources to drive positive system-wide change.

Acknowledgements

We would like to say a huge thank you to the many people who contributed to the new strategy: the individuals and organisations who attended strategy sub-groups and in person quarterly meetings, those that took the time to respond to our surveys; the many autistic people who spoke to us about their experiences of autism, concerns and gaps, and the many national organisations providing national perspective, experience, research and support for our local work.

The passion for change and collaborative approach has underpinned the strategic work and will continue to be an integral part of the implementation of strategic priorities.

Thank you all for being part of this journey.

What is Autism?

Autism, or Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), is a life-long neurodivergence and disability which affects how a person experiences the world, communicates, and interacts with others. Autism presents differently in each individual and can range from subtle to more pronounced traits, in the past this has been described as a "spectrum" however today we understand the

spectrum to mean each autistic person has a unique combination of characteristics. Autistic people can be very different to each other, with different sets of strengths and challenges.

Under the Equality Act 2010, disability is a protected characteristic. The Equality Act defines a disabled person as someone with a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Many forms of neurodivergence, including autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and dyspraxia, can meet this definition and therefore be legally recognised as disabilities. This means that autistic people are protected from discrimination and are entitled to reasonable adjustments in education, employment, and services.

Autism is part of the broader concept of neurodiversity, which recognises and values neurological differences as natural variations of the human brain. This perspective promotes inclusion, acceptance, and support, viewing autism as a "difference" rather than viewing autism solely as a condition to be treated. A 'neurodiversity' approach views autism as a natural variation in people.

Being autistic means you may feel things and react differently to non-autistic people. Experiencing the world in a uniquely perceptive and deeply felt way. Autistic individuals often have a heightened sensitivity to their surroundings, which can bring rich detail and insight into environments that others may overlook. Social interactions may require more energy or conscious effort, but many autistic people develop strong self-awareness and thoughtful communication styles which are authentic and honest. Busy or loud environments can be intense, reflecting a finely tuned sensory system but often allows for a profound appreciation of subtle sounds, textures, and patterns that others might miss. Intense interests are a source of passion and expertise, often leading to deep knowledge and creative innovation. Autistic individuals frequently bring focus, dedication, and originality to the things they care about. A preference for routine and structure can foster reliability, clarity, and stability, which are valuable traits in both personal and professional situations and environments. Repetitive movements or actions—sometimes called stimming—are powerful tools for self-regulation, offering comfort and control in situations that cause individual anxiety.

"Our understanding of autism is evolving all the time. Most autistic people see being autistic as central to who they are. They may need support to succeed in a world designed for the needs of non-autistic people (also referred to as neurotypical). But it is the barriers they face in society that are an issue, not being autistic. This is known as the 'social model' of disability." (2)

Autistic people of all genders can "mask" discomfort to navigate social situations demonstrating adaptability and resilience, it is important to create spaces where authenticity is welcomed, and mental well-being is supported. Masking is a strategy used by some autistic people, consciously or unconsciously, to appear neurotypical. While this strategy can help them get by at school, work and in social situations, it can have a devastating impact on mental health, sense of self and access to an autism diagnosis. Masking is commonly reported in girls and a reason cited for lower diagnosis rates in females however masking is used by all genders and can be exhausting.

"A lot of us present different versions of ourselves in different situations, that's normal. But masking is to re-write every fibre of your being to suit the situation you are in and what is perceived to be 'normal' behaviour and reactions. … When I am masking the vast majority of my brain function is going to that masking. It is taking almost all of my mental energy to just

stay in absolute control and only let through the behaviours that are acceptable in that situation." (2)

Support needs should be a primary consideration for autistic people, recognising that assistance must be tailored according to individual requirements rather than being solely dependent on a formal diagnosis. This approach acknowledges the diverse experiences and challenges faced by autistic people, advocating for timely assessments, accessible post-diagnostic support, and reasonable adjustments within education, healthcare, and employment. Emphasising community-based services, peer support, and recognition of the impact on families and carers ensures a more inclusive, responsive system that supports autistic people of all ages and all needs.

Terminology

Throughout this strategy document the word autism and identity-first terminology ("autistic people" rather than "people with autism") when referring to autistic people - children, young people and adults. This reflects research published in the Autism journal in 2015 (The National Autistic Society, the Royal College of GPs and the UCL Institute of Education) which looked at the preferences of UK autistic community members – autistic people, their families, friends and professionals around the language used to describe autism. Unless otherwise stated, reference to 'autistic people' or 'an autistic person' includes children, young people and adults of all ages across the autism spectrum at all levels of intellectual ability.

Co-Production and Engagement

This strategy is informed by a range of engagement, co-production and mapping activity to ensure a shared understanding of our autistic population, taking current national prevalence rates of 4%, this is over 13,000 autistic people across all ages.

The work has adopted an all-age and collaborative approach with stakeholders across assessment, health, education, employment, social care, housing and the Criminal Justice

System, sharing best practice. New services for autistic people have been piloted in 2024/2025 and the learning from those pilots has contributed to the strategy, these include all-age autism awareness events, post 16 support for autistic young people as they transition from school to further education, work of the neurodiversity practitioners (NDP's) and Partnership for the Inclusion of Neurodiversity in our schools (PINS) and innovative ways in which to capture the voices of children and young people and ensure they help shape our services.

Through this collaborative process, we have worked to ensure a truly representative and meaningful understanding of the needs and aspirations of autistic people within our community. The strategy's development has benefited from targeted outreach, with a particular focus on gathering diverse voices and perspectives, ensuring that the feedback and insights received have directly shaped our priorities and actions.

Our review of strategic objectives and actions is underpinned by regular reflection on what is working well and where further change is needed. This approach has enabled us to adapt and strengthen our response, ensuring sustained momentum and a shared commitment to making tangible improvements for autistic individuals and their families.

What have we done since the launch of the strategy in August?

- Engaged with over 120 Stakeholders supporting sub-group & quarterly meetings
- Reviewed over 200 recorded issues
- Monthly meetings with 36 individual sub-group meetings held and 3 in person quarterly meetings
- Mapped the geographical location of Children, Young People and Adults waiting for assessment, identifying "hot spots" in the county showing higher levels of need
- Piloted 5 All Age Autism Awareness Events in Oswestry, Bridgnorth, Craven Arms, Wem & Ludlow

Engagement

- Held focus groups with over 40 parent carers/families
- Met with over 50 autistic adults
- Published an employment survey recording lived experience of those aged 16+ which attracted 195 responses
- Met over 50 parent carers/adults at the all-age autism awareness events
- Delivered training for 70 Shropshire Council Adult Social Care staff
- Published a Criminal Justice System survey completed by all Criminal Justice System organisations – West Mercia Police, Probation, Youth Justice, Criminal Courts, HMP Stoke Heath and the Forensic support service covering Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin
- Forged national links to leaders Autistica, Autism Alliance, Ambitious about Autism and the London School of Economics

National Autism Strategy

"To succeed in improving autistic people's and their families' lives we will need to work collaboratively to implement these actions across national and local government, the NHS, the education system, the criminal and youth justice systems, and with autistic people and their families" (4)

National Autism Strategy Priorities

- Helping people to understand autism
- Helping autistic children and young people at school

- Helping autistic people to find jobs
- Making health and care services equal for autistic people
- Improving support for autistic people in the Criminal Justice System

In 2021 the **Autism Act 10 years on** report found too many autistic people face long waits for assessment, many autistic people struggle in childhood with getting pre and post diagnosis support including at school, many find it hard to get a job when they reach adulthood and the number of autistic inpatients in mental health services have increased. Autistic people are about 70-80% more likely to have poor mental and physical health, experience educational under-attainment, unemployment and underemployment, victimisation, social isolation and premature mortality. (5)

"But the depression and anxiety probably flow from not having the right support." (6)

Nationally 2025 is a pivotal year for autistic people and their parent carers and families. Prevalence of autism has increased from 1:100 or 700,000 people to 3-4%; neurodiversity prevalence is sited at 15% of the population and the trajectory continues to increase. The total current population for the United Kingdom in 2025 is 68,180,606, a 0.32% increase from 2024. Using the increased autism prevalence of 3-4% there are 2,727,224 autistic people in the population and as many as 10,227,090 neurodivergent people.

"A rise in diagnoses loops backs to increased awareness, which impacts on how people identify themselves, which leads to a call for more assessment centres, which has led to a greater rise in diagnoses," (6)

Autism is a life-long condition where timely and appropriate access to assessment, diagnosis and support services contribute to the well-being, achievement and independence of autistic people. While awareness of autism is widespread—reaching 99% of the population—it is true understanding that paves the way for meaningful change. Implementing real improvements requires this understanding at every level: within families, both before and after diagnosis, in schools, workplaces, housing, and across the wider community. Early intervention, coupled with improved understanding, can foster acceptance, transform environments, reduce harmful labelling, and help society embrace difference so that everyone is valued and included

Currently, all age support before and after diagnosis is inconsistent, incomplete, and often difficult to navigate. Addressing these gaps and recognising the links to well-being, educational achievement, independence and social isolation are essential. Poor school experience has a lasting and often damaging effect on mental health and well-being which in turn impacts educational achievement, employment and in some cases the Criminal Justice System. The national autism strategy placed a focus on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities System (SEND) enabling autistic children and young people to access the right support, within and outside of school supporting children to reach their potential, and to show that fewer autistic children are permanently excluded or suspended from school due to their behaviour. Improvements within schools included the support autistic people get in their transitions into adulthood, so that more autistic people can live well in their own communities, find work or higher education or other opportunities. This was cited in the national strategy as important in preventing more young people from avoidably reaching crisis point or being admitted into inpatient mental health services.

Post education the national strategy highlighted the need to make progress on closing the employment gap for autistic people, ensuring that more people who are able and want to

work can do so and that those who have found a job are less likely to fall out of work. Current national employment levels for autistic people in 2025 is reported at 30%, highlighting the necessity for improved understanding within the workplace for both employees and employers and the need to create more opportunity for autistic people to work and live independently. Escalation of need often manifest in early years through a combination of lack of needs led support and lack of understanding and support in schools, leading to a deterioration in mental health. Unavoidable admissions to inpatient mental health services could be reduced by improving the provision of community mental health and crisis support.

The suitability and availability of housing support and social care is also cited as a priority area, linked to escalation of need, lack of community support and inappropriate housing placements and ensuring we meet the targets in the NHS long term plan to build the right support in the community.

Finally, but by no means least, is improving support within the criminal and youth justice systems. Autistic people are more likely to be victims and witnesses of crime than offenders however the widespread misunderstanding of behaviours can lead to inappropriate support and sentencing for some autistic people. The aim of the strategy priority is to improve the police and wider criminal and youth justice system staffs understanding of autism, so that autistic people are more able to receive the right support, adjusted to their needs, as well as ensuring that different parts of the justice system – from prisons to courts – become more autism-inclusive.

The national strategic priorities, when taken together, represent a holistic approach to supporting the needs of autistic people throughout their life journey and recognise the significant impact that lack of support and understanding deliver at each phase. To provide equity, a system-wide approach is needed to prevent often unnecessary escalation of need and above all, positive outcomes for autistic people.

Health and Assessment

"Too many autistic people still face long waits for their diagnosis and do not always receive support that is tailored to their needs at an early enough stage."

Background

Increases in the prevalence of autism and the national impact on assessment capacity is widely reported attributing to a shift in broader awareness of autism over recent years. Many thousands of families and adults report long waits of over 2 years for assessment and confirmation of a diagnosis that often brings reassurance of difference but does not provide understanding and strategies of support. For many autistic adults' autism awareness did not exist in their early years, there was no access to assessment, no support for them or their families and they have struggled in a world that doesn't understand them, with life-long impact.

The National Strategy for Children and Young People and Adults 2021 – 2026 cited *"too many autistic people still face long waits for their diagnosis and do not always receive support that is tailored to their needs at an early enough stage. Far too many autistic people still struggle in childhood, both with getting a diagnosis and with support following a diagnosis, including at school, and find it hard to get a job when they reach adulthood"* National strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026 - GOV.UK

"Public services and policies should support people's individual profiles of difficulties and strengths." (8)

Health services should support both the strengths and difficulties of autistic people and autistic people in contact with the Criminal Justice System must receive equitable healthcare and social care. There is a national shift toward recognising autistic individuals' abilities, interests, and contributions—not just their challenges.

National perspective

As of March 2025, a total of 224,382 patients in England were awaiting assessment for suspected autism or diagnosis through the NHS, of these 201,638 (89.9%) had a referral that had been open at least 13 weeks (9). In the past five to ten years, autism assessment in the UK has increased significantly, with a 787% rise reported between 1998 and 2018 (10)and comparable increases recorded with our current assessment providers of 767% increase for children and young people (CYP) (11) Data shows that autism is more commonly diagnosed in males, in a 2021 England study, boys had a prevalence rate of 2.8% but data for girls reported a prevalence rate of 0.65% [2] masking in girls has been commonly cited as the reason for this however it has also been suggested that current clinical assessment is based on male presentation attributing to possible gender bias in diagnostic rates (12). At local level we discussed this outdated view and suggested a gender inclusive approach should be taken.

A 2023 study estimated that between 150,000 and 500,000 individuals aged 20 to 49 in England may be autistic but undiagnosed. (13)

40-50% of individuals with autism also have an anxiety disorder, and this prevalence is rising as more autism diagnoses occur, increasing demand for autism-related mental health

services, [14] autistic people, especially those with co-occurring mental health conditions, are 9 times more likely to die by suicide than the general population. [15] around 40% of autistic people also have ADHD and this is increasing as AuDHD prevalence grows. Co-existing conditions increase the complexity of assessment in adults for example diagnosis of fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome and hypermobility, however recognising and providing timely intervention to support needs and enhance understanding is critical in preventing escalation and negative impacts on health, well-being, education, employment and independence to live a happy and fulfilling life.

National research on the shift to a prevention-based model of support has been widely publicised. In December 2024 the Kings Fund (14), an independent charity working to improve people's health, openly supported the need for transformational shifts in how health and care services are planned, delivered and accessed, asking that this is reflected in the development of the NHS 10 Year Health Plan, recognising that *prevention* of health risk, access to *care closer to home* and *digital transformation* represent three key shifts in how services are delivered. All are integral in our rural community delivery of, and ensuring equitable access to, autism support services. The NHS 10 Year Plan (15) published by the government in July 2025 confirmed these priorities which support strategic recommendations at local level recognising prevention and community support as essential elements in the proactive care of autistic people through their life journey and the preventing escalation of need. This provides joint commissioning opportunities for the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and local authority as we work together to review an all-age autism and ADHD pathway

The economic case for prevention has been documented by the London School of Economics who reported every £1 spent on prevention yields £5–£10 in savings (Knapp et al., 2011) and re-iterated again in 2024 in their report The Economic Case for Prioritising Autism in Policy and Reform – “comparatively little funding would deliver disproportionately good outcomes and decreased need for expensive statutory interventions” M Knapp, London School of Economics. At national level the economic cost of autism, caused by low employment levels, loss of earnings of family members and the inability to achieve sustained employment, costs the country £32 billion per year.

Local picture

At local level, the issues cited in national autism strategy remain, exacerbated by an increasing trajectory of demand, however stakeholders involved in Shropshire autism strategy development believe that the primary ambition for autistic people should be their health and well-being and not the ability of autistic people to “get a job” as this can be the source of considerable stress/anxiety/discomfort. For many we know that access to assessment and diagnosis can be "the start of positive change" and the opportunity to learn and understand self however we also know that the narrative around assessment needs to change to manage expectations. Access to strategies of support and understanding of autism delivered using neuro-affirming language for children, families, parent carers and adults is critical in helping understand difference not deficit. In Shropshire, assessment referral data shows comparable increases with national rates – a 767% increase for children and young people (CYP) with the longest wait over 2 years. Increases of 31% are reported for adult assessments referrals, with an average wait time of 4 years, both waiting times are unacceptable.

Total Shropshire population data is expected to increase by 15.1%, June 2025 Office of National Statistics figures, showing growth areas in adults aged 25 years and over with marked growth in 65 years +. Using current national prevalence data we are able to forecast the impact of autism and neurodivergence for our population in Shropshire; the data has been used to indicate the prevalence of autism at 4% and neurodivergence at 15% by age group; the numbers are significant increases from previous prevalence rates of 1% and represent significant capacity challenges for health and local authority services, including education, employment, housing and social care and the Criminal Justice System.

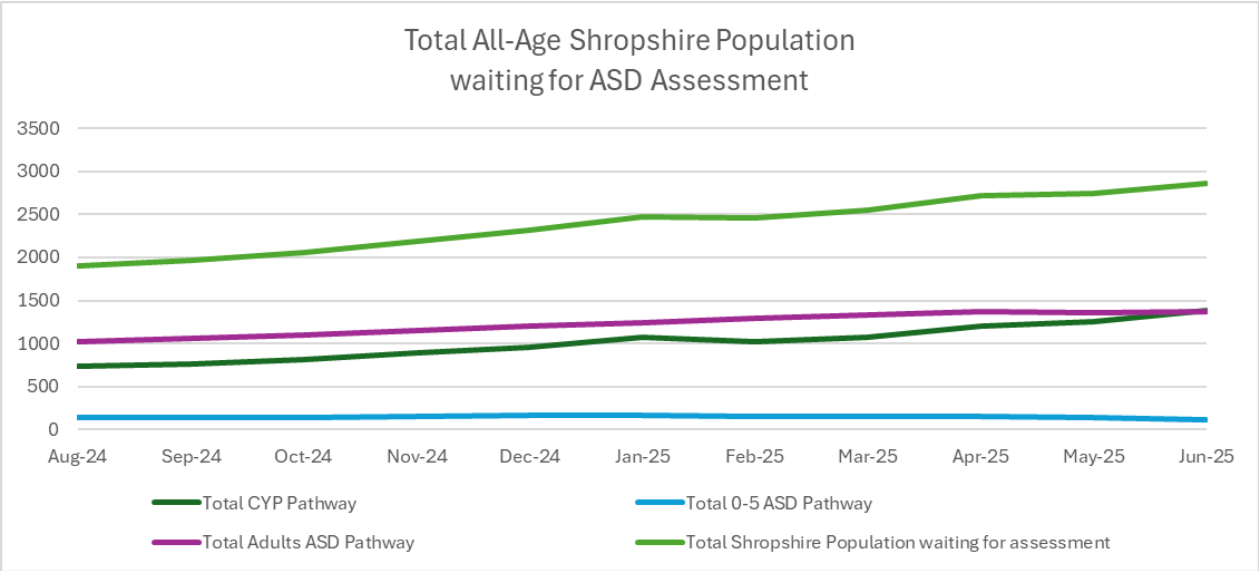
There is often unrecognised impact on parent carers/families navigating the autism assessment process for their children, the current referral process can be overwhelming and frustrating to parents with a wider impact on employment, income and well-being.

In Shropshire we are improving our understanding of our autistic population by mapping autism referrals in conjunction with community and school support; this is now being used to inform the location and demand for support needs in our communities. We have piloted all age autism events in county hot spots raising awareness of available services and connecting with Community and Family hubs to meet people where they live. In addition, we have held focus groups with parent carers and autistic adults, listening to their experience of the assessment pathways, identifying issues and gaps in provision which would improve their experience and the outcomes for the child/young person or adult in their family. Neurodivergent CYP are 3-6 times more likely to have other mental health difficulties such as anti-social behaviour, depression and anxiety and research confirms links to school exclusion and links to the Criminal Justice System.

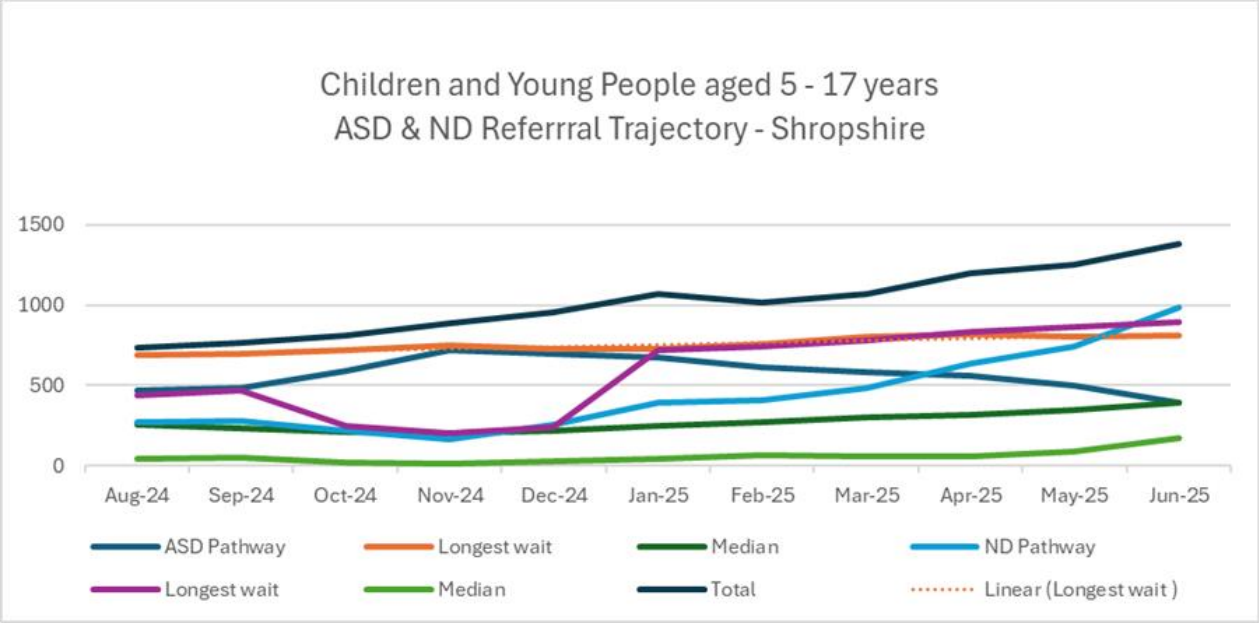
Age	2023	2047	Change	% Change	Autism Prevalence 2027 - 4% Population	Autism Prevalence 2047 - 4% Population	ND Prevalence 2023 - 15% Population	ND Prevalence 2047 - 15% Population
0-4	14521	13805	-716	-4.9%	581	552	2178	2071
5-14	35324	30747	-4577	-13.0%	1413	1230	5299	4612
15	3979	3318	-661	-16.6%	159	133	597	498
16-24	26973	25460	-1513	-5.6%	1079	1018	4046	3819
25-44	71,954	81338	9384	13.0%	2878	3254	10793	12201
45-64	95821	104357	8536	8.9%	3833	4174	14373	15654
65-84	75647	100987	25340	33.5%	3026	4039	11347	15148
85+	11653	26644	14991	128.6%	466	1066	1748	3997
Total	**335,872**	**386655**	**50783**	**15.1%**	**13435**	**15466**	**62500**	**68998**

In June 2025 Shropshire autism assessment referral data confirms 1381 CYP 5-17 years are on the waiting list for assessment; 1365 adults and 114 0-5 years– a total of 2,860representing all age waits, with wide impact on the individuals, their parent carers and families. Of these the holistic approach offered by the 0-5 years pathway is the only data showing a downward trajectory but, overall, the data shows **a 66% increase in referrals** for assessment between August 2024 and June 2025 which should not be ignored.

The total all-age autism pathway waiting lists is shown below. Children aged 3-5 years show a downward trajectory however 5- 17 and adults pathways show significant increases



Child and Young People Pathway showing upward trajectory in terms of numbers and waiting times



Target Population

- All age
- All assessment pathways, 3-5 years nursery and pre-school, 5-17 years provision for children and young people, and the adult's pathway
- Targeted areas of need - young adults transitioning from children to adults' services and older adults living with ageing parents, with unknown needs or diagnosis status.
- Older adults

What are the identified issues:

- pre/post diagnostic and ongoing low level preventative support available at any age. Focus group feedback indicate existing support is not clear and parent carers, families and adults are often unclear where to find support
- Lack of understanding and communication of the assessment process, expectations and potential outcomes
- Lack of understanding of available support services whilst waiting and a lack of communication which on the waiting list
- Support must be accessible to all, needs led, accessible support in communities
- The voices of lived experience should be captured to influence service improvements
- The voices of parent carers and families' must be considered
- Reasonable adjustments are not understood, communicated and consistently available
- Lack of transition planning that extends beyond an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) to provide on-going support to autistic people wanting to progress their education through university and further education

- Access to training on neurodiversity and autism is not consistently available to staff in education, health and care settings leading to inconsistencies in understanding needs
- Care Act Assessments undertaken should be done "through the autistic lens"
- Inconsistent access to annual health checks, NHS passports, health services for autistic people including doctors, dentists and opticians.
- Lack of clarity and guidance over the NHS Right to Choose to support patients in exercising a choice regarding their assessment provider. No shared data around the numbers waiting for assessment with alternative providers, their experience and access to locally based support provision once the assessment is complete

Strategic Goals Summary

1. Ensure Needs-Led, Person-Centred Support

- Deliver support based on individual needs, not diagnosis status.
- Improve access to needs-led support in communities, consider the development of Neurohubs and their focussed support and specialist knowledge on neurodivergence
- Provision of education and support for autistic individuals of all ages to ensure autistic people understand themselves. The delivery and availability of support such as “this is me”, “about me” initiatives are essential
- Promote access to reasonable adjustments across all health services (GPs, dentists, opticians).
- Use Autism Champions or Buddies to support individuals through processes.

2. Promote Prevention and Early Intervention

- Implement a prevention model of support for autistic people of all ages and their parent carers/families.
- Provide early intervention across all age groups to prevent escalation and crisis.
- Embed social prescribing and community-based support.

3. Improve Access and Capacity in Autism Assessment and Support

- Reduce waiting times for autism assessments for both children and adults.
- Increase capacity for online and face-to-face assessments.
- Develop an integrated diagnostic and care pathway, including pre/post-diagnostic and ongoing preventative support through schools, community and family hubs providing accessible community-based support for all ages that recognises the contribution from the school nursing team
- Ensure continuation of EHCP support into further education and adulthood.

4. Empower Families and Individuals

- Ensure parent and carer voices are heard in referral and support processes.
- Navigational support through the referral process
- Reduce stress and anxiety caused by referral and assessment process with clearer communication and improved access to specialist support through the commissioned universal autism support service and autism hub

- Recognise the impact of an autistic family member on parent carers, families and friends, through Shropshire Carers support

5. Build Workforce Capability and Systemic Change

- Mandate neurodivergence training for education and health staff.
- Ensure consistent training for school staff.

6. Enhance Communication and Information Sharing

- Provide clear, consistent, and empowering information, through a joined-up communication plan with health partners
- Regular updates on diagnosis wait status.
- Improve digital systems (e.g., digital flags for communication and progress tracking).
- Ensure the needs of CYP or adults are recorded consistently across support services such as mental health provision, social prescribing to ensure a clearer understanding of the size and needs of our autistic population and any gaps

7. Foster Inclusion and Community Engagement

- Increase visibility and support through community-based hubs and social prescribing
- Ensure the co-production of CYP and adults in service design and delivery
- Reduce stigma and promote acceptance of autism.

8. Communication and understanding

- Provision of education and support for autistic individuals of all ages to ensure autistic people understand themselves. The delivery and availability of support such as “this is me”, “about me” initiatives
- Mandatory neurodivergence training for staff in health and education settings and consistent provision and understanding of reasonable adjustments for autistic people
- Access to annual health checks, NHS passports and improved access to health services for autistic people including doctors, dentists and opticians.
- Clarity on the NHS Right to Choose offer and process/advice support for parent carers, families and adults through Shropshire GP’s

Expected Outcomes

Short term - focussing on accessibility, awareness, and early-stage support mechanisms:

- Autism support is accessible in community locations.
- Parents and children/young people (CYP) feel listened to and supported.
- CYP understand their needs and feel empowered.
- Person-centred care is embedded in practice.
- Improved understanding of autism and strategies to support CYP and their families.
- Increased acceptance and reduced stigma for autistic individuals.
- Enhanced coping mechanisms for autistic people

Medium term – reflecting systemic improvements and service integration

- Clear, needs-led support pathways available regardless of diagnosis status.
- Improved communication and collaboration across services (e.g. schools, health, VCSE).
- Reduced waiting times for assessments through increased capacity and digital access.
- Consistent and mandatory neurodiversity training for education and health professionals.
- Improved access to social prescribing and community-based support.
- Enhanced support for parent carers, including advocacy and navigation assistance.
- Implementation of digital tools (e.g. flags, updates) to track progress and communication.
- Strengthened voice and co-production from CYP and adults in service design.

Longer term – representing the overarching vision and systemic transformation:

- A comprehensive, well-communicated support offer for all ages, regardless of diagnosis.
- Systemic change in the diagnostic process: prompt, needs-led, and compassionate.
- Lifelong support that reduces escalation of health needs and prevents crisis.
- Families, CYP, and adults feel supported throughout their life journey.
- Autistic people can access help and support confidently and know what is available.
- Continuity of support from early years through adulthood, including transitions to further education and independent living.

Education and Preparation for Adulthood

"Neurodivergent children can thrive in an educational setting when given supportive and understanding environments tailored to their unique needs." (16)

Background

Equitable support for autistic children in schools, and a positive experience, is fundamental to supporting educational achievement and well-being with wider impact on employment, independence and fulfilment for many. School support for autistic children is recorded in increasing statutory guidance however a joined-up approach must be delivered to recognise the life-long impact of a poor school experience on well-being, mental health, anxiety, social isolation, educational achievement and employment opportunities.

We should all show a "commitment to developing empathetic educational practices that cater to the unique cognitive needs of neurodivergent children" (16)

Education is not just primary and secondary; it must include considerations of transition and consistency of post 16 support to further and higher education to ensure an equitable offer to all. We must create an employment pathway to a better future that includes preparation for the world of work, training for employers, meaningful work experience and volunteering placements/supported internships to allow students to "try" opportunities in different sectors.

"Autistic people have strengths, abilities and interests that often exceed their more neurotypical peers… including attention to detail, visual perception, creative and artistic talents, mathematical and technical abilities." "Using a strengths-based approach from the outset… helps give autistic individuals a much more balanced outlook." (17)

Across Education we must recognise the unique talents of autistic students adopting a strengths-based education that fosters a more positive and empowering experience for autistic learners.

National perspective

The **2015 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice** places duties on local authorities, NHS and schools in respect of autistic children and young people SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf Under statutory guidance accompanying the National Autism Strategy, SENCOs should inform young people with autism of their right to a community care assessment and their parents of the right to a carer's assessment. This should be built into preparing for adulthood review meetings for those with Education Health Care (EHC) plans. The SEND APP, Special Educational Needs Accelerated Progress Plan, should improve understanding of autism in schools, train staff and school teams to be inclusive and consider adjustments to the school environment to accommodate the needs of autistic children.

The **2019 – NHS Long Term Plan** - https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/ committed to reducing autism assessment waiting times and delivering packages of post-assessment support for children and the **2021 – 2026 National Autism Strategy for Children and Young People and Adults** cites too many autistic people still face long waits for their diagnosis and do not always receive support that is tailored to their needs at an early enough stage. Far too many autistic people still struggle in childhood, both with getting a diagnosis and with support

following a diagnosis, including at school, and find it hard to get a job when they reach adulthood.

In March 2024 National Autism Charity, Ambitious about Autism, called for the government to extend education health and care plans (EHCPs) to provide a legal duty to support autistic young people in work becoming *employment* health and care plans Autism Eye - EHCPs 'should be extended into employment health and care plans' "the requirement for support does not end when a young person leaves school or college."

This recommendation supported the Buckland review of Autism Employment (18), published in February 2024, that found most autistic people want to work, however, just three in ten are in jobs due to stigma and lack of understanding and many of these are not full-time jobs worthy of the individuals skills, qualifications and experience.

The Review's recommendations include guidance for employers on inclusive procedures, training for autistic staff, equipping career advisers to give better support, and guides for appropriate premises and furnishings.

"Neurodivergent children experience profound anxiety, depression, and sensory overload triggered by a typical school environment they find simply overwhelming."

This year, in June 2025, as we approach the final year of the National Autism Strategy 2021-2026 and a new government takes the helm, there has been increased activity in reviewing autism at national level. The Autism Act 2009 Committee and House of Lords Select Committee issued a call for evidence from autistic people and professionals reflecting on their own experience and gaps in provision, a report is due in November 2025. The Neurodiversity Task and Finish Group, convened to review education support for neurodivergent children between March and September 2025, is to make recommendations to DfE ministers on the best ways to support and meet the needs of neurodivergent children and young people in mainstream settings, the work of Shropshire's Neurodiversity Practitioners has been shared with members of this Task and Finish group as evidence of good practice. The group will consider the following issues in their review of how classroom practices and wider approaches could better meet neurodivergent children and young people's needs:

- the presentation of overlapping and co-occurring needs (when different conditions occur together or have similar types of need) and how to support these
- the types of support that should not depend on a diagnosis
- provide a shared understanding about what provision and support should look like, informing classroom practices and wider approaches
- best practice regarding the commissioning of support services across education and health
- how to effectively deliver educational support for neurodivergent children and young people locally, regionally and nationally; and how that support can properly consider long-term ability to be successful and independent in future life as well as short-term support and adjustments
- how to reduce school avoidance – national data is stark, school avoidance occurs in 7.1% of neurotypical children, compared with 42.6% of Autistic children (19)

Local picture

"The confusion of the early years and discovering your child is neurodivergent, to navigating a school system that doesn't seem to fit, and the daily frustrations of picking your battles (and losing most of them)" (20)

- The rising trajectory of autism assessment referrals in CYP - 767% increase reported at the end of 2023 placing schools under increased pressure to manage the increase in referrals. During the autism strategy development period referrals have almost doubled
- The lack of data on the recording of CYP needs in schools and the links to school support – examples include the Inclusion Development Grant, to develop early intervention/prevention strategies to reduce exclusion in secondary schools, Risk of NEET Index (RONI), Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA), Mental Health in schools and Talk to Work programmes
- The poor understanding, communication and navigational support of support services for parent carers and families
- The increase in EHCP's with a primary need of autism. Data shows a doubling between 2021-2023, capacity issues causing delays for EHCP's and withdrawal of children from school whilst waiting (with wider impact on social isolation, education gaps, stigma and impact on the family)
- The impact of school experience on CYP. London School of Economics reported the long-term impact of bullying for autistic children on mental health and life achievement
- The need for a partnership approach in SEND reviews which is person centred and includes parents understanding of their children
- The need to equitable access to preschool and after school clubs for autistic children
- The lack of knowledge and understanding around the environmental and cultural impact of schools on a positive school experience which contributes to underachievement, school avoidance, social isolation and mental health issues
- Inconsistent support and the lack of set standards/expectations of accessible support available in higher education institutions compared to primary and secondary schools
- The understanding of the Equality Act 2010 and access to reasonable adjustments
- The inconsistency of knowledge and support for autistic CYP
- The lack of needs led resources for support pre and post diagnosis in education settings
- Rigidity in school curriculum and focus on exam attainment impacting educational outcomes for autistic young people

"*The earlier the young person is recognised as autistic and positively supported, the less likely that severe mental health issues will develop.*" (21)

Target Population

- Autistic children and young people (CYP)
- Autistic young people including post 16 transition and those accessing higher or further education
- Autistic adults wanting to continue education at any age

Intervention activities that will address the need:

- Training in schools to achieve minimum standards of staff understanding of autism through coordinated activities of Autism Education Training, Partnership for the Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) and Shropshire's Neurodiversity Practitioners (NDP's) and increase the use of neuro-affirming language consistently across all schools and in all classrooms

- Neurodiversity Practitioner Team – advocate for mandatory and free support for ALL Shropshire schools moving from the current traded model to ensure equity
- Neurodiversity Practitioner Team, refine support offer for secondary schools/college to include Preparation for adulthood and Post 16 support, specifically those on Risk of Need Index (RONI)
- Improve data collection of CYP to ensure all health conditions are recorded consistently across all projects
- Extend the reach of Primary school support through Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools to support all Shropshire Primary schools. The 2025/26 extension to PINS has been welcomed but an equitable offer of training and peer support networks should be available in ALL schools
- Review the impact of EHCP accuracy and updates in ensuring the needs of autistic CYP are accurately represented and offer transition to higher/further education or employment
- Targeting of Information, Advice and Guidance to children and families on the diagnostic pathway – improve the collaboration with assessment pathways, schools and the community to ensure awareness and accessibility
- Focussed support offer available in the community through the use of Family and Community hubs and improved accessibility to universal autism support services; these have been piloted 2024/2025 offering all age support to CYP and parent carers and families of primary and secondary school age children and those transitioning to adult services at 18. Ensure support services are commissioned in line with demand.
- Ensure the shaping of future support listens to the experience of autistic CYP – this can be included in the launch of a pilot Radio Club project aimed at promoting skills and confidence through producing a podcast, encouraging CYP to talk and learn about key issues to them
- Regular access to autism assessment referral data to ensure support services match areas of need across the county. This must be established routinely to inform community and service provision

Strategic Goals Summary

1. Drive Systemic and Cultural Change

- Create inclusive school environments that recognise the holistic needs of neurodivergent children and allow them to thrive in school. If not in place, this impacts home education and school exclusion
- Reduce stigma using neuro-affirming language.
- Challenge rigidity in the national education system to support diverse learning needs.

2. Improve Data and Insight

- Ensure consistent data capture on CYP with additional needs to inform sustainable solutions that ensure we understand the needs of all children.
- Use autism referral data to align support services with areas of greatest need.

3. Enhance Support Across the Education Journey

- Provide consistent, needs-led support pre- and post-diagnosis.
- Develop a co-produced, transferable support document (e.g. a “passport”) for transitions to higher education and employment.

- Ensure **mandated support** for autistic students in schools at all stages of education.

4. Strengthen Training and Workforce Development

- Deliver autism training for school staff through coordinated programmes (e.g. Autism Education Training, PINS, NDPs).
- Establish minimum standards for consistent delivery across schools and other education institutions
- Expand the Neurodiversity Practitioner Team and peer support networks to ensure support can be accessed again and when needed.

5. Empower Children, Young People, and Families

- Ensure CYP voices shape future support services (e.g. via the Youth Partnership Board).
- 'Empowering the autism community' more generally in education (e.g., ways in which autistic people in education, and their families where relevant, are given opportunities to shape services, environments, policy etc to include post-school education.
- Improve communication and navigation of services for parent carers and families.
- Reduce the number of children educated at home by meeting needs within schools.

6. Build Sustainable and Integrated Support Systems

- Position schools as community hubs for autism support.
- Improve access to commissioned, voluntary, and social prescribing services.
- Reference autism consistently in strategic frameworks (e.g. SEND Review, Youth Strategy, Neurodiversity Workstream).

7. Improve Educational and Life Outcomes

- Increase educational achievement at secondary level.
- Support transitions into further and higher education, integrating more continuity of support in education pursued post-school leaver age to capture further and higher education choices to reduce the disruption that can be experienced.
- Increase accessibility of university and the completion of programmes because support needs are met; this in turn improves graduate outcomes and opportunities to acquire meaningful/purposeful employment post-graduation.

Expected Outcomes

Short-Term:

- Increased autism awareness and training uptake in schools.
- Improved communication between families and services.
- More consistent support for autistic CYP across educational settings.

Medium-Term:

- Reduction in school exclusions and elective home education.
- Better alignment of services with local needs through improved data.
- Enhanced transitions to post-16 education and employment.

Long-Term:

- Higher educational attainment among autistic students.
- Increased employment and independence for autistic young people.
- A more inclusive and equitable education system for all neurodivergent learners.

Employment

"Just 3 in 10 autistic people have a job."

Background

"Neglecting autistic strengths and abilities can inadvertently perpetuate stigma around autism and limit people's potential." (22)

Employment supports self-esteem, independence and well-being, it offers fulfilment, a sense of achievement and should be accessible to all. A shift is needed to improve understanding of autism in the workplace, to enhance employer understanding and accountability, particularly around reasonable adjustments and inclusive practices under the Equality Act 2010.

The National Autistic Society report, Left Stranded (23), showed the pandemic exacerbated the inequalities autistic people already faced of loneliness, anxiety and exclusion from public spaces, as well as new pressures that include shopping, social distancing measures and employment.

We need a broader shift to recognising the value of autism to employers, where businesses and society benefit from the diverse abilities of autistic individuals, highlighting strengths helps challenge stereotypes and unlock potential in the workplace.

"Teams, businesses and societies can benefit from embracing the diversity of abilities that autistic and other neurodivergent people have." (17)

National perspective

At national level the Annual Population Survey 2020 (24) reported that 21.7% of autistic adults are employed and are more likely to be in roles below their skill level or in unstable employment. Being unemployed excludes people from society. It limits their ability to support themselves and impacts their mental health. Lack of diagnosis, education, awareness and stigma associated with disclosing autism are all reasons attributed to the low percentage. By November 2024 the Annual Population survey shows an improved employment rate of 30% reflecting improved identification of autistic people and greater prominence and topical coverage of autism however data recording of autism is limited with no coverage of wider neurodivergent needs.

MP Sir Robert Buckland issued the Buckland report in February 2024 escalating the national issue of low employment levels and calling for improved training, understanding and support from employers. This was supported by a report issued by the London School of Economics citing the economic cost of low employment rates for autistic people nationally costing the economy over £10 billion. Further studies estimate that between 70% and 95% of autistic children have a mental health condition increasing the risk of unemployment among young adults.

The launch of the Neurodiversity Employability Index, led by national charity Autistica, in July 2024 provided a formal process of accreditation for employers, an opportunity to review recruitment practices, test understanding and knowledge, demonstrate a positive management and workforce culture that understands reasonable adjustments in the workplace, at every stage of employment. 118 pioneering organisations spanning 10 sectors participated in the NDEI®, to learn more about becoming leaders in workplace neuroinclusion and included Enable Employment Support, Shropshire Council, who achieved Silver accreditation in December 2024.

"Organisations know that they need to do more to be inclusive of neurodiversity in the workplace. But many don't know where to start, and others are uncertain about how to make measurable year-on-year progress. That's where the NDEI® comes in." (25)

Local picture

In Shropshire, adult social care data shows that only 14% of adults with a primary need of autism, who are accessing adult social care support, have an employed status. In 2025, costs and support needs continue to rise reflecting escalating needs that often stem from a lack of needs led support earlier in life.

Our review of local employment support data shared by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) shows some highlights from Shropshire's employment data: this is recorded under "disability" however, whilst accurate, also demonstrates that we are unable to quantify our employment rates for autistic people in Shropshire. To improve our understanding of employment rates of autistic people we need a consistent approach to how this data is captured to accurately reflect the local and national employment position. Not only is there is no consistent method of data recording through the DWP, Enable and employers but research indicates that the stigma of disclosure, fear of rejection and reduced opportunity is exacerbated by cultural and societal acceptance of difference.

1. Of 182,300 working age people in Shropshire, 45,200 are disabled = 24.8% (DWP October 2023 – September 2024)

3. 25,145 people are recorded on UC Universal Credit – (December 2024) with Shropshire 8th place out of 20 West Midlands local authorities

To capture and reflect the employment views of autistic people, a Shropshire Council Employment survey was published on March 3rd closing 2nd May 2025. The responses received provided rich and current data on the work-related challenges faced by autistic people providing quantitative and qualitative data to evidence the need for change.

What the survey told us:

A total of 195 individuals participated in the survey, with 97% identifying as neurodiverse. Among those, 72% had a formal diagnosis of neurodiversity, while 26% were self-diagnosed. Most respondents identified as having Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), followed by ADHD, dyslexia, and sensory processing difficulties. The gender breakdown showed 33% male and 62% female respondents, with a diverse age range represented. The survey respondents live across Shropshire but there were far more from the Shrewsbury area than from other parts of the county (111 of the 195). Whilst this is positive evidence it also suggested that the survey should be promoted again across local communities to ensure all demographics in Shropshire are represented in the survey findings.

The survey also assessed the education and employment status of respondents, revealing that 52% were employed, while others were students, self-employed, or unemployed. Only 16 respondents were receiving support from employment services. Some of the survey topic highlights are shown below:

1. Preparation for work - 55% of respondents felt prepared, while 39% did not
2. Workplace adjustments - 70% of respondents understood the concept of reasonable adjustments, but 49 individuals were unaware of it, indicating a need for greater awareness.
3. Applications - significant barriers in understanding job descriptions and advertisements, with many respondents expressing that employers often do not clearly welcome applications from neurodiverse individuals and stigma associated with sharing autism as a "disability"

4. Job Interviews - only 13% of respondents felt comfortable discussing their neurodiversity during interviews, affecting implementation of reasonable adjustments
5. In Work - 75 of the 86 respondents in work do not feel that they can be their "true self" in the workplace. A large number expressed concerns about stigma and bullying, with many indicating that their neurodiversity negatively impacted their workplace relationships and opportunities for promotion.

The findings from the survey suggest there is a significant need for improved understanding and support for neurodiverse individuals within the workplace. Key themes identified include the necessity for additional training for employers, better implementation of policies, and the provision of reasonable adjustments. A significant issue highlighted within the survey comments is that many individuals don't feel able to disclose their neurodiversity because of previous experiences or understand the reasonable adjustments they may request/ actions available. This presents challenges that employers are not aware of needs and are therefore also unable to respond by offering reasonable adjustments.

Employment support must be in place on several levels. We must introduce training to prepare young people for employment and the world of work - what to expect, how their behaviour might be interpreted, reasonable adjustments and positive ways to help a smooth transition to the workplace to support sustainable and meaningful employment. Such actions and employment support would deliver a consistent approach benefiting all autistic people and support a positive cultural change in recognising the strengths of all people in the workplace.

What are the issues:

- Lack of understanding of autism and workplace reasonable adjustments, as specified in the Equality Act 2010, for both employee and employer - there is a clear need for education rather than awareness in driving staff understanding of autism and neurodivergence, a cultural shift that accepts "difference"
- Lack of visibility of employers who positively support neurodiversity
- Inconsistent approach to employment support for autistic people ensuring needs led support to find sustainable employment
- Risk of stigma associated with disclosing individual needs to an employer
- Shortage of supported internships and work opportunities for autistic young people
- Poor data around the primary needs of the job seeker so that support needs and resources can be assessed and prevalence recorded
- Vulnerabilities of autistic young people as they transition from school to further education/employment/training and the impact of that transition
- No continuation of an EHCP (Educational Health and Care Plan) to document the needs of an autistic person as they transition from education towards employment.
- Needs led Post 16 support for those CYP who are recorded on the Risk of Neet Index (RONI)
- Not all autistic people will be able to work, access to benefits and support must be available to all when needed
- The economic cost and financial impact of low employment rates on individuals, their well-being, families, our communities and economies

Target Population:

- Young people aged 14-16+ who are leaving education who require clarity on employment opportunities and confidence that employers understand their needs
- Autistic adults who are available for or looking for employment
- Autistic adults who are in work

Intervention activities that will address the need:

- Mandatory training and understanding of autism for employer and employee
- Introduction of a coproduced "About Me" document and EHCP/Passport to allow a consistent platform for identifying support needs for transition to further education or employment
- Recruitment practices that recognise difference and offer reasonable adjustments at all stages of recruitment.
- Neuro-affirming language should be used avoiding deficit-based language
- Employment awareness campaign to double employment rates in Shropshire - for example Shropshire Chamber and Marches Growth Hub
- Promotion and adoption of the national Neurodiversity Employability Index (NDEI)
- A Neurodiversity Champions forum co-produced to ensure support from local authority to employer level providing a platform for peer support
- Post 16 to access Neurodiversity Practitioners support in schools to provide 121 support to meet needs including those that are identified on RONI. This should include a record of the need for support that includes autism.
- A consistent employment support offer that records need to provide data on employment rates
- Training on the Equality Act 2010 and Reasonable adjustments
- A coproduced Neurodiversity Champions forum

Strategic Goals Summary

1. Increase Employment Rates for Autistic Adults

- Align with Autistica's national ambition to double employment rates by 2030.
- Reduce economic costs of unemployment (estimated nationally at £10 billion annually).
- Improve societal outcomes and generate potential savings of £1.5 billion per year.

2. Improve Employer Understanding and Inclusion

- Enhance employer understanding and accountability, particularly around reasonable adjustments and inclusive practices under the Equality Act 2010.
- Promote the use of neuro-affirming language to reduce stigma.
- Engage employers through initiatives like the Neurodiversity Employability Index (NDEI) and partnerships with local business networks.

3. Enhance Support Structures and Pathways

- Develop a consistent, needs-led approach to employment support.
- Review and implement a Disability Passport to identify and communicate support needs.
- Expand supported internships and work opportunities for autistic young people.

4. Strengthen Data and Visibility

- Improve data collection on neurodivergent job seekers to better understand needs and outcomes.
- Increase visibility of inclusive employers to encourage best practice and reduce stigma.

5. Support Transitions and Independence

- Focus on Preparation for Adulthood and support for young people aged 14–16+.
- Provide clear employment pathways for young adults leaving education.
- Reduce reliance on social care through increased independence and employment.

6. Foster Community and System-Wide Change

- Collaborate with local authorities and business groups (e.g. Shropshire Council, Chamber of Commerce).
- Promote county-wide awareness campaigns to shift perceptions and improve access to equitable job opportunities.

Expected Outcomes

Medium-Term

- Broader employer understanding of autism and neurodiversity, supported by business partnerships such as the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Marches Growth Hub.
- Commitment to national employment accreditation initiatives focusing on support for neurodivergent people looking for work, and in the workplace
- Importance of Post 16 support and transitions, ensuring the needs of autistic young people are met and matched to strengths
- Systemic improvements in data collection and visibility of neurodivergent needs in employment.
- Improved access to equitable job opportunities for autistic individuals.
- Increased independence and overall well-being.

Long-Term

- A measurable increase in employment rates for autistic adults, sharing the national goal of doubling these rates by 2030.
- Reduction in reliance on social care through sustainable employment, improved well-being and improved transitions into adulthood.
- Creating a consistent, inclusive employment support system that is needs-led and neurodiversity-aware.

Housing & Social Care

Background

The autism strategy aims to address the complex and evolving housing and social care needs of autistic adults in Shropshire. Drawing on evidence from the Housing LIN Report (Jan 2025), Power BI analytics, and Census 2021 data, it highlights the urgent need for a coordinated, data-informed, and person-centred approach to commissioning services. The strategy recognises the significant local authority financial burden and the human cost of inadequate housing and support including identifying areas of under reporting particularly for undiagnosed autistic adults living with ageing parents.

The increase in autism assessment referrals for CYP and adults, including long waiting times of between two and four years, may contribute to the rise in the population eligible for local authority support from the, including escalating needs whilst waiting. Understanding the impact of the “burden of waiting” is the subject for a study to be conducted by Keele University – UNPACK study – “Supporting and understanding neurodivergent people through diagnosis seeking and the burden of waiting” and will help inform the needs of those waiting for assessment, the reasons for assessment and impact on housing and social care support.

Housing LIN reported a noticeable push toward greater independence and person-centred living for people with autism and those with coexisting conditions such as autism and learning difficulty. The expectation for supported living is becoming the norm rather than an exception and this links in closely to the experiences of young and older autism people “who can face difficulties transitioning to supported housing later in life, especially when they move after years of living with their parents”. Opportunities to provide independent living skills supports increasing expectations around independence reported in Housing LIN and demonstrate a shift to more personalised living environments that shared housing does not always provide.

There is a need for collaborative planning and data utilisation between health and council teams to identify the needs of autistic individuals and their families. This can come from a number of sources including data from autism assessments, post 16 transition and social prescribing. This information will contribute to better informed housing and support services, creating a clearer pipeline of need and improved planning to help meet needs to achieve best outcomes for the individual. Work has already started in this area by improving the recording of neurodivergence and autism by the social prescribing team, understanding the needs of our population will improve our planning and shaping of service improvements.

Improved planning is further enhanced by a multi-disciplinary approach to ensuring a housing solution meets individual assessed need and building a robust prevention model of support for autistic adults to reduce the escalation of needs.

Positive outcomes can be achieved by identifying gaps in provision based on evidence and data with opportunities to work closely with developers to ensure person centred builds that meet needs and ensure individual safety together with closer working relationships and collaboration with the autism hub to understand needs.

Target Population

- Autistic adults at any stage of diagnosis
- Autistic adults with identified housing and social care needs.
- Undiagnosed autistic adults living with ageing parents whose needs are currently unrecorded.

Intervention Activities - these interventions are designed to work together to create a more responsive, inclusive, and forward-planning system of housing and social care for autistic adults.

- Mandatory autism training for professionals in commissioning and social care.

- Person-centred, needs-led support with improved communication.
- Development of housing specifications tailored to autistic needs.
- Independent Living Skills programme to assess and support practical independence.
- Internal resources for timely Housing Needs Assessments.
- Clear communication of prevention offers using visual and written formats.
- Collaboration with Keele University's UNPACK study to understand the burden of waiting and inform future services.

Strategic Priorities

1. Data-Driven Planning & Forecasting

- Improve internal data systems to forecast housing and social care needs for autistic adults.
- Use EHCPs, autism hub data, and Housing LIN insights to map geographical demand and plan services.
- Collaborate with health services to identify undiagnosed autistic adults living with ageing parents.

2. Prevention & Early Intervention

- Clarify the prevention offer and communicate it through both visual and written formats.
- Shift towards proactive, community-based support aligned with the NHS 10-year plan and consider using existing specialist knowledge to enhance support, for example through the autism hub .
- Reduce crisis situations through early identification and support.
- Promote voluntary sector involvement for low-level, preventative support.

3. Housing Strategy & Independent Living

- Develop housing models that are person-centred and autism-informed (sensory, auditory, safety needs).
- Build a pipeline of need to support transitions from childhood to adulthood.
- Design and implement a programme to deliver practical independent living skills
- Increase availability of specialist and independent living accommodation.
- Build internal resources to conduct Housing Needs Assessments, reducing reliance on external commissioning and improving timeliness of outcomes.

4. Workforce Development & Training

- Mandatory autism training for all professionals involved in commissioning and social care.
- Embed specialist autism knowledge in assessment teams.

5. Lived Experience & Co-Production

- Capture voices of autistic adults, parent carers, and families to shape services.
- Develop Autism Champions to advocate and support others.

6. Service Navigation & Communication

- Improve clarity and accessibility of support services through visual and written formats.

- Promote an “umbrella of ordinary things in ordinary places” in line with the Shropshire Plan, ensuring autistic adults can access mainstream community resources.
- Consider animations and other tools to explain local offers and processes

Expected outcomes

Immediate Outcomes

- Clearer trajectory of need to inform planning and budgeting, including transition planning.
- Improved clarity of existing service offers.
- Identification of gaps in provision based on evidence and data.
- Opportunities to collaborate with developers for person-centred housing.
- Stronger collaboration with the autism hub.

Intermediary Outcomes

- Reduced crisis situations due to timely and appropriate interventions.
- Lower demand for emergency accommodation.
- Increased managed moves through better crisis planning.
- Evidence-based pipeline of need using transition and adult data.

Long-Term (Primary) Outcomes

- Autistic people are supported to live in the right accommodation, at the right time, with the right support.
- A care market that is well-equipped to meet the needs of autistic people.
- Enhanced internal systems for forecasting and strategic planning.
- Greater visibility of autistic adults living with ageing parents to inform commissioning.

Criminal Justice System

Background

Understanding the impact of autism and wider neurodivergence system-wide across the Criminal Justice System provides insight and intelligence on prevalence, cost and capacity. It suggests the need for systemic change within the Criminal Justice System, improving understanding and practices to ensure appropriate support for autistic people of all ages, recognising their vulnerabilities to, and within, the Criminal Justice System and the impact on their families and wider communities.

"The challenge is not related to knowing what to do to deliver services that make a positive difference. Rather, it is the alignment of them within a comprehensive systems pathway." (26)

National perspective

National data (ADHD Foundation) suggests prevalence of Autism in prisons is as high as 8.5% however research from the HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) review in 2021 suggests that "*within prisons the prevalence of autistic 'traits' or 'indicators' could be around three times as high (16% and 19% respectively*)" and in some prisons as much as 50%. Many autistic prisoners remain undiagnosed, encountering misunderstandings caused by inconsistencies in awareness, screening, and identification. Their behaviour is often misunderstood and negatively impacted by lack of diagnosis or support contributing to their struggles to succeed in a society that doesn't understand or support them.

"We were struck by the number of times the word 'difficult' was used in evidence, most commonly in relation to perceptions of the behaviour of neurodivergent people. ***It would perhaps be more useful to reflect on how 'difficult' the Criminal Justice System is for people with neurodivergent needs****, and what could be done to change this."* (27)

Whilst the data focus is on autism in the prison population, the direction of travel through the Criminal Justice System often includes all other elements, depending on age. The police, probation, youth justice, courts and forensic teams are all impacted. The HMPPS report recognised "*there is no reliable, consistent or systematic data collection, either within individual services or across the Criminal Justice System as a whole, which can tell us about the extent of neurodivergence".*

In addition to this, available data suggests a huge discrepancy in the increasing presentation and recognition of autism, ADHD or both (sometimes referred to as AuDHD). Prevalence data shows that at least 40% of autistic people have co-occurring ADHD, and that this must be considered in the education and training of criminal justice system staff.

The "Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System: a review of evidence" report includes the following key observations *"it seems that perhaps half of those entering prison could reasonably be expected to have some form of neurodivergent condition which impacts their ability to engage".* This is supported by a survey of police, prison and probation staff who revealed consistently low levels of awareness, understanding and confidence in relation to neurodiversity, people involved in the Criminal Justice System made a powerful plea for

criminal justice staff to simply make full use of their 'soft skills' – listening, empathy and compassion**.**

The review of evidence report makes six short recommendations, including an overarching recommendation about coordination and call for "a coordinated and cross-government approach", working together, and with other statutory and third sector organisations in a coordinated way, to understand and **meet the needs of neurodivergent individuals in the community, prevent offending and supporting rehabilitation**.

There is a wide corpus of literature (28) that refers to limited autism-related knowledge in the broader Criminal Justice System as a whole, the implications of what this can mean for how autistic people's behaviours are understood and/or whether undiagnosed people are identified for screening/diagnosis/support services or are even perhaps misdiagnosed. There are examples of staff who don't fully understand autistic needs and presentations may interpret autistic prisoners as disrespectful; may not appreciate the need to use low arousal approaches to de-escalate situations; may not fully recognise how an individual's autism may form context for adjudications, and who may struggle to disentangle what behaviours are risk-related

These misunderstandings seem to resonate across individual interactions (29) (e.g. with peers and prison staff) and broader systemic levels (e.g., how lack of understanding and appropriate reasonable adjustments/accommodations can leave autistic people susceptible/disadvantaged through the system itself at police, court, prison and beyond). This can be further compounded where an autistic individual either masks their autistic traits (for example as a survival strategy) or the environment serves to mask their traits.

At an individual level, the power of an autistic individual understanding themselves and their behaviours is often overlooked (28) self-understanding can be important regardless of diagnosis and has implications for how they communicate needs to others.

Three key priorities emerge from these reviews, the need for training and understanding, improved system data collection and a collaborative approach across the Criminal Justice System.

Research conducted through the Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Forensic Team in April 2025 "Understanding our clients" confirmed that some autistic people can be particularly vulnerable to abuse and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) earlier in life, which can have implications for subsequent risk of offending and potential perpetration of offending. There are also arguments (30) that autistic people can be susceptible to being influenced, exploited, groomed and/or manipulated by others (e.g., gangs, extremist actors etc.), which can then contribute towards offending and subsequent imprisonment

Autistic individuals report fundamentally different experiences and needs in the Criminal Justice System, these are frequently associated with challenges and difficulties in interpersonal interactions/communication, environments, and processes not being very neuroinclusive.

Whilst national research suggests that systemic change is required across the Criminal Justice System, there needs to be a shift to a consistently person-centred approach that meets the needs of autistic individuals, helping them to understand themselves and the consequence of their behaviour/actions. It is recognised that systemic failure to diagnose and provide needs led support attribute to the vulnerabilities and risks of autistic people to be

victims of crime. People who are often misunderstood within the Criminal Justice System can be more at risk of inappropriate sentences due to a lack of understanding.

Local picture

The strategy sub-group representing the Criminal Justice System has been well attended by all parts of the Criminal Justice System, West Mercia Police, Probation, Criminal Courts, Youth Justice, Autism Forensic team and Shropshire's prison, HMP Stoke Heath, a category C training and resettlement prison holding up to 782 adult men and supported by Dr Luke Vinter, Senior Lecturer in Applied Criminology, University of Derby.

Within the strategy sub-group, autism support has been reviewed as a "system" – a joined-up approach essential in ensuring a shared ambition to support autistic people through their Criminal Justice System journey, to provide a consistent level of understanding, provision of reasonable adjustments and recognition that many autistic individuals are vulnerable adults who are the victims of crime.

The strategy sub-group learned of pockets of positive initiatives. West Mercia Police published their autism strategy in December 2024 and identified mandatory training provisions for front line patrol officers including a proposal to include development courses and have neurodiversity champions. Dedicated Neurodiversity Support Managers (NSMs) are now in place in every public prison in England and Wales to better support offenders away from crime. The specialist staff are tasked with making sure prisoners with neurodivergent needs are identified and can access the right education and training opportunities while in prison which are crucial to reducing reoffending.

Members of the strategy sub-group include representatives from NHSE West Midlands Health and Justice team who have developed Health and Justice - Neurodiversity Training which is being rolled out 2025 - 2026. This training is provided by the National Autistic Society (commissioned by NHS England, Midlands Health and Justice Team) to bring awareness of neurodivergent conditions to everyone involved in the Health and Justice service provision and increase the understanding of neurodiversity and autism, associated specific vulnerabilities and providing supportive strategies.

The Criminal Justice System sub-group has had the benefit of lived experience representation however we have not been able to reflect the lived experiences of autistic people in prison. To support this, we have discussed and co-produced a short interview guide for use by prison staff to encourage prisoners to share their experience. The aim of the guide is to explore how they experience being in prisons, what they find helpful, what they find unhelpful, and how we can ensure prisons meet the needs of autistic people.

We have shared a Criminal Justice System survey with all contributors to the strategy sub-group including West Mercia Police, Criminal Courts, Probation, Youth Justice, and HMP Stoke Heath. The survey aimed to understand current practices, identify gaps, and explore opportunities for improvement in supporting neurodiverse individuals within the system. The results of the survey covered three main themes:

Data: the survey confirms varied and inconsistent approaches to the recording of neurodivergence data contributing to challenges in accessing accurate data on autism prevalence across the system. The information gathered suggests there is a need for standardised methods to record neurodiversity across organisations to ensure

comprehensive data collection and evidence the need for better support for autistic individuals.

Training and Resources: the survey confirms basic training is available for professionals within all organizations', whether mandatory or optional. The training does not represent a "joined up" and consistent approach across every stage of professional Criminal Justice System contact and application and understanding of strategies of support, for autistic individuals, is limited. The training does not use lived experience to clearly understand the needs and experiences of autistic individuals.

Health: the survey findings confirm a person centred approach is being used in supporting neurodivergent individuals, including signposting to support services, access to assessment, and the provision of reasonable adjustments and advocacy.

The results confirmed sub-group findings that inconsistent systems, data capture and training and education, contribute to a lack of accuracy and prevalence across the Criminal Justice System. Broader discussions around needs led support focus on autistic people needing to understand themselves and how their autism impacts their behaviour and risks of reoffending.

Target Population

- 'Autistic' includes both diagnosed and undiagnosed status to ensure support is needs led and person centred
- Autistic children and young people (CYP) vulnerable to crime due to social isolation.
- Autistic individuals in contact with any part of the Criminal Justice System: youth offending, courts, probation, police, prisons.
- Criminal Justice System staff at all levels across all settings.

Strategic Priorities

1. **Training and Education**
   - Consistent, mandatory and contextually relevant autism training for all Criminal Justice System staff, ensuring training is specifically tailored to the context they are working in (not just generic autism training including regular refreshers). Ideally with content that has been co-produced/developed in consultation or collaboration with autistic people.
   - Capture the voice of lived experience across all sectors to help inform a continuous improvement programme of systemic and cultural change
   - Education for people in contact with the Criminal Justice System to understand their autism, vulnerabilities and links to re-offending. An outcome of this education may be the enhancement of ability to convey needs to others.

2. **Systemic Adjustments**
   - More streamlined Autism-related information sharing across the Criminal Justice System.
   - Consistent understanding of, access to, and implementation of reasonable adjustments.
   - A joined-up approach to ensure accessible Criminal Justice System documents, environments and processes are in place to support all autistic people through their Criminal Justice System journey.

3. Support Structures

- Work to promote the establishment of consistent/stable points of contact such as a worker or a team assigned to an autistic person throughout their Criminal Justice System journey.
- Broaden peer-to-peer support and family support and ensure these are clearly communicated and accessible (for example, Triangle of Care, PACT).
- Provide support/navigation for transitions from custody to community services.

4. Data and Strategy

- Adopt a consistent approach to ensuring that the needs and diagnosis status of autistic individuals in Criminal Justice System systems are recorded. This will ensure prevalence can be accurately reported and actions taken to meet support needs
- Shared strategic ambitions across CJS members to ensure joined-up approaches, currently only West Mercia Police has an autism strategy.
- To develop a shared strategy and ambition across all Criminal Justice System partners and review joint commissioning opportunities with Telford and Wrekin.
- Develop gender -specific pathways and strategies to reduce disruption from staff/environment changes.

5. Assessment Access

- Access to autism assessments for those in prison where diagnosis could positively impact outcomes. Establishing a minimum of contextually relevant and dynamic ND needs assessments may also support individuals and services recognising the timescales for formal diagnosis.

Expected Outcomes

Immediate:

- Improved autism understanding, and confidence in working with Autistic people, among CJS professionals.
- Better self-understanding for autistic individuals in the CJS.
- Equitable access to person-centred support and adjustments.

Intermediary:

- Reduced risk of re-offending.
- Reduced crisis escalation and improved mental health.
- Evidence of collaboration and shared strategic goals across CJS partners.
- Opportunity for joint commissioning across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.

Long-Term (Strategic Ambition):

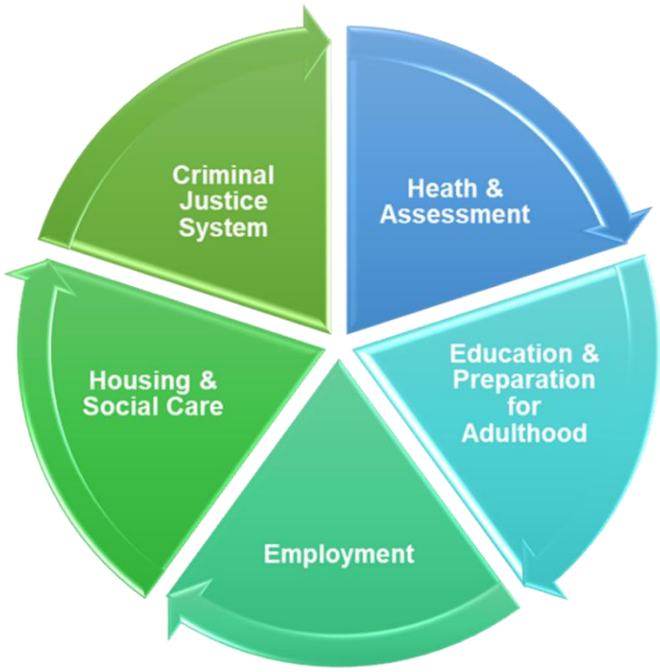
- Establishing a consistent understanding of autism across all CJS staff.
- Reducing the number of autistic individuals in prison. Ensuring equitable access to support services. Creating a safer and more inclusive environment for autistic people within the CJS. Reducing the cycle of re-offending through needs-led support.

Common Themes Across All Domains

1. **Neurodiversity and Autism Inclusion**
    - All collaboration centred on improving outcomes for autistic and neurodivergent individuals, whether diagnosed or self-identifying
    - There is a strong emphasis on **needs-led** rather than diagnosis-led support, recognising the wide diversity of presentations and experiences.
2. **Data Gaps and Systemic Inconsistencies**
    - Each domain highlights **poor data capture**, **inconsistent recording**, and **lack of joined-up systems**—whether in health interventions, support in schools including transitions, employment tracking, Criminal Justice System databases or housing forecasts.
3. **Training and Awareness**
    - A recurring need for **mandatory autism and neurodiversity training** for professionals across sectors—teachers, employers, health workers, social care staff, and Criminal Justice System personnel
    - The importance of application of knowledge and systemic changes as a training outcome
4. **Transition and Continuity of Support**
    - The transition from childhood to adulthood is a critical point of vulnerability. There is a call for **continuity of Educational Health & Care Plans (EHCPs)**, **Preparation for Adulthood (PfA)** frameworks, and **support for young adults** entering employment, higher education, or independent living
5. **Person-Centred and Preventative Approaches**
    - All sectors advocate for **early intervention**, **preventative models**, and **person-centred care** to reduce crisis escalation and improve long-term outcomes
6. **Voice of Lived Experience**
    - There is a consistent emphasis on **co-production**, **family and carer involvement**, and capturing the **voice of autistic individuals** to shape services and strategies

Collective Strategic Goals and Objectives

A holistic and collaborative approach is needed across all key domains, with clear understanding of the impact and relationship between one domain and another, and the impact, in turn, on well-being.



Domain	Strategic Goals	Key Objectives
Health & Assessment	Comprehensive support regardless of diagnosis status	Integrated care pathways, social prescribing, reduce waiting times, embed reasonable adjustments and provide community-based support
Education	Embed positive school experience and equitable support	Mandate the work of the neurodiversity practitioners across all schools, improve EHCP accuracy, develop passports for transition, reduce home education and exclusion
Employment	Double employment rates for autistic adults by 2030	Launch the Neurodiversity Employability Index (NDEI), drive employer engagement, consistent support recording, training on Equality Act
Housing & Social Care	Autistic people in the right accommodation at the right time	Improve data systems, develop Independent Living Skills programme, autism champions, strategic plan
Criminal Justice System	Systemic change in CJS support for autistic people	Consistent training, reasonable adjustments, peer support, data recording, female-specific pathways

Conclusion

The Shropshire Autism Strategy 2025–2030 sets out a bold and compassionate vision: to create a county where autistic people of all ages are understood, supported, and empowered to thrive. This strategy is not just a document—it is a commitment to systemic change, co-produced with those who live the experience of autism every day.

Across health, education, employment, housing, social care, and the Criminal Justice System, the strategy identifies clear priorities and actionable goals. It recognises that autism is a lifelong condition requiring lifelong support, and that meaningful progress depends on collaboration, data-informed planning, and the voices of autistic individuals and their families.

Key themes—such as needs-led support, early intervention, inclusive environments, and consistent training—run through every domain. The strategy also acknowledges the importance of transitions, especially from childhood to adulthood, and the need for continuity in support that reflects the evolving needs of autistic people.

By embedding autism awareness and neurodiversity understanding into every layer of service provision, Shropshire can become a place where difference is not only accepted but celebrated. The strategy's emphasis on co-production ensures that autistic people are not passive recipients of services but active partners in shaping them.

As we move forward, the success of this strategy will depend on sustained commitment, transparent accountability, and a willingness to listen and adapt. The journey ahead is one of transformation—towards a more inclusive, equitable, and autism-friendly Shropshire achieved through stronger communities/neighbourhoods and strong multi-agency partnerships.

Together, we can ensure that no one is left behind.

Glossary

Autism-Related Terms & Acronyms Summary

Acronym	Full Term	Description
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder	A neurodevelopmental condition affecting communication, behaviour, and social interaction.
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	Commonly co-occurs with autism; affects attention and impulse control.
ARFID	Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder	Eating disorder often seen in autistic individuals.
ASC	Autism Spectrum Condition	Alternative to ASD, emphasizing difference over disorder.
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	NHS service for young people with mental health needs.
CMHT	Community Mental Health Team	Adult mental health support team.
DSP	Designated Specialist Provision	Specialist educational setting for children with SEND.
EHA	Early Help Assessment	Support tool for families needing early intervention.
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan	Legal document outlining support for children with SEND.
IASS	Information, Advice and Support Service	Local authority service offering SEND support.
MCA	Mental Capacity Assessment	Determines ability to make decisions.
NAS	National Autistic Society	UK charity supporting autistic people and families.
Neurodivergent	—	Describes individuals with neurological differences including autism.
PBS	Positive Behaviour Support	Proactive approach to managing challenging behaviour.

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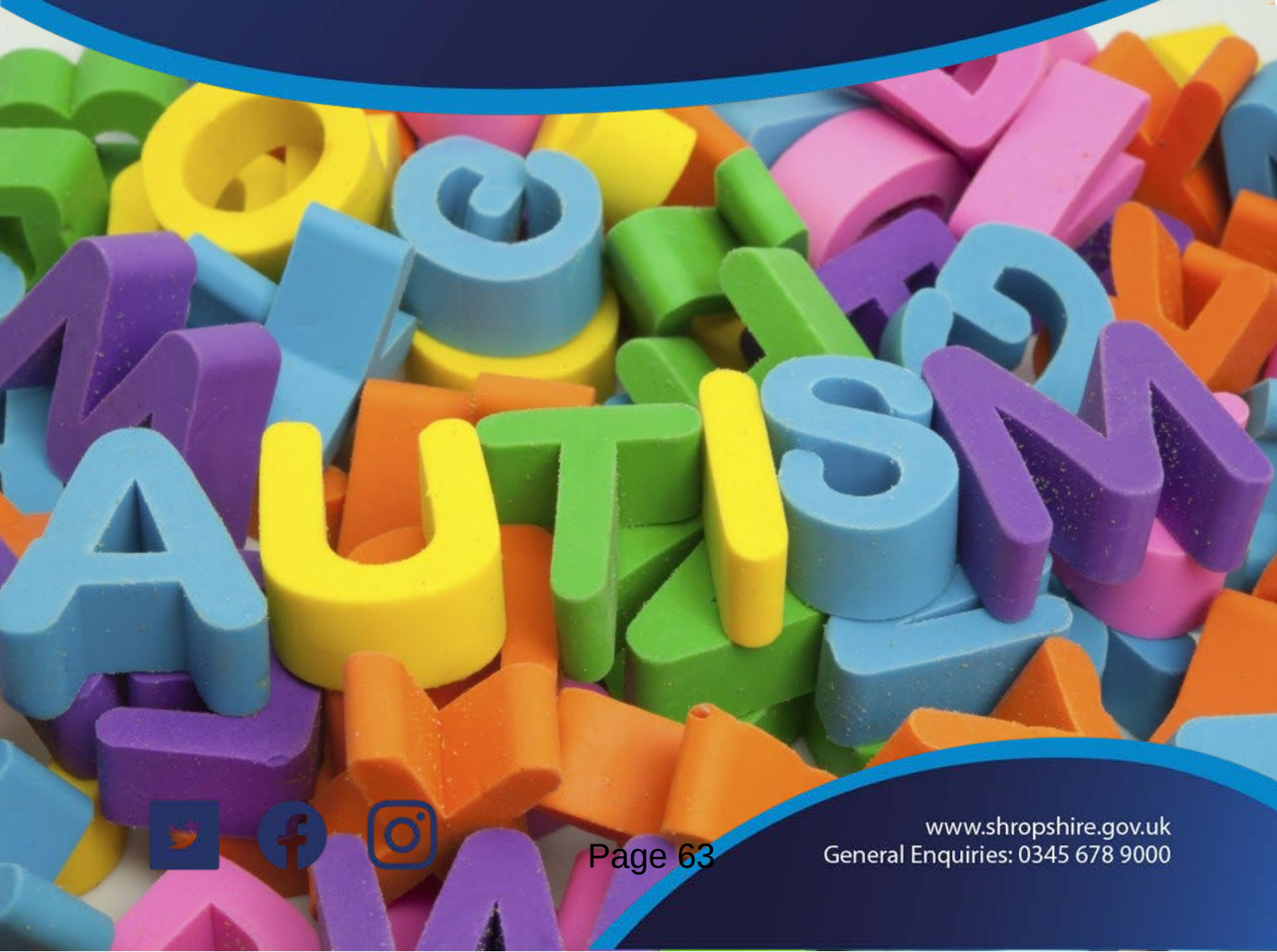
Shropshire Council

All Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030
Draft Strategy Consultation
Report

November 2025



www.shropshire.gov.uk
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1 Background

Shropshire Council launched a consultation in September 2025 to gather views on a Draft All-Age Autism Strategy (2025-2030). The strategy aims to promote a cultural shift across Shropshire's services adopting an all-age approach and recognising the need for a more joined-up, proactive, timely and autism-accessible offer to enable people to live healthy and fulfilling lives. The strategy focuses on 5 important areas of service provision:

- Health and Assessment
- Education and Preparation for Adulthood
- Employment
- Housing and Social Care
- Criminal Justice System

The draft document has been developed through a collaborative approach with input from members of the public through previous engagement activity, and with partner organisations and other stakeholders. Working groups have influenced the development of the strategy and the contents of each theme and the strategic objectives and outcomes included.

To obtain further feedback on the draft document, Shropshire Council and its partners widely promoted a consultation to anyone with Autism able to provide experience of living in Shropshire and also from a wider audience to those with an interest in Autism, whether personal or professional.

The survey was open for almost 7 weeks from 22nd September until the 6 November. There was a slight technical problem for just over a day but this was quickly resolved and responses were received between the 29th September and 28th October 2025. Alternative response options were provided including email, post and bespoke options for anyone in need of reasonable adjustments. The consultation was promoted widely using Shropshire Council's newsroom, social media posts, through local newsletters and through word of mouth via Shropshire Council staff members. Although the response numbers were small, the responses that were received are very helpful and can be considered within the production of a final version of the strategy for formal agreement. Shropshire Council's Cabinet plans to consider the final version of the strategy in late 2025.

This report details the results of the survey within 5 main sections:

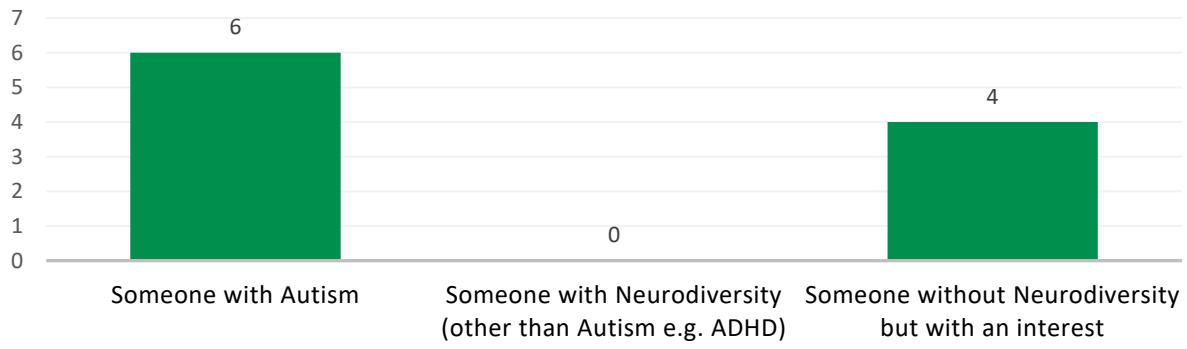
- **Section 1: Background** (this section) provides an overview of the survey and how it was promoted.
- **Section 2: Survey Response** covers those engaged within the survey to understand if feedback is representative.
- **Section 3: Overall Feedback** considers the general response to the draft document and levels of satisfaction.
- **Section 4: Comments and Suggestions** explores the comments made by the survey respondents for consideration in the production of the final version of the strategy.
- **Section 5: Summary and Conclusion** provides a brief summary and conclusion based on the overall analysis of the feedback received.

2 Survey Response

20 people responded to the consultation in total. Sixteen people responded using the online survey and a further 4 submitted email responses. In addition to formal responses, there were some social media posts and all of the information available has been combined and features within this report. Information about the respondents was only gathered through the online survey and therefore this section of the report focuses on the online respondents.

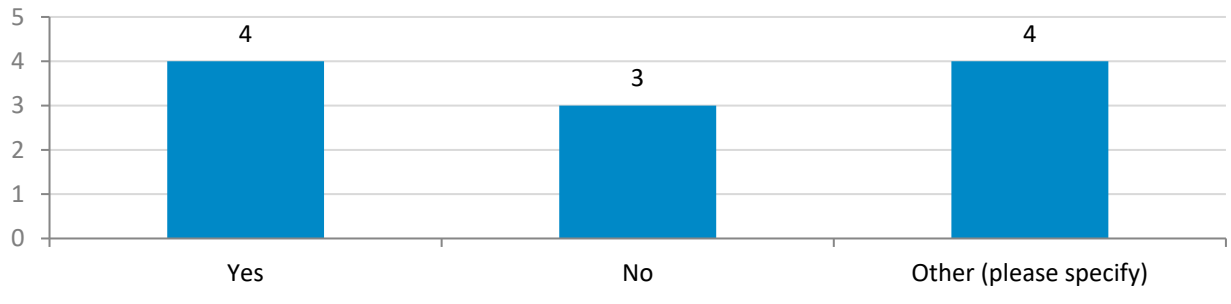
It was hoped that a proportion of consultation respondents would be people with Autism and able to consider the strategy from a more personal, rather than professional, perspective. Figure 1 displays the response when survey respondents were asked whether they have Autism or other forms of Neurodiversity. 6 of the 16 survey respondents were people with Autism and 4 did not have Autism or other forms of Neurodiversity but an interest in the subject area. 8 people made comments within the 'other' category. The comments explained that 2 of the survey respondents have ADHD and Autism (AuDHD), 4 care for a family member with Autism and/or ADHD, 1 described themselves as Autistic rather than a person with Autism and 1 has a professional interest through Day Services delivery.

Figure 1: Which of the following best describes you?



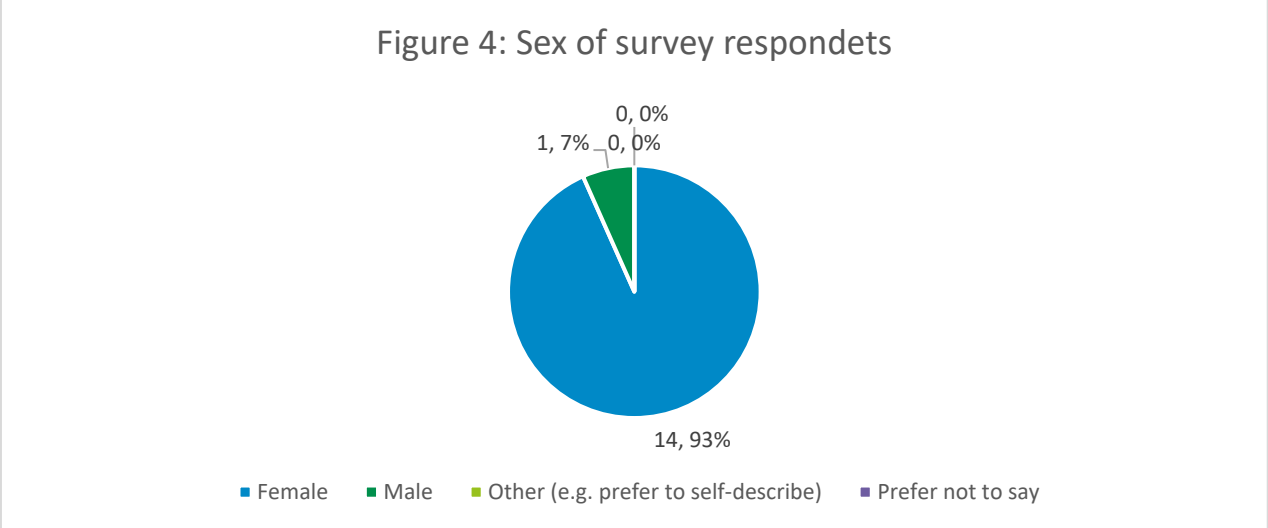
Those with Autism were asked if they had been diagnosed and Figure 2 presents the results. 4 of the survey respondents with Autism have been diagnosed and 3 have not. 4 made comments using the 'other' response option. 2 clarified their previous roles (as family members/carers), 1 explained that they were currently being assessed and one commented on an experience of misdiagnosis and the importance of AuDHD diagnosis for people with Autism and ADHD.

Figure 2: If you have Autism are you diagnosed?

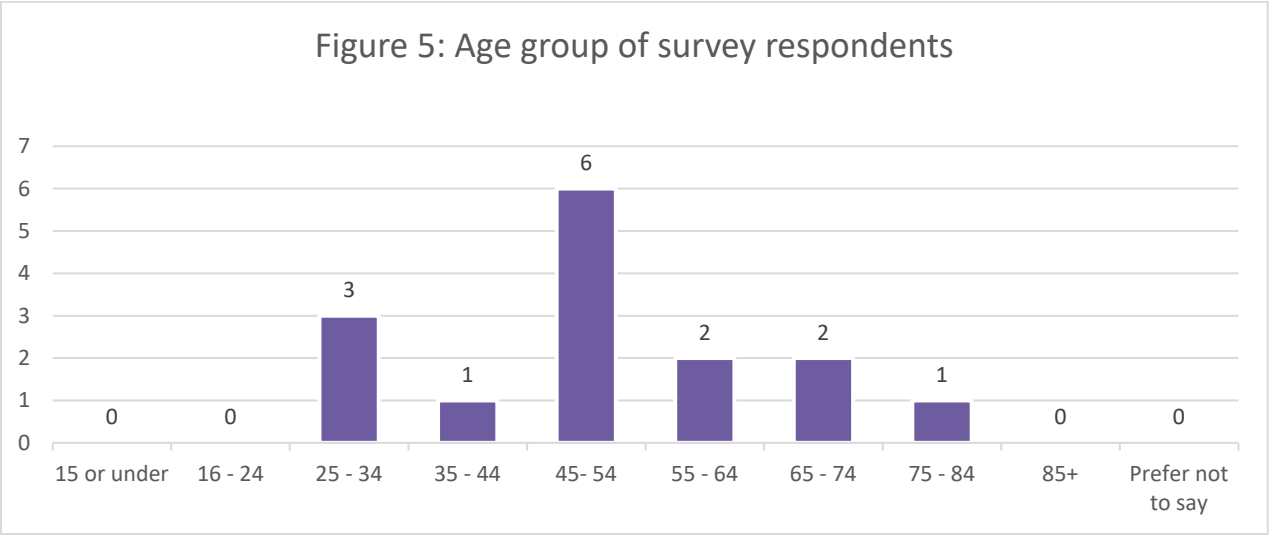


Each survey respondent was asked a little more about the way in which they were responding to the consultation. Figure 3 shows that some respondents had more than one reason to respond to the consultation. 10 responded as local residents, 2 as public sector workers, 2 as voluntary and community sector workers and 1 as a visitor to the county. The 3 other response reasons overlapped with the main response options (parent/carers and a local resident).

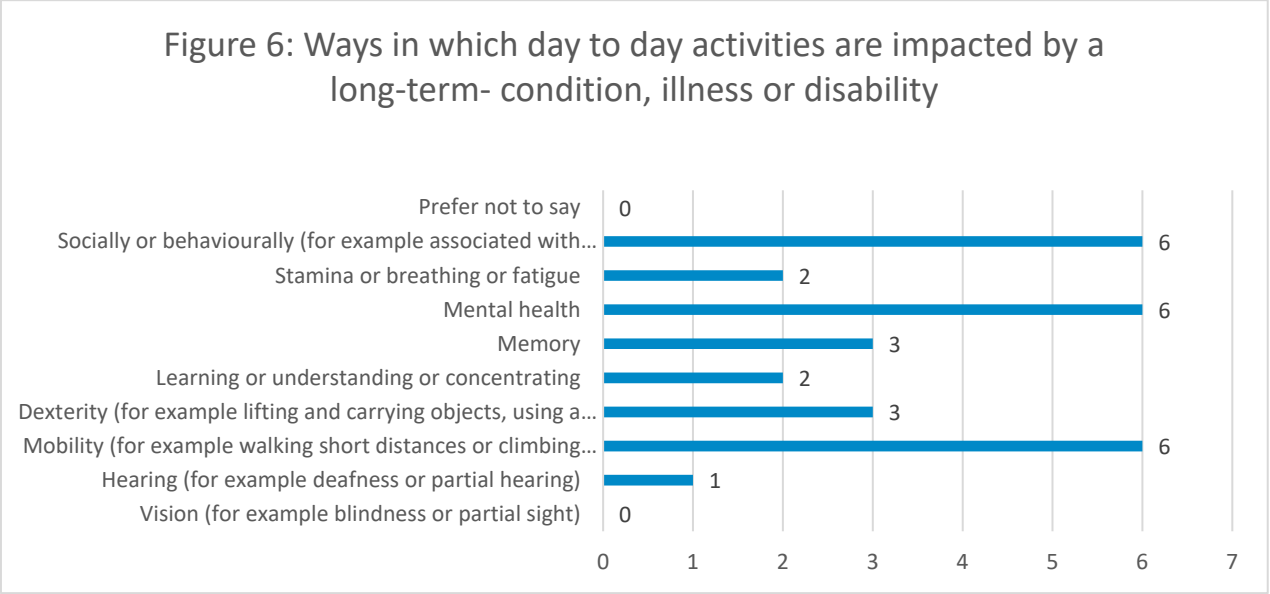
Figure 4 highlights that men were under-represented in the consultation with only 1 male respondent, 14 females and one respondent who preferred not to answer the question.



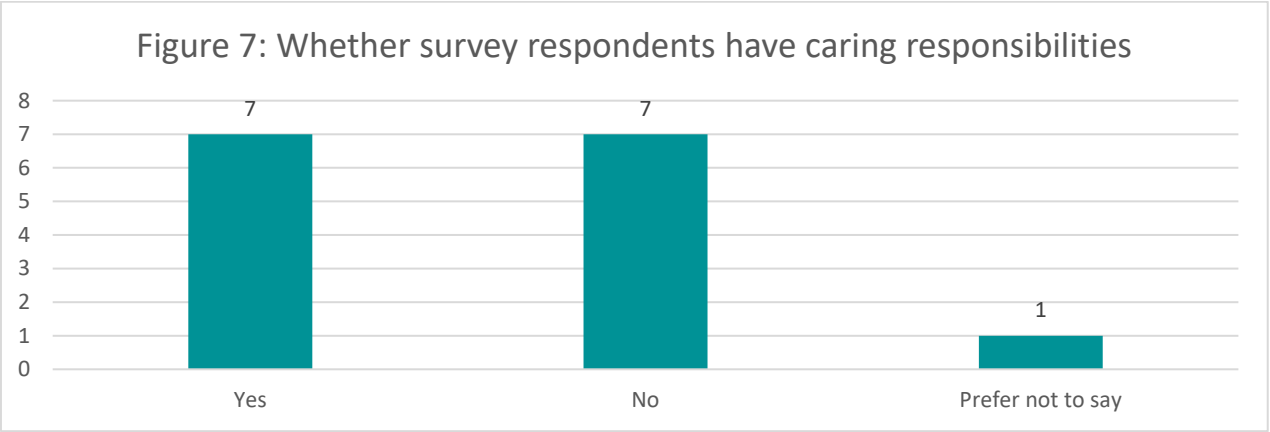
The survey respondents represented a mix of different age groups ranging from the 25-34 year group to the 75-84 year group. The result highlights that those under the age of 24 were not represented within the engagement. Often engagement with young people needs to be specifically designed for the audience and this is something that can be considered within the delivery of the strategy, as necessary. For example, comments on the strategy are not essential but if there are areas of delivery that need to be tailored to the younger age groups then engagement at that stage will be more beneficical.



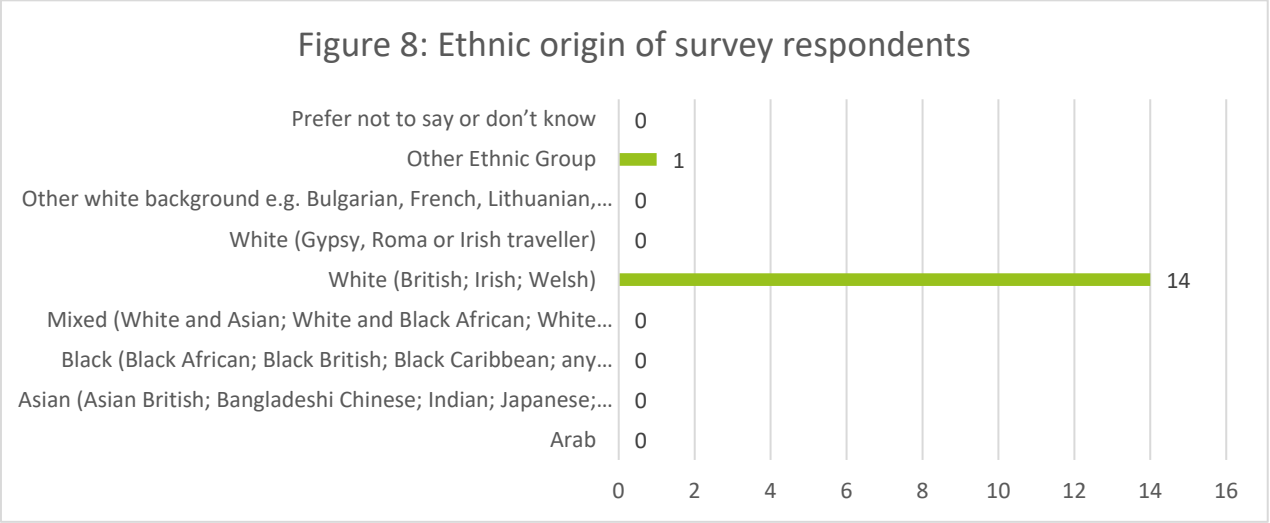
Other characteristics considered within the 'About You' section of the online survey included whether survey respondents have a disability impacting daily activities and the nature of disabilities. Of the 16 respondents 7 (47%) have a disability. Figure 6 displays the additional details and suggests that the day to day challenges and disabilities being faced by consultation respondents should be recognised in future engagement work. Mental health, social and behavioral challenges and mobility were highlighted by respondents for each category.

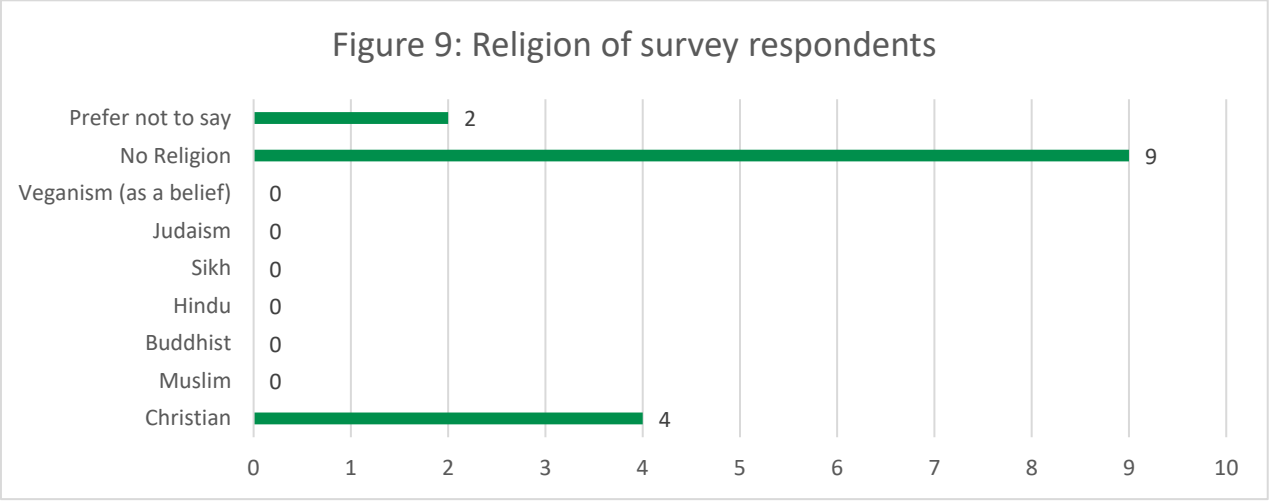


The survey also recognised the importance of caring responsibilities, both for those caring for someone with Autism and those who may have Autism and other neurodiversity (e.g. ADHD) caring for others. The question read 'Caring responsibilities: A carer is someone who spends a significant proportion of their time providing unpaid support to a family member, partner or friend who is ill, frail disabled or has mental health or substance misuse problems. Do you regularly provide unpaid support caring for someone?' Figure 7 shows that 7 of the survey respondents have caring responsibilities and 7 do not (1 preferred not to say).



Figures 8 and 9 highlight the ethnic origin and religion of survey respondents and suggest that the small response numbers have prevented a more diverse representation from all communities in Shropshire. Despite the opportunity to participate being widely promoted it should be noted that those who participated are not necessarily representative of the wider population, and although their comments are very valuable, consideration of this should be taken into account within future engagement and the strategy delivery.



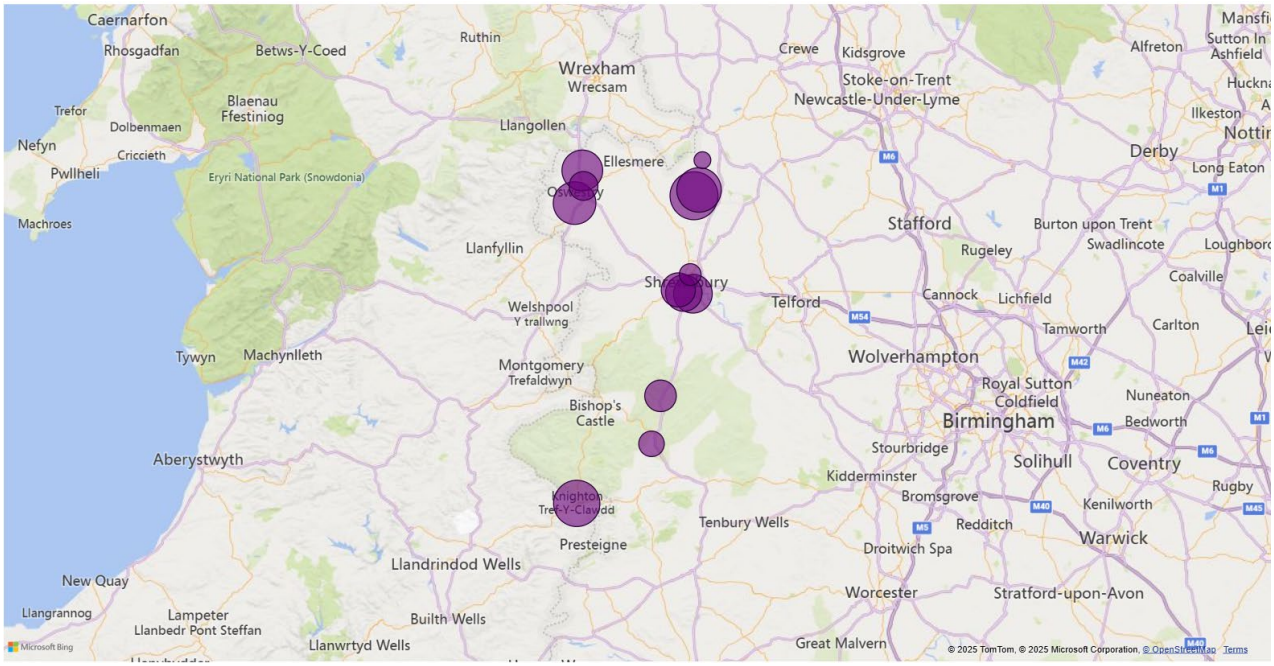


Shropshire Council has a duty to consider the needs and views of armed forced veterans, serving members and their families. Fortunately, one of the 16 survey respondents falls

within this group. Should additional engagement be required at a later date then targeted engagement may be possible through local networks.

The last ‘About You’ question asked survey respondents for their home location. The map below is an approximate location to avoid any identification but to ensure that Shropshire Council understands which communities have been represented and whether there are any geographical gaps. Map 1 shows the approximate location of survey respondents. The larger bubbles represent more than one survey respondent. The map highlights that there were responses from the north, central and southern areas within Shropshire with some urban and some rural locations represented. Given the small response to the consultation the geographical distribution is very positive.

Map 1 Approximate location of survey respondents within Shropshire

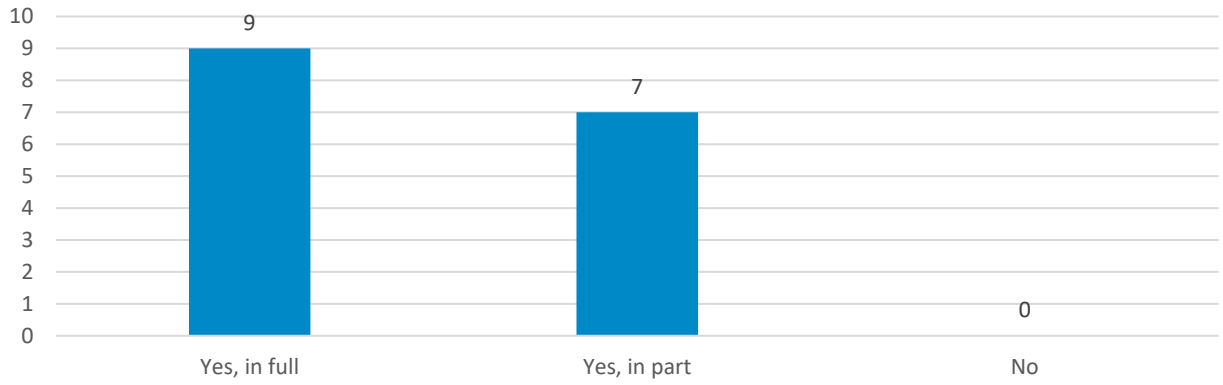


The next section of the report considers the more general feedback on the draft strategy document, considering overall satisfaction, satisfaction with main elements of the draft document and the strategy’s main themes.

3 Overall Feedback

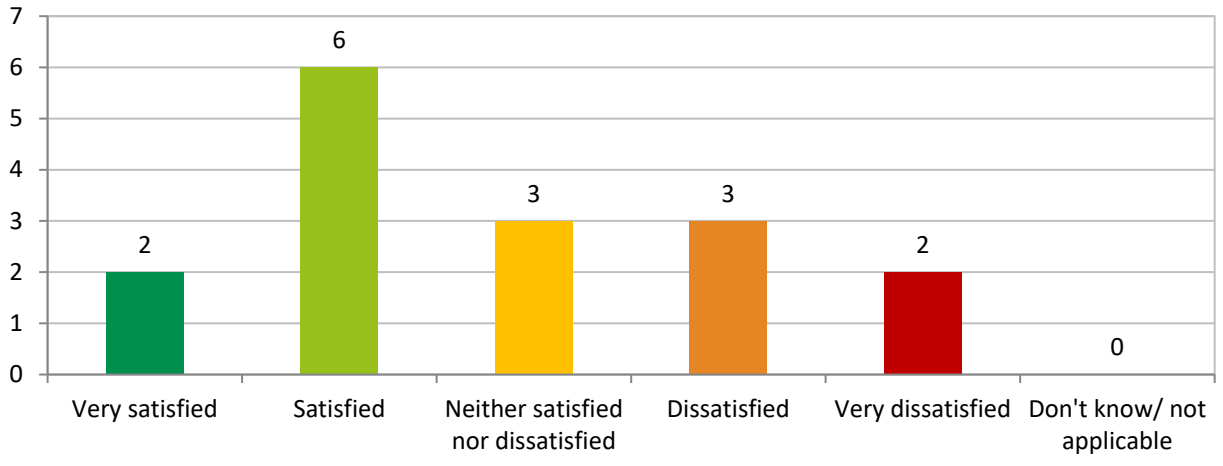
To understand the context for the feedback and comments, each survey respondent was asked whether they had read the Draft Shropshire Autism Strategy 2024 to 2030. Figure 10 shows the response, 56% responded to the survey after reading the draft strategy document in full and 44% after reading the document in part. None of the survey respondents had failed to read the draft document. This confirms the responses to the survey were well informed. The content of the 4 written consultation responses suggests they were also written after reading the draft strategy document.

Figure 10: Have you read the draft All Age Autism Strategy 20254 to 2030?



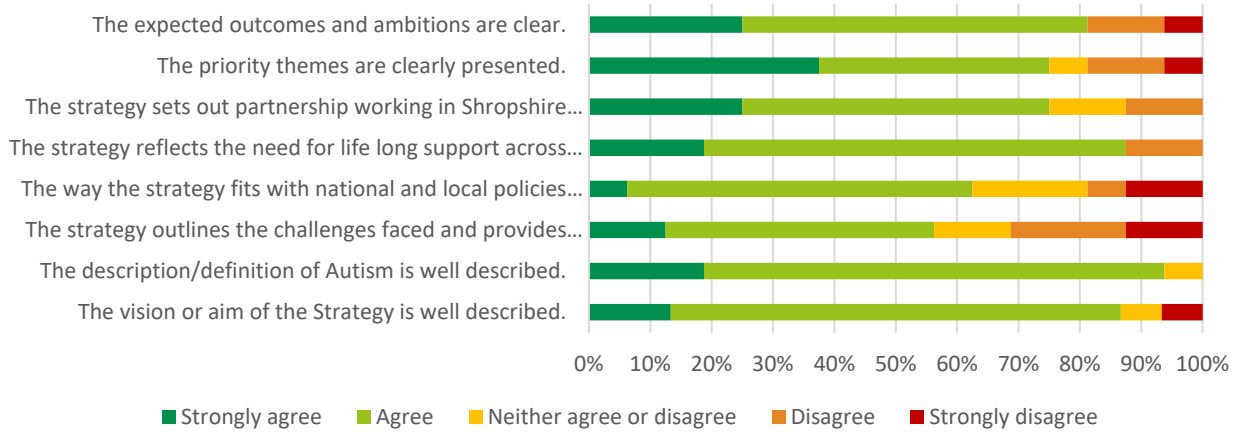
To understand how consultation respondents feel about the draft strategy document overall, a question was included within the survey which read 'Overall, how satisfied are you with the draft strategy?' Figure 11 displays the survey response. 50% are satisfied or very satisfied compared to 31% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (others had a neutral view). Levels of satisfaction outweigh any concerns and this is also reflected within the written consultation responses. 3 of the 4 written responses were very positive with constructive suggestions with only one presenting some more mixed views (see section 4 of the report for more information).

Figure 11: Overall, how satisfied are you with the draft strategy?



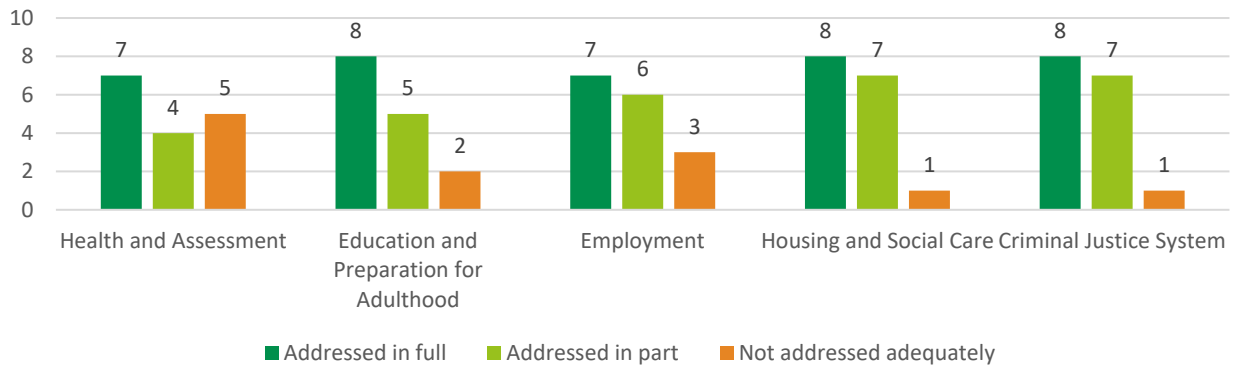
To explore satisfaction in more detail, views were collected in relation to each element or feature of the draft strategy. Figure 12 highlights that generally the feedback was very positive when asked more specific questions. The vast majority of respondents agreed that the description/definition of Autism is well described (no-one disagreed) and that the strategy reflects the need for life-long support across areas of service (two people disagreed). Areas of most disagreement (5 people) related to whether the strategy outlines the challenges faced and provides context. 3 people had concerns about whether the strategy fits with national and local policies and plans but more (10) were satisfied.

Figure 12: Please consider the following statements and select the response that best reflects your opinion.



Survey respondents were asked whether the 5 key themes covered by the startegy had been addressed within the draft. There was overall satisfaction within the responses with high levels of satisfaction with the housing and social care and criminal justice themes. Only one person disagreed that these two themes had been addressed in full or in part. 3 people had some concerns that employment had not been addressed adequately and 5 people that health and assessment had not been addressed adequately. Overall all themes were positively received with slightly greater concern about the health & assessment theme (Shropshire Council can work in partnership with the NHS but is less directly responsible for these areas of service).

Figure 13: The strategy sets out 5 main themes for action. For each, how well is it addressed?



Survey respondents were asked to explain any concerns. The concerns from survey

respondents relating to each theme are set out below (more information is covered within the next section of the report including the written consultation responses):

Theme Comments:

Health and Assessment

- *"What happens when someone is mis-diagnosed as not having autism in the past, when the criteria was based on research done on boys, where studies have now shown that females were more likely to have been diagnosed with mental health conditions. How can a female get re-assessed to ensure they get the support needed for comorbid conditions including autism, e.g. AuDHD?"*
- *"The Adult assessment needs to be sorted they use the children's practical to assess adults which is not acceptable."*
- *"How will these outcomes be achieved? It's unclear. There isn't any support for children in Shropshire. GP referred to BeeU. BeeU discharged. GP referred again. Assessment took place. Was assessed and advised support would be given. No support given."*
- *"Make frontline workers listen to the people who are coming to them asking for help instead of brushing them off. Give them better training."*
- *"You must combat the strong vaccine / Tylenol messages from the USA."*

Education and Preparation for Adulthood

- *"Early identification of barriers to learning and working."*
- *"More access to people to come and talk to young people in day services e.g. health professionals."*
- *"We have been waiting a year for EHCP. Child out of school. Council aren't providing education. You MUST address how the EHCP process is failing autistic children. This has to be included. It puts children in a worse position than they were in before applying! The lack of understanding and empathy is shocking. There are many families that are forced into home education by this council. Any strategy to improve the lives of autistic children and young adults needs to investigate / include this area. Secondary schools lack compassion."*
- *"… You want to stop crisis situations? You need to fix the complete failings and illegal actions of the EHCP team first and foremost."*
- *"Provide funding for adult autistics in education to receive the support they require in the classroom."*

Employment

- *"Work places need a buddy or named person to support people with autism."*
- *"Give employers funding for extra training, and accommodations that are needed to make the workplace viable for autistic people."*
- *"Mandatory training needed for managers, not just employers; too much ignorance".*

Housing and Social Care

- *"Yes more options to move away."*
- *"Safety."*

Criminal Justice System

- *"Yes, more help if life is in danger."*
- *"Speak to Forensic Carers perhaps?!"*

The next section of the report considers all the feedback and comments in more detail.

4 Comments and Suggestions

This section of the report considers the written consultation feedback and comments that were received during the consultation in addition to the written comments gathered through the survey. A few of the comments shared from Facebook have been included because they represent views of local people and provide helpful feedback (anonymized) but unfortunately some inaccurate and political information was shared through social media. Inaccurate, political or comments with derogatory language have not been included in order to prevent further misinformation being circulated. It should also be noted that some consultation respondents did highlight business or other interests in this work e.g. as providers of services that could be commissioned.

The comments from different response methods are brought together and presented in sections:

1. Concerns – The comments suggesting some dissatisfaction.
2. Positive feedback – What people like about the draft strategy.
3. Gaps – Areas of the strategy that consultation respondents feel need to be covered or developed further.
4. Strategy equality considerations (to understand impact and the need to consider the needs of people with one or more protected characteristics).
5. Other comments.

To illustrate some of the longer written responses, extracts are used as examples. All comments have been considered in full, and comments may be used to influence the production of the final strategy even if they are not used as examples within the report. A few respondents made the same point repeatedly and repetition has been avoided within this report in order to focus attention on the main points made and to avoid repetition bias.

1. Concerns

Comments

- *"I personally don't like the term autistic, I prefer to say I have autism."*
- *"Nowhere in this document is there any information regarding costings. Without an analysis of how much each very commendable proposal is there any figure of how much money will be required to put it into practice, and where this money will becoming from. Without any financial information it is all pretty meaningless."*
- *"It's unclear how any of these outcomes will be achieved. Without the 'how' it feels unfinished and unconvincing."*
- *"Strategy sounds wonderful but is unrealistic and unachievable! Focus on certain areas won't be delivered, data to evidence anything is manipulated, raw data is never shared and nothing is transparent, and data is manipulated to say what you want it to!"*
- *"To be effective, a strategy needs to have objectives that are SMART - specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. Few of the outcomes meet these criteria. Could we drop vague terms like 'encourage', 'foster', 'promote' 'increase' and 'reduce' in lists of expected outcomes? They are aspirational but don't specify what actually needs to happen for those aspirational aims to be met."*
- *"Finding the strategy to read was a nightmare! All I kept getting was the Consultation which I couldn't answer at that stage! Why don't you have any links and papers like this proof-red by people on the spectrum like me?..."*
- *"The Adult ASD assessment the practical is done using the children's so it is not age appropriate and is degrading to adults."*

- *"The failings of the local authority in providing appropriate and legally entitled education and support to young people with autism. How can you have a mega plan to improve without first acknowledging these huge failings?"*
- *"Late diagnosed adults that don't require a lot of support but may may find themselves either regressing and needing more support or feeling able to work at some point didn't seem to be mentioned."*
- *"…..Young people can have co-existing mental health problems….the minute they reach 18 then they fall off the cliff, you refuse to refer them onto adult mental health…"*
- *"Please add a title or subtitle to the table on page 13 identifying what it shows".*
- *"On page 15, please note that the only people who attend autism training sessions currently are autistic people. Bosses are always "too busy". It *really* needs to be mandatory, especially in Shropshire Council. My SC boss told me that it was a good thing RFK Jr was looking into the connection to vaccines because something had to explain the rise in autism!"*
- *"There are multiple typographical errors, and inconsistencies in capitalisation, abbreviations and referencing."*
- *"The reasons for the increased prevalence of autism diagnosis, and the statistical explanation for the proportion of the population deemed 'neurodiverse', should be explained in the strategy; the draft gives misleading impression that 'neurodiversity' and autism are set on upward trajectories with no end in sight."*
- *"The draft strategy presents autism as a 'neurodivergence' in the context of the social model of disability, and the diagnostic criteria for autistic spectrum disorder focus on social interaction. It doesn't follow that autistic people face challenges involving only social interaction or the barriers they face in society. There is robust evidence that autistic characteristics are predominantly genetic in origin, and those genetic configurations can result in physical and mental health issues in addition to autistic characteristics, or that could cause autistic characteristics, e.g. variations in auditory and visual processing that cause hyper- or hypo-sensory functioning that in turn results in challenges with social interaction. Mary Coleman and Christopher Gillberg have written extensively on medical conditions associated with autism (e.g. Coleman & Gillberg, 1992)."*

Many of the comments are specific but the main themes from the concerns include:

- The importance of strategy delivery and available budget.
- The need to monitor implementation through measurable goals.
- Some concerns relating to the way Autism is described (it should be noted that the views of some of the respondents differ in this respect).
- The responses highlight concerns with local Special Educational Needs and Disability provision (a concern reflected nationally).
- The comments from respondents highlight the importance of detail and accuracy.

It should be noted that there is a theme throughout many comments suggesting some of the negative responses relate more to attitudes towards Shropshire Council perhaps more than the content of the strategy itself.

2. Positive feedback

Comments

- *"Thank you for drafting this strategy."*
- *"Can't wait to see this in action."*
- *"It's a first step towards a positive impact."*
- *"So pleased to read of the recent launch of the all age autism strategy. It is very much needed."*
- *"Very positive, looking forward to being part of its delivery!"*
- *"I think it's great that it exists and the difficulties of autistic people are represented quite well."*
- *"That it looks to address the assessment challenges - pathways, communication, wait list, etc. Extending the EHCP to continue for Employment - we are likely to be in work until 67/68 and*

having a disability passport to show what you need and preferences with communication, etc."

- *"I like that it exists! On the whole, it is on the right track and seems well researched."*
- *"I like that it mentions the strengths of autism, but it could mention how the GCHQ intelligence service thinks autistic individuals are crucial employees.."*
- *"The draft strategy presents rich data and outlines key issues relevant to autistic people in Shropshire. On the whole, the data are presented clearly, many important points are made, and much of the report is well-written."*
- *"Inclusive Mental Health Therapy Ltd (IMHT) welcomes the Shropshire All-Age Autism Strategy as an important step towards a more inclusive county. The vision to create autism-friendly practice across health, education, employment, housing, and social care is one we share."*
- *"Thank you for sharing the Draft Shropshire All-Age Autism Strategy… it is certainly reads as a valuable and robust document. I … noticed the strong presentation of issues related to the rise of Elective Home Education (EHE) and the pursuit of Good and Fair Employment which is great."*

The more positive comments include:

- Recognition of the work that has taken place and an appreciation that an all-age Autism strategy is a positive development.
- Comments suggesting that the contents of the strategy will lead to positive change and service delivery.
- Appreciation that the strategy recognises the challenges faced by people with autism.
- Appreciation of the research undertaken and the inclusion of available data.

3. Gaps and Suggestions

Some of the comments related to gaps and suggestions for changes linked specifically to a theme within the strategy. The comments did not cover all themes but there were comments related to health and assessment, education and preparation for adulthood and employment. There were also some other comments difficult to categorise under the main themes.

Health and Assessment

- *"…. section 5 - re-assessment where a previous assessment failed you in terms of misdiagnosis when Autism is only assessed as a standalone condition, when it is emerging how differently it 'looks' when combined with ADHD (AuDHD)"*
- *"The strategy still positions diagnosis as the gateway to meaningful support, leaving children and adults unsupported for years while on waiting lists. Recommendation: - Adopt a needs-first model where support (e.g., sensory-informed strategies, coaching, carer guidance) is available regardless of diagnostic status. - Commission community-based support hubs that can provide immediate regulation strategies, psychoeducation, and therapeutic input."*
- *"Sensory needs are mentioned but not embedded across the system. Without proactive adaptation of learning, health, housing, and workplace environments, autistic people remain excluded. Recommendation: - Mandate sensory-environment audits in schools, health settings, and housing projects. - Adopt established frameworks (e.g., Dunn's Sensory Processing Model) to inform adjustments. - Commission local providers (such as IMHT) to train staff in practical sensory-informed strategies."*
- *"… the genetic configurations that result in autistic characteristics could also cause physical and mental health issues. These could be in addition to autistic characteristics, or could cause them, or the autistic characteristics could precipitate the health issues."*

Education and Preparation for Adulthood

- *"Concern: While the strategy references neurodiversity, much of the framing remains deficit-based (e.g. school avoidance, employment "gaps"). This risks perpetuating stigma rather than fostering empowerment. Recommendation: - Ensure all interventions use strengths-based, identity-first, and neuro-affirming language. - Fund initiatives such as "This Is Me" profiles to enable autistic people to articulate their authentic needs and strengths."*
- *"Support frequently ends with EHCPs or school leaving, leaving autistic young people and adults isolated at key transition points. Recommendation: - Develop a lifelong passport system that follows the individual from school into FE/HE, employment, and adult services. - Commission local providers to deliver preparation for adulthood programmes focused on self-regulation, independence, and workplace readiness."*
- *"Many autistic children and young people have benefitted from being educated at home, but every mention of home education in the report lumps it together with school exclusion. This does not reflect a person-centred approach to education, and is contrary to s.7 Education Act 1996, which recognises the importance of education otherwise than at school."*
- *"More content about training in preparation for adulthood, employment or lifelong learning is required."*

Employment

- *"Under 'Local picture' (p.26), the second numbered point 3 (shouldn't that be '2'?) cites the number of people claiming Universal Credit in Shropshire, but doesn't explain that UC is a benefit that can be claimed by people in work…. And there's no mention of self-employment - often a good option for autistic people."*
- *"Concern: Training commitments are broad and inconsistent. Without specialist, neuro-affirming training, professionals risk perpetuating harm through poor understanding. Recommendation: - Move from "autism awareness" to autism competence and confidence. - Mandate neurodivergence-specific CPD for education, health, and social care staff, with a focus on practical skills (sensory, communication, regulation strategies)."*
- *"Elective Home Education (EHE): While the strategy's goal of improving school approaches to prevent unplanned EHE is crucial and well-presented, there seems to be an opportunity to further explore and develop a formal multi-agency protocol for when an EHE decision is made, instead of leaving it solely to the education system. To aid this, we are keen to continue learning, aligning, and sharing our knowledge. Specifically, a Multi-Agency EHE Review (involving Education, Health/CAMHS/ICB, and Social Care) could investigate the factors driving the decision and offer integrated remediation through appreciative approaches and system reviews. Hoping that some of this will be drawn out at our event on the 28th November which now has 29 registered, an event not about the numbers attending but having the right balance between community, NHS/ICB, welfare and education which it feels like it has."*
- *"We are also planning an approach at the moment to conduct research… to understand the long-term impact of being outside the education system. This research links to work on exploitation risk (undertaken by Solent), long-term health (explored through the NHS Ambassador programme), and offending risk (explored through YSS…."*
- *"Opportunities in Good and Fair Employment: The strategy outlines strong systemic policy shifts for employment, which we look forward to seeing Shropshire implement and taking learning from. I wonder if there are actions that could be strengthened around collaboration or the role of the community sector to support or work with employers, creating a stronger cross-sector system…."*

Other themes

- *"Strategy commitments to prevention are vague and risk being reactive, with families often only accessing help in crisis. Recommendation: - Embed early sensory and emotional regulation support at the first point of concern. - Provide therapeutic guidance for parents and*

carers, recognising their own emotional load and capacity. - Invest in multi-informant sensory profiling and therapeutic coaching to prevent escalation."

- *"Support for Families and Carers, concern: The strategy underplays the emotional and psychological toll on families. Carer support is described mainly in terms of navigation, not wellbeing. Recommendation: - Expand carer support to include direct therapeutic input, emotional regulation support, and peer groups. - Recognise carer burnout as a system-wide risk factor and commission preventative support accordingly."*

Some of the comments relating to the themes of the strategy and potential gaps include:

- Under the theme of Health and Assessment there are concerns about access to diagnosis, reasonable adjustments for sensory needs and the importance of recognising the link to mental health.
- There are requests to broaden the employment theme to cover self-employment, a wider range of training needs, a recognition of employment initiatives and other sectors (including the community sector) and additional information about Elective Home Education.
- Other comments relate to the importance of prevention activity and support for parents and carers.

4. Equality Considerations

A question was included within the survey which read 'Shropshire Council has carried out an Equalities, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment for the draft strategy. This is to ensure that people of different protected characteristic groups are not adversely impacted by any changes delivered as a result of implementation. Issues of diversity and equality and health are important. Please use the space below if you have any other comments to make about the strategy's positive or negative impact on people with protected characteristics (including those with Autism, under the Disability characteristic).' There were 7 comments and all are shown below. There aren't any particular themes within the responses provided with each person making a different point.

- *"Appreciate a strategy for supporting people throughout their lives."*
- *"Just that some autistic people who have been dealt a suspended sentence is then villafied by the public."*
- *"But we are excluded from consideration by nearly every department - including the Blue Badge section!! Your lack of Autism training relating to people's jobs is woeful SCC!"*
- *"Again, the Community OT will not assess children who mainly struggle with sensory issues. Many, many children with autism have sensory needs as their main area of OT need. It's a huge issue. And then the LA will try and refuse much needed OT support in EHCPs on the basis of this policy. It's illegal and the amount of stress it places on families is monumental."*
- *"Diagnosis of autistic women is exceptionally hard to achieve with extremely long waiting times and doctors not believing that Adult women can go their whole life without having had a diagnosis in childhood. Professional frontline workers need to be more aware that autistic women of 25 years old and up have been a forgotten generation and therefore have associated trauma from having to mask for so long."*
- *"I think a strategy that includes mandatory training for managers and better inclusivity for all in a range of targeted areas can only be beneficial."*
- *"….Asperger's syndrome, is no longer an appropriate term to use."*

5. Other comments

The survey responses, written consultation responses and comments collected on social media included a range of other comments shown below:

- *"It's done a very good job of highlighting the issue, but not outlining the actual physical steps that will be taken."*
- *"Provide costings." and "Yes , zero financial information."*
- *"How will it happen?"*
- *"While the strategy sets out strong aspirations, there remain significant gaps between vision and delivery."*
- *"The Shropshire Autism Strategy sets an ambitious vision. To deliver on it, Shropshire must move from policy aspiration to practical, needs-led action….We strongly recommend: - Commissioning community sensory hubs and therapeutic support packages. - Embedding lifelong, needs-first, neuro-affirming practice. - Investing in early, preventative, sensory-informed interventions that reduce long-term costs and crises."*
- *"The Strategy is unable to be read by people on the Spectrum such as myself. The print is too small, the Sections too unclear and the aims of each section not clearly stated. Where is the Easy Read version of it?!!!!"*
- *"Need to feel welcome is really important… we would like more access to guest speakers. Especially people who can come and speak to them about relationships, hygiene and mental health."*
- *"Please look further into the education crisis for autistic children. So many children are left without an education due to the poor understanding and competence of the EHCP team. Please, please fix the EHCP process. Stop trying to save money when it comes to children's lives. We shouldn't have to fight like this, to go through all of this stress just to secure the bare minimum that our children are entitled to."*
- *"My experience comes from being a parent of a profoundly autistic son…The importance of Personal Centred Planning is absolutely vital. For someone who is profoundly autistic, has severe learning difficulties and is non-verbal, generic training cannot stand alone. Understanding the individual is paramount. Continuity averts crisis. So much can be achieved with the right support. Wellbeing and being a valued part of the community."*
- *"*Keep the Actio Shropshire going, children get some much out of it."
- *"One of the expected outcomes is that people feel listened to, empowered and supported. That's desirable, but even more desirable is that people are listened to, empowered and supported - all of which are objective rather than subjective outcomes. Could we replace 'feel' with 'are' in the outcomes?"*
- *"Thank you for putting this strategy together. It is very good, and I hope it gets the attention is deserves and leads to definite actions being taken."*

The other comments highlight a few common themes for consideration within the next stages of work, decision making by councillors, and the strategy implementation:

- Concerns that the All-Age Autism Strategy will not be adequately funded.
- Concerns about the capacity of Shropshire Council and its partner organisations to deliver the strategy in full.
- Some appreciation for the work that has taken place on the strategy and the existing services and support available.
- Requests for future engagement by parents and carers (SEND service pressures appears to be a particular area of concern, as seen within other sections of the report).

Some of the comments used as examples within this section of the report suggest that public perception may not be entirely accurate within some areas and that more communication is needed to develop greater awareness. This links to areas of service responsibility, existing provision (e.g. preventative services, information, advice and guidance), available data etc. The final section of the report provides a summary of the 20 consultation responses and the main themes from the feedback provided.

5 Summary and Conclusion

Shropshire Council's consultation on its Draft All-Age Autism Strategy (2025–2030) launched in September 2025. The strategy aims to foster a cultural shift in service provision across Shropshire, promoting a joined-up, proactive, and autism-accessible approach to enable people with autism to live healthy and fulfilling lives. The strategy focuses on five key areas: Health and Assessment, Education and Preparation for Adulthood, Employment, Housing and Social Care, and the Criminal Justice System. The draft was developed collaboratively, with input from the public, partner organisations, and stakeholders.

The consultation ran for nearly seven weeks, receiving 20 responses (16 online, 4 via email), supplemented by social media feedback. Respondents included people with autism, carers, professionals, and others with an interest in autism. Demographic data showed a predominance of female respondents, a range of age groups (though none under 24), and a significant proportion reporting disabilities and caring responsibilities. Ethnic and religious diversity was limited, reflecting the small sample size.

Overall Feedback

Most respondents had read the draft strategy in full or in part, ensuring informed feedback. Satisfaction levels were mixed but more positive overall: 50% were satisfied or very satisfied, 31% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, with the remainder neutral. Written responses were generally positive and constructive, only one expressed more mixed views. Feedback on specific elements of the strategy was largely positive, especially regarding the description of autism and the need for lifelong support. However, concerns were raised by a small numbers of respondents about whether the strategy adequately outlined challenges (5) and aligns with national/local policies (3). Satisfaction was greatest for the housing/social care and criminal justice themes, while health/assessment and employment drew more feedback and suggestions compared to other themes. Some of the challenges within these areas relate to reliance on other organisations to deliver work. Although partnership working is in place and central to strategy delivery, the challenges faced by external, independent organisations should be recognised (such as budget constraints and service pressures).

Concerns

Delivery and Funding: Many respondents questioned the realism and achievability of the strategy, citing a lack of financial detail and measurable objectives.
Clarity and Accessibility: Some found the strategy difficult to access or understand, and there was a suggestion that an Easy Read version would be helpful.
Assessment and Support: Concerns were raised by one respondent about misdiagnosis, especially for women and adults, and a point was also made about the use of child-focused assessment tools for adults.
Education and EHCPs: Dissatisfaction was expressed regarding the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process, perceived failings in local SEND provision, and the need for more compassionate and effective support. This feedback reflects nationally reported pressures within the SEND system.
Employment: Included within the comments were calls for mandatory training for managers, workplace accommodations (recognising sensory needs), and support for self-employment opportunities or support for people with Autism.
Data and Accuracy: Requests for clearer data were included alongside some very

specific comments on the draft strategy formatting and wording. It should be noted that some of the comments conflicted, highlighting that survey respondents have differing views on how Autism should be presented and terms worded.

Positive Feedback

Strategy Development: There were quite a few comments highlighting an appreciation for the existence of an all-age autism strategy and recognition of the challenges faced by autistic people.
All-Age Approach: Comments suggested support for the all-age approach taken within the draft strategy.
Comprehensive and well researched: There was praise for the research and data included, and optimism about the potential for positive change.

Gaps and Suggestions

Needs-Led Approach: Comments included the recommendation to provide support based on need rather than diagnosis, and to commission community-based support.
Sensory Needs: There was a call for mandatory sensory-environment audits and training in sensory-informed strategies.
Strengths-Based Language: A suggestion was made to use neuro-affirming, strengths-based language throughout.
Lifelong Support: The comments included a proposal for a lifelong passport system to support transitions from education to employment and adult services.
Employment: Requests for more focus on self-employment and cross-sector collaboration.
Prevention and Carer Support: Emphasis on early intervention, therapeutic support for carers, and recognition of carer burnout.

Other comments highlighted the need for inclusivity, mandatory training, and recognition of the challenges faced by autistic women and carers. Additional feedback included requests for clearer implementation steps, costings, and practical actions. Concerns about funding and capacity to deliver the strategy were reiterated, alongside appreciation for the work done and calls for ongoing engagement with parents and carers.

Conclusion

The consultation on Shropshire's Draft All-Age Autism Strategy (2025–2030) revealed a broadly positive reception to the strategy's aims and the collaborative approach taken in its development. Respondents valued the recognition of autistic people's challenges and strengths, and the ambition to create a more inclusive, joined-up system of support. However, there were some concerns regarding the strategy's deliverability, funding, and the clarity of its objectives. Respondents emphasised the need for measurable, realistic goals, transparent data, and practical steps for implementation. The importance of adopting a needs-led approach, embedding sensory-informed practice, and providing lifelong support were repeatedly highlighted. Education and SEND provision emerged as an area requiring attention along with support for autistic children and young adults. Employment support, including mandatory training and workplace accommodations, was also identified as a suggestion.

In summary, while the strategy is a welcome and much-needed step forward, its success will depend on robust implementation, adequate funding, and a sustained commitment to partnership delivery. Some of the key points within the feedback will now inform amendments to the draft document prior to the final version being presented to Shropshire Council's Cabinet for agreement in late 2025.

Acknowledgements

The draft strategy was produced with input from partner organisations and members of strategy themed working groups. Although their views are not represented within this report, which focuses on the additional public feedback received through the consultation, the strategy would not have been possible without the contributions from those individuals. Many thanks are extended to the following organisations:

A4U
Autonomy Shropshire
Autism West Midlands
DWP (Department for Work and Pensions)
Empathy for Special Children
HM Courts & Tribunals Service, Telford
HM Prisons Young Offenders Institute Stoke Heath
HM Probation service
Lloyds Bank Foundation
ND support charity
NHS

- Clinical Leads, NHS Shropshire
- Community Paediatricians Service
- Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (MPFT)
- NHS Midlands and Lancashire CSU
- School Nursing and Nursery Nurses Service
- Shropshire Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Shropshire Community Health NHS Trust
- West Midlands Health & Justice NHS England

Oswestry SEN Parents
Parent and Carers Council (PACC)
Shrewsbury Colleges Group
Shropshire Autism Hub
Shropshire Council

- Adult Social Care
- Children's Social Care
- Children's Services - Learning and Skills/Educational Psychology
- Commissioning
- Customer and Communities./ Community Hubs
- Early Help
- Enable
- Housing and Housing Options
- Public Health
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities(SEND) Service
- Co-production leads, Strategy

Telford & Wrekin Council
University of Derby, Department of Criminology
West Mercia Police
West Mercia Youth Justice Service

Special thanks also to the many **Experts By Experience** who gave their time to share their experiences and feedback.

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Lead Service: Commissioning and Governance Team, Commissioning

Shropshire Council

Shropshire Council

Neurodiversity and the Criminal Justice System: Focus on Autism

Feedback Report

June 2025

www.shropshire.gov.uk
General Enquiries: 0345 678 9000

1 Background

Shropshire Council launched a survey on 3rd March 2025 to gather the views of local representatives from organisations within the local Criminal Justice System. The survey was designed to learn more about how Neurodiversity is addressed within the Criminal Justice System, with a focus on Autism.

The survey was aimed at contributors to the autism strategy sub-group representing all areas across the Criminal Justice System in Shropshire. This includes West Mercia Police, Criminal Courts, Probation, Youth Justice and HMP Stoke Heath. The aim was to clearly establish the current methods for recording autism, review existing data and consider training opportunities for staff members and individuals being supported through the system.

The survey results provide an overview of current practice and reflect the knowledge of the sub-group members. The survey was left open online until each organisation had had the opportunity to feedback and present their summary of how those with Neurodiversity, in particular Autism, are supported through the different services within Criminal Justice System and how organisations assess and record skills and health needs. There were 6 responses in total.

This report anonymizes the responses where possible. The purpose of the survey was not to compare practice between organisations but to generate a more collaborative approach including sharing of good practice.

The findings from this survey will inform future service provision and help Shropshire Council and its partner organisations develop clear priority areas and goals for the local all-age autism strategy. This collaborative effort involves working closely with stakeholders to ensure that the approach taken is both inclusive and effective.

ND is used as the acronym/shorthand for neurodiversity within the report.

This report describes the survey findings within 5 main sections:

- **Section 1: Background** (this section) provides an overview of the survey and how it was promoted.
- **Section 2: Data** presents the numbers of people with ND supported through the Criminal Justice System in Shropshire and how this is recorded, and data captured.
- **Section 3: Training and Resources** explores how organisations support their staff to access training on ND and other resources available within the system to ensure the needs of people within the Criminal Justice System are understood and met.
- **Section 4: Health** considers the different stages of support from diagnosis to assessment and access to services/ referral. This section also considers the additional support put in place when ND is identified.
- **Section 5: Summary and Conclusion** provides a brief summary and conclusion based on the overall analysis of the feedback received.

2 Data

The survey, designed to explore ND within the Criminal Justice System, covered three main themes. The first theme was data. This topic covered how Autism, ADHD and other conditions are recorded within systems; the requirements for recording; and how many people are recorded within systems to better understand numbers supported.

Figure 1 below shows a breakdown to show which forms of ND are recorded by organisations within the Criminal Justice System. One of the 6 organisations records all these forms of ND within their systems. One organisation did not complete the question. Of the remaining 4, 2 do not record this information, one records neurodiversity generally (without a breakdown of type) and one partly records this information (5 of the 10 featured).

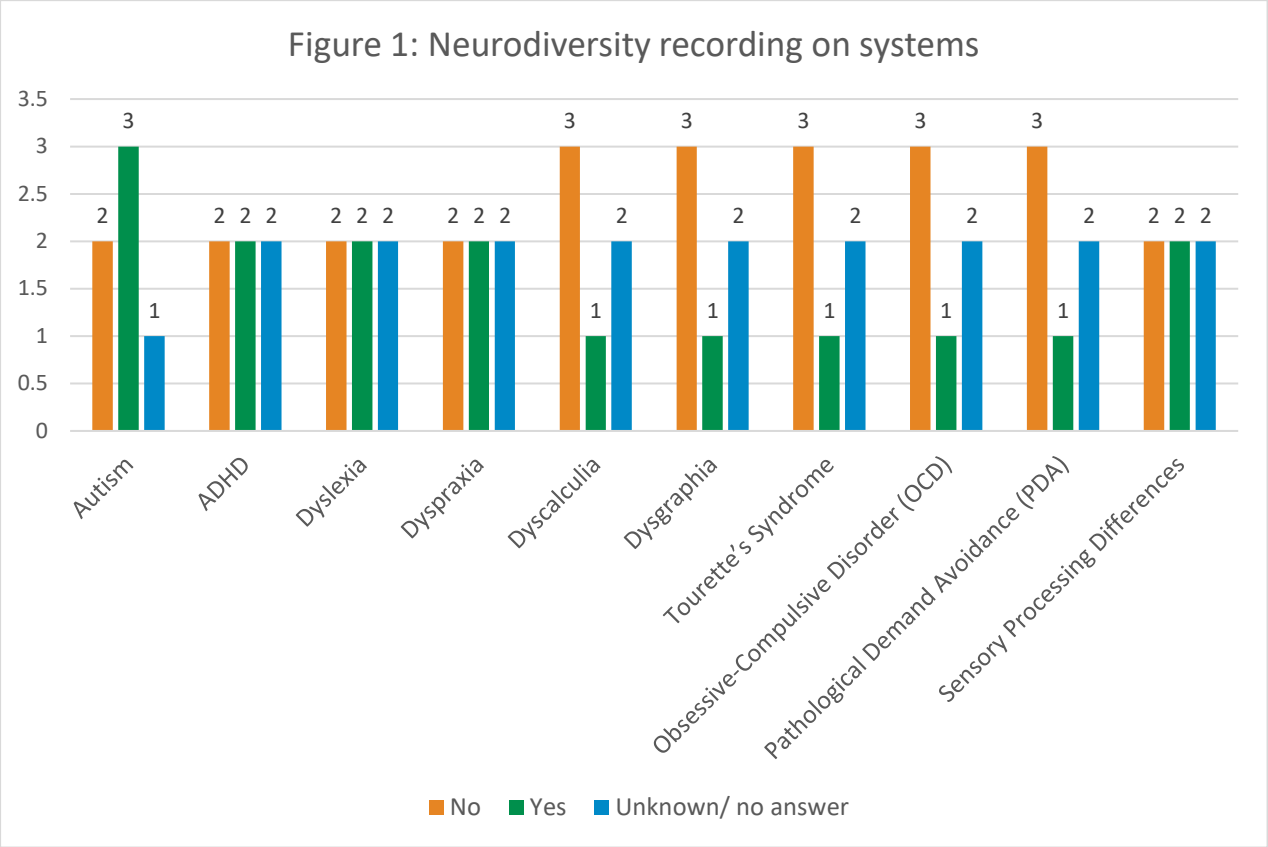
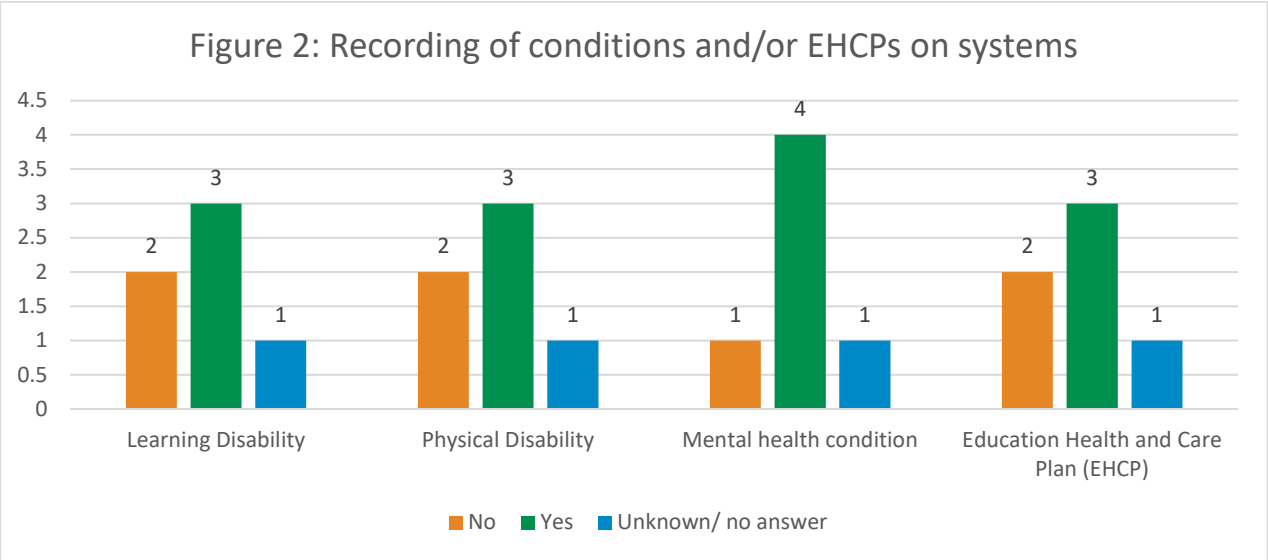


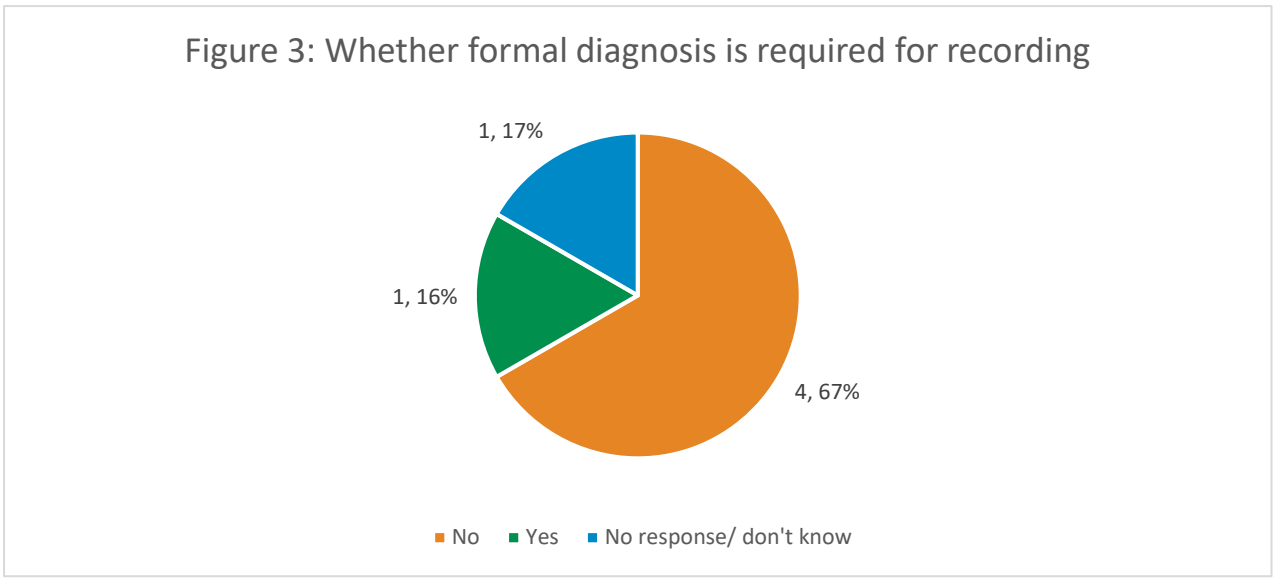
Figure 2 displays the results to a question designed to understand more about the recording of conditions and Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The chart shows that 4 of the 6 organisations record mental health conditions (one does not and one didn't know/ didn't answer), 3 record Learning Disability, Physical Disability and EHCPs the remaining 2 do not and one of the survey respondents did not know which information was recorded.



The next question asked for comments to explain current processes for recording neurodiversity. 5 responses were provided. The responses highlighted the following methods:

- System recording: examples included EMIS (Electronic Medical Information System), Common Platform and Childview.
- Alerts.
- Court register recording (neurodiversity related needs recorded as a special measure).
- Use of Care Plans to record support needs and conditions.
- Notes within personal details record, equality information records or other notes taken by case managers.

The next question sought to determine whether formal diagnosis is required to record Autism. Figure 3 displays the results. 4 of the 6 organisations do not require formal diagnosis, 1 does and one respondent didn't answer/didn't know.



The survey included a question to find out how many people with ND and/or Autism

specifically, are currently supported by the organisations within the sub-group (Criminal Justice System**). None of the respondents were able to access that data easily to allow the information to be included within their survey response.**

A supplementary question was included which read ‘Do you have data since 2020 showing the numbers of autistic people supported?’ and ‘If yes, where is this data recorded/reported? Please describe.’ The results show that one of the organisations working within the sub-group has this data and can access it through the system, Childview (the Youth Justice Management Information System).

Overall, the questions on the theme of data have highlighted varied approaches to recording neurodiversity; only one recorded all forms of neurodiversity, some recorded general neurodiversity without specifics, and others did not record such data. Most recorded mental health conditions, but fewer recorded learning disabilities or Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Formal autism diagnosis was not always required for recording.

Common methods for recording this information is use of systems like EMIS (Electronic Medical Information System) and Childview, alerts, court registers noting special measures, care plans, and notes within personal or equality records managed by case managers. The feedback highlights data availability challenges. Most organisations could not easily provide data on the number of neurodiverse or autistic individuals supported, with only one organisation able to access such data through the Childview system since 2020.

The results suggest inconsistent data recording methods contributes to a lack of clarity on the prevalence of autism across the criminal justice system as a whole and the impact this has on individual support needs and operational changes needed to deliver the support needed.

The next section of the report looks more closely at the next theme covered within the survey: training and resources.

3 Training and Resources

The second main theme covered within the survey was designed to better understand how staff members within the local criminal justice system are trained and supported to deliver support for Neurodiversity, with a focus on Autism. Questions covered training, access to resources, support for people within the Criminal Justice system and organisational strategy.

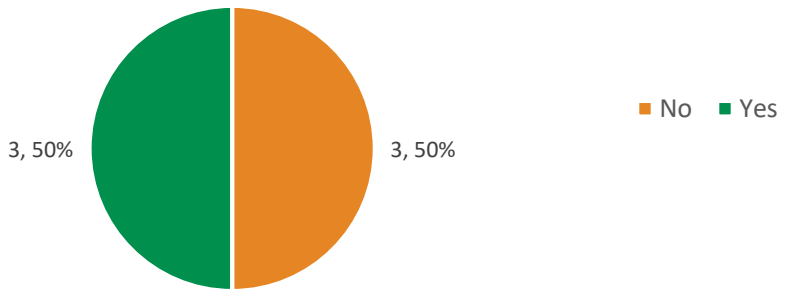
The first question within this section read 'Please describe the current Autism or ADHD training available to staff.' The 6 respondents listed the following training opportunities available:

- Oliver McGowan Training on Learning Disabilities and Autism
- Neurodiversity Awareness Training
- In house training provided by Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (MPFT)
- ADOS (Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule) and ADI-R (Autism Diagnostic Interview – Revised) training for assessment clinicians
- Judicial College Training for Magistrates and HMCTS staff
- Police awareness sessions for Tutors, Sergeant and Inspectors
- CPD information for call handlers with input from Custody Sergeants (Police).

The answers suggest that there is a robust training offer locally but different organisations provide different types of training depending on type and role. To explore this further the organisations were asked about which roles within the organisation receive training. The roles listed were all staff, managers, volunteers and particular staff depending on role. The response demonstrated that 5 of the organisations ensure all staff receive training. One organisation didn't comment. It doesn't appear that this type of training is extended to volunteers, if they are used. It is positive to see that the partner organisations seek to make training available to all staff rather than limit opportunities to managers or certain roles.

The survey included a question to determine whether ND training is mandatory or optional. As Figure 4 shows, the response to this question was split in half with 3 organisations providing mandatory training and 3 optional training.

Figure 4: Whether ND training is mandatory or optional



Each of the survey respondents was asked to rate the quality of the ND training available within their organisation. Figure 5 displays the response.

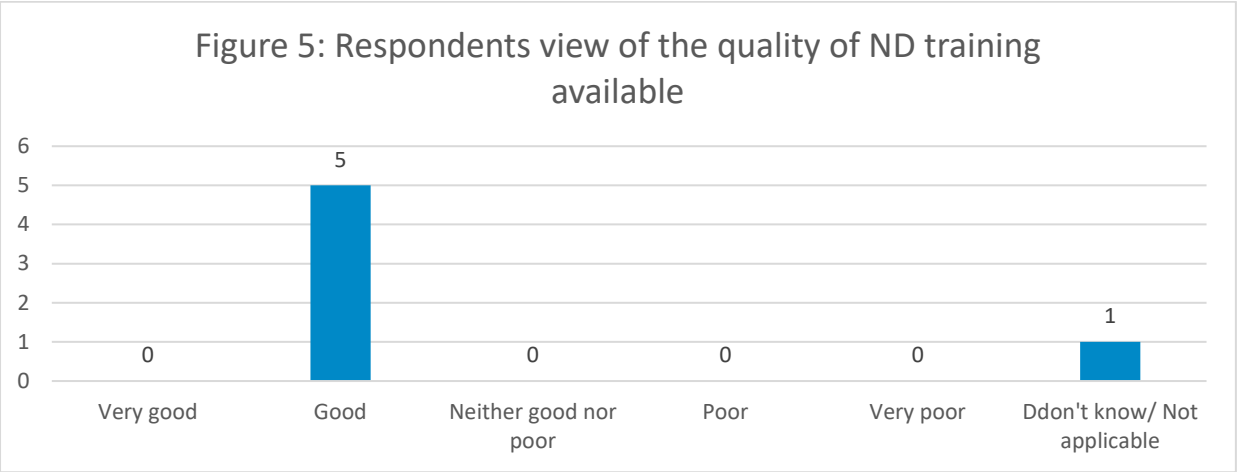


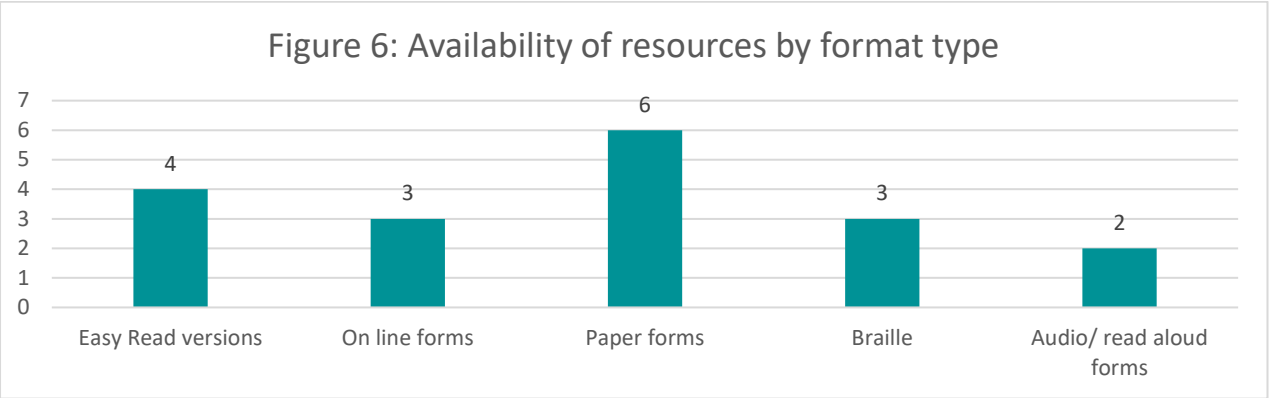
Figure 5 shows that the ND training available within the Criminal Justice System locally is considered to be good. One respondent didn't express an opinion but added a comment to suggest they had not received training within their service. The comments related to the training included:

- *"It could be more in-depth but abstractions from the front line do not allow longer sessions."*
- *"It delivers a thorough understanding of neurodiversity."*
- *"The training is a general awareness training. an introduction, identifying neurodiverse conditions, individual strengths, adjustments and strategies for practioners."*
- *"The training is online which does not suit all staff members…. i.e. those who prefer face to face training. The online training is otherwise is detailed and well explained."*

The survey respondents were then asked more about the resources made available to staff members within their organisations to support those individuals with ND/ Autism. The response to the questions shows a wide range of resources are made available:

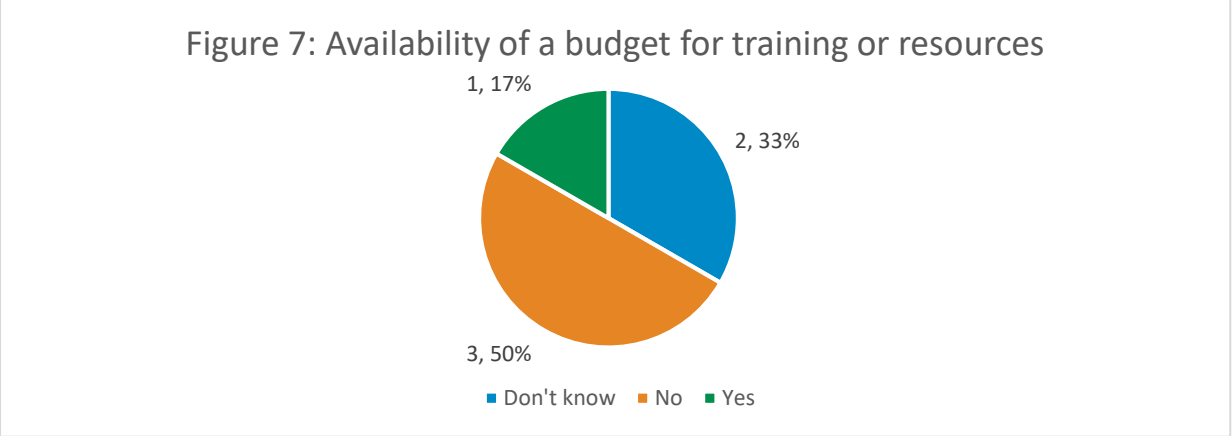
- *"Fidget toys in custody suites."*
- *"Intermediary services available for defendants and witnesses subject to an application being made."*
- *"Mixed, there is a database of intervention. Visual cues/timetables, transition tactics and some sensory diet practices encouraged. Staff follow EHCP guidance if applicable."*
- *"Self-help booklets, easy read, reading on prescription."*
- *"We have commissioned a partnership organisation to assist and support practitioners in managing autistic people."*
- *"We link closely to the Autism Hubs in Shropshire and Telford. We provide reasonable adjustments around location, time, staff."*

A further question was included to determine the format of any resources available. Figure 6 displays the range of options made available. All 6 organisations offer paper forms, 4 provide Easy Read versions of documents. 3 offer Braille and online forms and 2 offer audio/read aloud forms.



A question was included within the survey to determine whether the sub-group partners within the Criminal Justice System would be interested in working together to produce training videos designed to better support autistic people. 3 of the organisations expressed an interest, 2 were not sure//didn't know. One declined the offer.

To further identify opportunities to develop new resources or training in partnership, the 6 organisations were asked whether they have a training or resources budget available. Figure 7 displays the response. The response suggests that availability of funding is currently very limited (with only one of the organisations having any available budget) and this could prove an obstacle to the work of the sub-group in finding the budget to deliver new training or resources for mutual benefit.



The last question within the section on training and resources sought to find out whether organisations working within the Criminal Justice System locally have autism strategies in place. The question read 'Does your organisation have an autism strategy?'. The responses are shown within Figure 8.

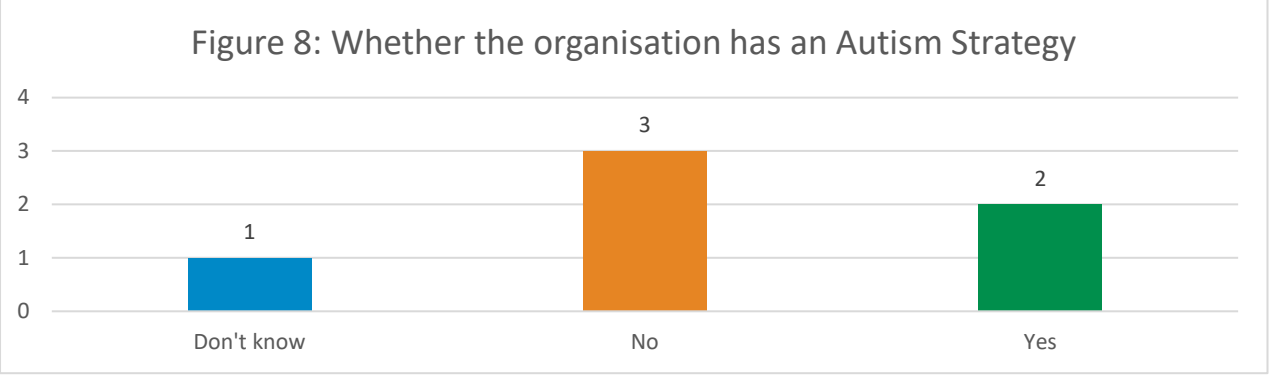


Figure 8 shows that 2 of the organisations have an Autism Strategy in place, 3 do not and one representative wasn't sure. Further work will be taking place through the sub-group and partnership working to understand this further and work together where possible.

This theme within the survey has highlighted that there is good provision of general awareness training in ND and some more specialist training available. This training can help provide an introduction to identifying neurodiverse conditions, individual strengths, adjustments, and strategies for practitioners. Where training is available it is usually available to all members of staff but this is only mandatory within some organisations. In addition to training for staff, organisations also provide resources to meet a range of needs. These range from fidget toys available in custody suites to help manage sensory needs to leaflets/booklets and the provision of forms within a range of formats. The responses also highlight the importance of drawing on local experts and sources of support including the Autism Hubs in Shropshire and Telford.

The section highlights the varied approaches to training and resources, emphasizing the importance of tailored support to meet the needs of neurodiverse individuals within the Criminal Justice System. Within the feedback there was no mention or consideration of the individuals understanding of their autism, why it impacts their behaviours and the consequences that this can cause. It may be necessary to develop wider understanding of the fact that if autism if not understood and has not been picked up during early and school years (meaning access to assessment or support hasn't been available) this can culminate, in some cases, people being more at risk to vulnerabilities such as poor mental health & well-being and/or involvement within the criminal justice system, and a cycle of re-offending. Some offenders will not know what "reasonable adjustments" are and therefore won't understand which reasonable adjustments they need.

The next section turns to explore health needs and processes.

4 Health

The third and final theme included within the survey was on the topic of health. This section covered signposting to support services, provision of reasonable adjustments, access to advocacy and support, Mental Capacity Act (MCA) assessment and access to formal Autism/ADHD assessments. Understanding how support and referrals work within the Criminal Justice System will assist the sub-group in its work and contribute to the evidence base that will form the Shropshire Autism Strategy.

The first question within this section read 'Do you signpost to other services for Autism or ADHD support? If yes, please list the organisations used.' 5 of the 6 organisations signpost to other services and one does not. The services that were listed include:

- Autism West Midlands
- BEEU
- Liaison and Diversion
- NAS (National Autistic Society)
- 3SC (Neurodiversity coaching programme)
- Genius Within CIC
- Autism Hubs (Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin)

The next question asked 'What do you see as the benefits or drawbacks of autism/ADHD diagnosis in your area?' All of the 6 survey respondents were able to provide helpful information from the perspectives of their different services/organisations:

- *"Waiting times are a drawback. Lack of 'in process' resources shared for people with suspected autism/ADHD. The process is not Autism friendly; forms are given to people to fill out which can sometimes act as a barrier to young people being able to access or receive support…."*
- *"Benefits gain access to some accommodations although we prefer to go on a needs based assessment."*
- *"Lack of understanding and support."*
- *"We only screen for ASD but can diagnose for ADHD."*
- *"Waiting lists are long but new service. Too many missed children."*
- *"Early diagnosis prior to first hearing would ensure intermediary applications could be made at the first hearing and cases managed appropriately. This reduces the risk of unnecessary adjournments and associated stress. A formal diagnosis may however introduce delay if, for example, greater time or more input is needed prior to concluding a case e.g. at the sentencing stage."*

In response to 'What differences do formal assessment for autism or ADHD make to your processes?' all 6 representatives provided an answer:

- *"The young person would receive specific support and would highlight areas of need for young people working with them. Can also provide guidance to those working with the service when a YP has a formal assessment being undertaken. Formal processes sometimes make young people feel heard and valued and more likely to engage with*

services."

- *"We provide reasonable adjustments without the need for a diagnosis."*
- *"This helps in understanding behaviour and being responsive in the type of support or treatment required to aid desistance from offending."*
- *"Informs all staff and provides personalised support."*
- *"Allow access to DSR."* [Dynamic Support Register]
- *"If identified in respect of a defendant either by the L&D team or Probation service this will ensure any sentence, if needed, is suitably tailored to the needs of the defendant. It also ensures all special measures are dealt with at the point a trial is fixed assuming that is required."*

It should be noted that formal assessment for ASD is not available in HMP Stoke Heath.

The next few questions were on the issue of reasonable adjustments. The survey results show that 5 of the 6 organisations routinely ask about and/or offer reasonable adjustments for staff (see Figure 9). The same results is provided when asked about reasonable adjustments for service users (see Figure 10).

Figure 9: Whether reasonable adjustments are routinely asked about/offered for staff

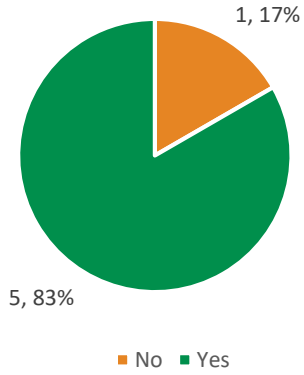
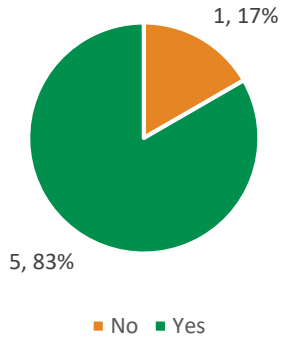
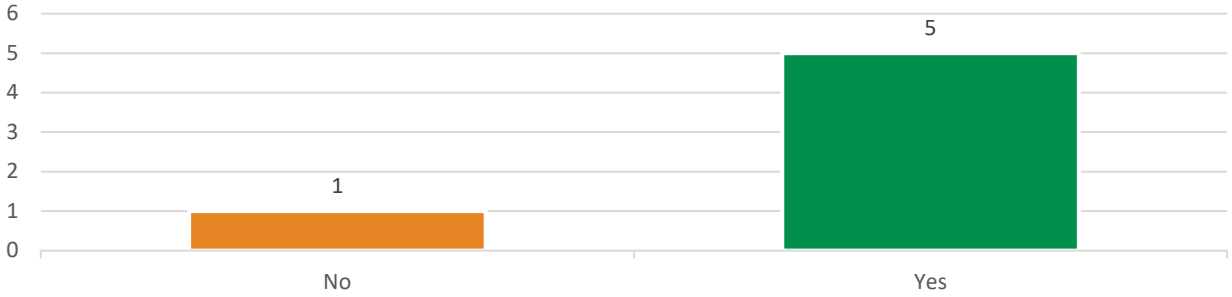


Figure 10: Whether reasonable adjustments are routinely asked about/offered for service users



The next question within the survey sought to understand use of advocates or appropriate adults for people with ND. The result is shown in Figure 11 and highlights that 5 of the 6 organisations do routinely offer to organise support when ND is identified.

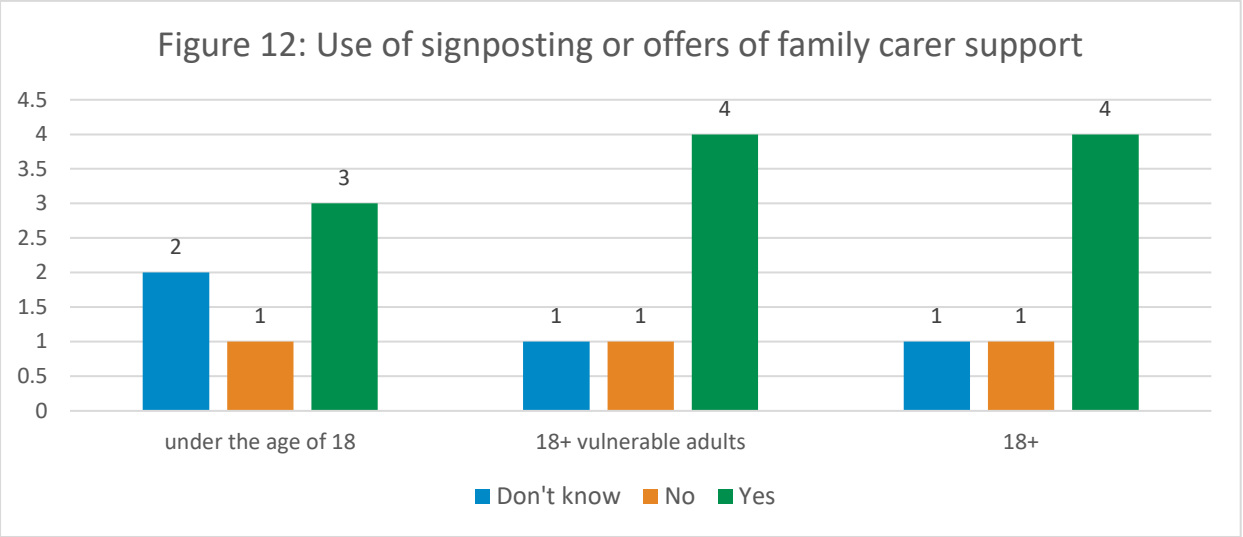
Figure 11: Whether advocacy or an appropriate adult is routinely organised when ND is present



A set of questions was included within the survey to understand more about signposting or offering family carer support. The questions were:

- Do you signpost or offer family carer support for those under the age of 18?
- Do you signpost or offer family carer support for those 18+ considered a vulnerable adult?
- Do you signpost or offer family carer support for those 18+?

The responses are shown in Figure 12. 4 organisations offer this additional support for those over the age of 18+, including vulnerable adults. 3 organisations offer this support to those under the age of 18.



The next part of the survey included two questions linked to working with families. The first asked 'What action do you take on behalf of family if they may be the victim?' and the second 'Are any checks undertaken by your organisation to establish if any involved family members are known to Criminal Justice System?'. The response to the first question highlighted that Safeguarding, MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) and MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) are used when working with offenders. Signposting to relevant agencies is in place and special measures are used when appropriate. Victim Liaison Officers can also be introduced to families when the appropriate criteria for that support is met. The second question resulted in feedback to highlight the following checks:

- Police checks;
- Childview check;
- Approaches to Children's services to request information;
- Attendance at strategy meetings; and
- PITSTOP.

Use of Mental Capacity Act (MCA) assessment was the next theme explored within the research. The response highlights that there are different roles and responsibilities within the Criminal Justice System. Some organisations such as Court would not be expected to be involved in this area. Others may refer to mental health services to complete assessment and others will work in partnership (e.g. with health care professionals). This type of work will be limited to those trained to deliver MCA assessments which will

usually include medical professionals, social workers, occupational therapists, independent social workers and some psychologists.

Survey respondents were asked ‘How would your organisation support access to formal autism/ADHD assessment?’. Most of the organisations represented refer to the appropriate organisations locally with professionals trained to carry out the assessments (this includes the Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (MPFT) represented within the partnership working to develop and deliver the Autism Strategy). The survey feedback also highlighted the Right to Choose which sits under the NHS Choice Framework. This means that if a GP refers someone for specialist treatment such as an autism or ADHD assessment, ADHD medication services etc. people have the right to choose an appropriate provider.

All survey respondents were given the opportunity within the survey to add anything else they wished to share or comment on regarding their organisation’s practices in relation to neurodiversity, autistic people and/or people with ADHD. There were some comments included that will help the sub-group partners work together going forwards. One of the comments highlighted a lack of access to all information within their role, a helpful explanation but not included as an example in the overall suggestions below:

- *“I do think more can be done to improve understanding and access to resources.”*
- *“Our service are ‘try-ers’ and will do what they can to support young people in any area. However, lack of training and skills acts as a barrier to potential support.”*
- *“We have a number of projects and plans which we are seeking to implement to better support people in custody and in interviews.”*
- [There is a need for access] “*diagnostic assessments for possible autistic prisoners*”.

The last question sought to bring together some of the wider partnership work and the sub-group members were asked to list the other organisations, teams or agencies they work with to support neurodivergent people. These include:

- Autism Hubs
- Autism West Midlands
- Local authorities
- BEEU
- National Police Autism Association (NPAA)
- DPA (Disabled Police Alliance)
- Largely limited to L&D & Probation teams in the court room.
- MPFT team
- 3SC (provide training to staff).
- Youth workers (to support young people when there are barriers to education or any offending behaviour has occurred).
- CLIMB
- DIAG
- ADHD alliance

This section has highlighted the work that takes place within organisations to offer reasonable adjustments for staff and service users to meet sensory needs, communication methods, and other individual requirements. Many organisations use advocates when neurodiversity or vulnerabilities are identified or access other support as appropriate e.g. Victim Liaison Officers. This section highlights the importance of support to meet the needs of neurodiverse individuals within the Criminal Justice System and how that support is secured internally and through referrals to, and collaboration with external support services.

5 Summary and Conclusion

Shropshire Council's Neurodiversity Survey results provide learning of how neurodiversity, particularly Autism, is addressed within the Criminal Justice System in Shropshire. The survey gathered insights from local representatives across various organisations, including West Mercia Police, Criminal Courts, Probation, Youth Justice, and HMP Stoke Heath.

The survey aimed to understand current practices, identify gaps, and explore opportunities for improvement in supporting neurodiverse individuals within the system.

The results covered three main themes:

Data

This section presents the methods used by organisations to record neurodiversity, including Autism and ADHD. The survey focusses on the collation of data across the criminal justice system but does not include the recording of "outcomes" of the intervention, providing data and reassurance that the intervention has been effective. The feedback highlights the varied approaches to data recording and the challenges faced in accessing comprehensive data on neurodiverse individuals supported by the system. The information gathered suggests **a need for some standardised methods to record neurodiversity across organisations to ensure comprehensive data collection and better support for neurodiverse individuals.**

Training and Resources

This section explores the training opportunities available to staff members within the Criminal Justice System, focusing on Autism and ADHD. Overall there appears to be a relatively comprehensive training offer with professionals within all organisations having access to training, whether mandatory or optional. The evidence gathered also highlights the resources provided to support neurodiverse individuals, such as fidget toys, intermediary services, self-help booklets and the provision of alternative versions of documents/forms. Whilst this doesn't appear to be an area in need of particular attention, the feedback suggests that opportunities for development are limited through lack of access to training and resource budgets. Experience of those with neurodiversity within the Criminal Justice System could be improved through **consistency across all contributors, a joined-up approach and the importance of lived experience in delivering meaningful training.** As with all training, gaining knowledge is important but this is only effective if it can lead to changes in practice and improved outcomes for offenders.

Health

This section examines the health aspect of supporting neurodiverse individuals, including signposting to support services, the benefits and drawbacks of diagnosis, the impact of formal assessments, and the provision of reasonable adjustments and advocacy. Reasonable adjustments appear to be offered widely by most organisations. **There appear to be good partnership arrangements in place to signpost to specialist services where needed but the feedback suggests room for improvement and some gaps in support or service offers.**

The findings from the survey highlight the importance of a collaborative and inclusive approach to supporting neurodiverse individuals within the Criminal Justice System.

The insights gained from this survey will be used by those working within the Autism Strategy sub-groups. The results will inform future service provision and help develop clear priority areas and goals for the local All-age Autism Strategy. The strategy will be made public for wider engagement and feedback and the findings reported to Shropshire Council's Cabinet later in 2025.

June 2025

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Shropshire Council Lead Department:
Commissioning

Neurodiversity Employment Survey: Focus on Autism

Feedback Report

May 2025

www.shropshire.gov.uk
General Enquiries: 0345 678 9000

1 Background

Shropshire Council's Neurodiversity Employment Survey – Focus on Autism was designed to gather valuable feedback from individuals who are autistic, whether diagnosed or self-identifying. The survey aimed to learn more about people's experience of employment including recruitment practices, workplace support and employer approaches in Shropshire. Questions were designed to find out what is working well, the gaps in support, and whether young people feel prepared for work.

The survey ran from the 3rd March to the 2nd May 2025. It was promoted through Shropshire Council's Get Involved section of the website, through the Gov Delivery surveys database, through the Council's Newsroom and communication channels and through a variety of local networks and groups.

The survey was hosted online but alternative versions of the survey were also available on request (e.g. large text). Members of the public were encouraged to highlight any communication needs and request any support required to respond. Most people chose to respond online.

The findings from this survey will inform future service provision and help Shropshire Council and its partner organisations develop clear priority areas and goals for the local all-age autism strategy. This collaborative effort involves working closely with stakeholders and individuals with lived experience to ensure that the approach taken is both inclusive and effective.

ND is used as the acronym/short hand for neurodiversity within the report and this was also explained within the survey introduction.

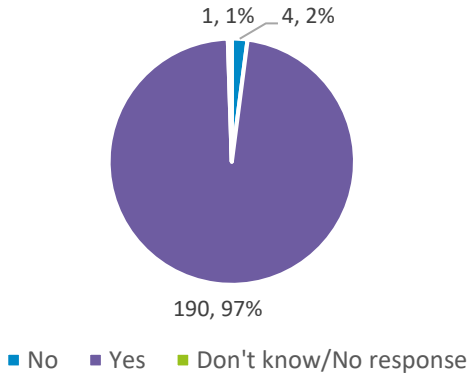
This report describes the survey findings within 7 main sections:

- **Section 1: Background** (this section) provides an overview of the consultation and how it was promoted.
- **Section 2: Respondents** presents the number and types of responses to the survey including respondent characteristics.
- **Section 3: Preparation for Work** explores how survey respondents feel about being ready of work and/or their experience in the workplace.
- **Section 4: Job Applications** analyses survey respondents' feedback about the process of applying for work.
- **Section 5: Job Interviews** considers feedback from people in relation to their experience of being interviewed and any adjustments made.
- **Section 6: Being in Work** covers issues related to neurodiversity in the workforce and the policies and support provided by employers.
- **Section 7: Summary and Conclusion** provides a brief summary and conclusion based on the overall analysis of the feedback received.

2 Respondents

The survey was responded to by a total of 195 respondents. Some core questions were included within the survey to find out a little more about the respondents and to determine if the sample provides a representative group of Shropshire's wider population or whether further engagement would be needed in addition to the survey. The response was really encouraging with 97% (190 respondents) of the 195 total describing themselves as neurodiverse/ neurodivergent. This is a key result and provides reassurance that the survey reached its target audience. In addition, 4 people responded who are not neurodiverse but must have an interest in the survey topic and 1 respondent didn't say or wasn't sure. Figure 1 displays the results.

Figure 1. Whether respondents consider themselves to be neurodiverse.



Survey respondents were asked if they have been diagnosed and the results are shown in Figure 2. More survey respondents have been diagnosed than those who have self-diagnosed. Given nationally reported concerns linked to delays in diagnosis this could potentially be a positive indicator for Shropshire suggesting that a majority are clear about their diagnosis. 26% have self-diagnosed of the 190 survey respondents considering themselves neurodivergent and 72% have diagnoses.

Figure 2. Whether respondents have been diagnosed.

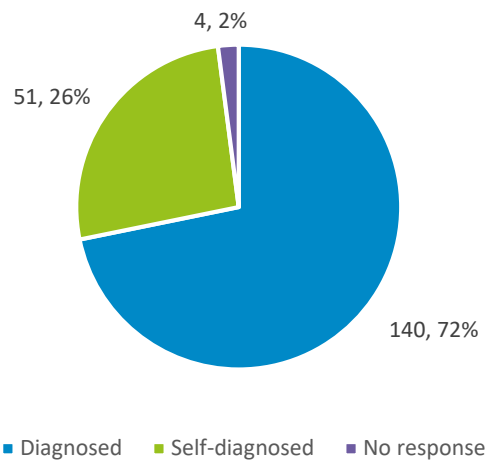
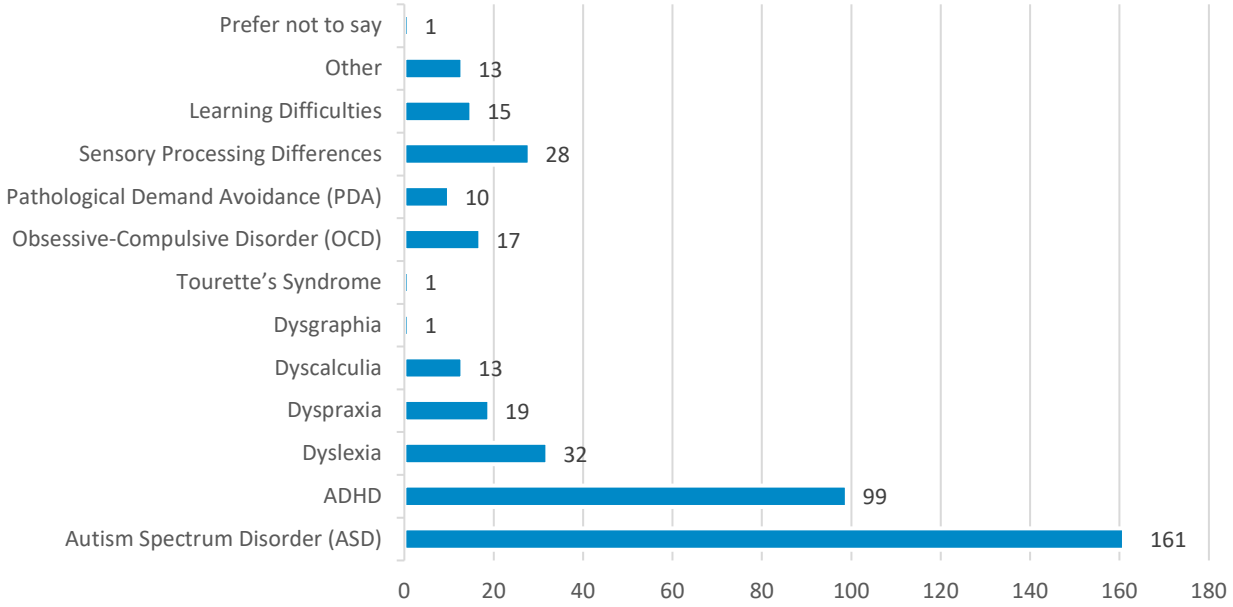


Figure 3 includes the results when survey respondents were asked to describe their neurodiversity. The results show that more survey respondents have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) than any other form of neurodiversity (161), with a high proportion also reporting ADHD (99). Respondents with dyslexia and sensory processing difficulties are also well represented within the survey sample. It is encouraging to see that people with a wide range of neurodiversity conditions and experiences took the time to participate within the survey.

Figure 3. Survey respondents by type of neurodiversity



In addition to the important information collected about neurodiversity, survey respondents were also asked for information on some of their other characteristics to understand the research sample. Figure 4 shows that 33% of the survey respondents were male, 62% female, 1% non-binary and the remainder preferred not to say or did not answer the question. The bias towards female respondents is common within survey results and should be noted but should not be cause for concern.

Figure 4. Sex/gender of survey respondents

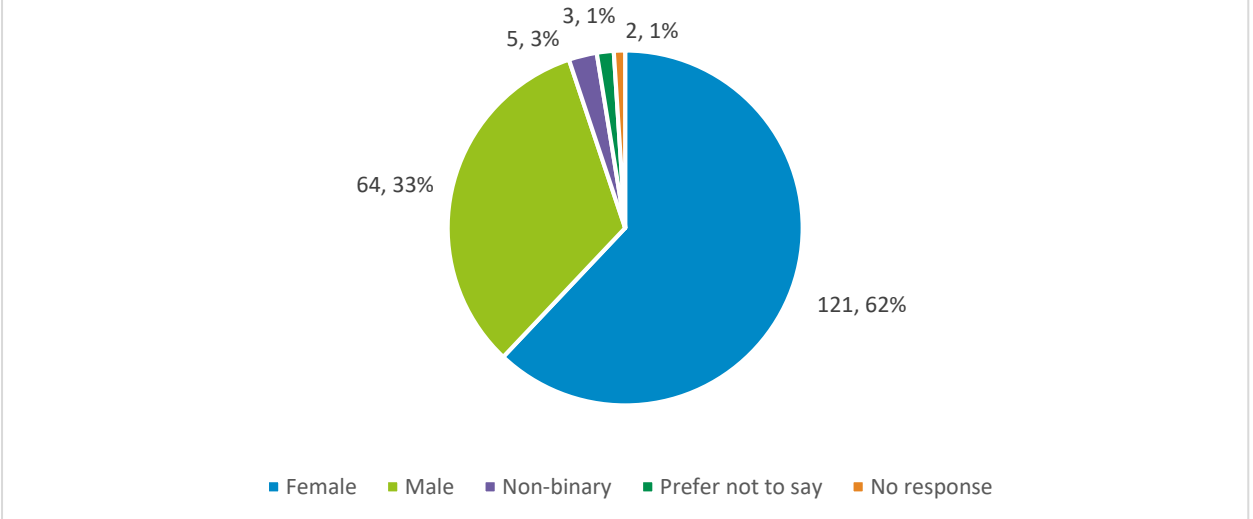


Figure 5 displays the age group breakdown of the survey sample. The results show a good spread of responses across age groups with fewer in the 60+ age group but this is to be expected when a large proportion of the older members of this group may be nearing the end of their careers or retired and have greater experience of managing with neurodiversity in the workplace. Only 1% of the survey sample are within the 15 and under age group and this is likely to reflect the fact that employment may not yet be a big consideration with a wide range of post-16 education options available. 12% of respondents represent the younger 16-19 age group and 30-44 year-olds form the largest group with 32% of all respondents within this bracket.

Figure 5. Survey respondents by age group

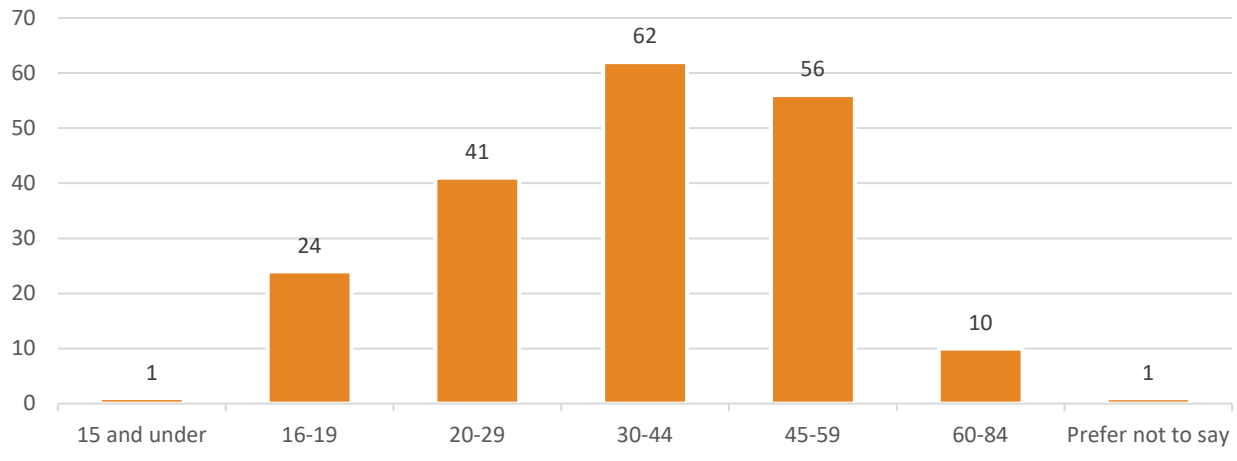
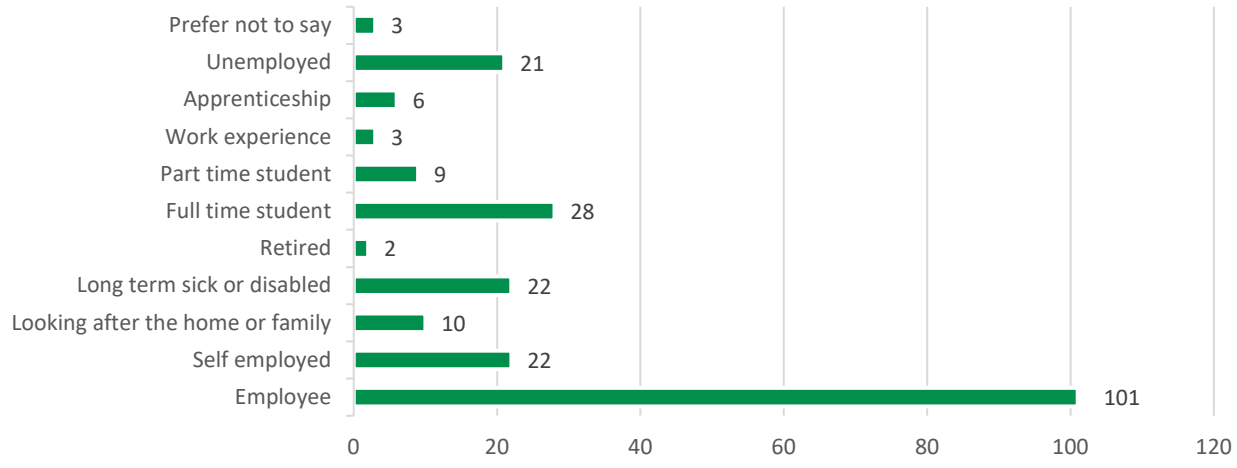


Figure 6 displays the results when more information was sought concerning the education, work or training status of respondents. Again, a good representative mix of responses was received. Some respondents selected multiple options and a large majority are employees (101 of the 195, 52%). 14% of the survey respondents are full time students, 11% self-employed, 11% long term sick or disabled and 11% unemployed.

Figure 6. Survey respondents by education, work or training



A follow up question was included to determine whether survey respondents were receiving any help from an employment support service. Figure 7 displays the response and the results show that 16 of the 195 respondents are currently receiving support form

an employment support service. When asked to comment on this question, 27 made comments to explain further. A summary of comments is included within Table 1, a list of services mentioned is included as Table 2 and example comments are shown below.

Figure 7. Whether survey respondents recieve support from an employment support service

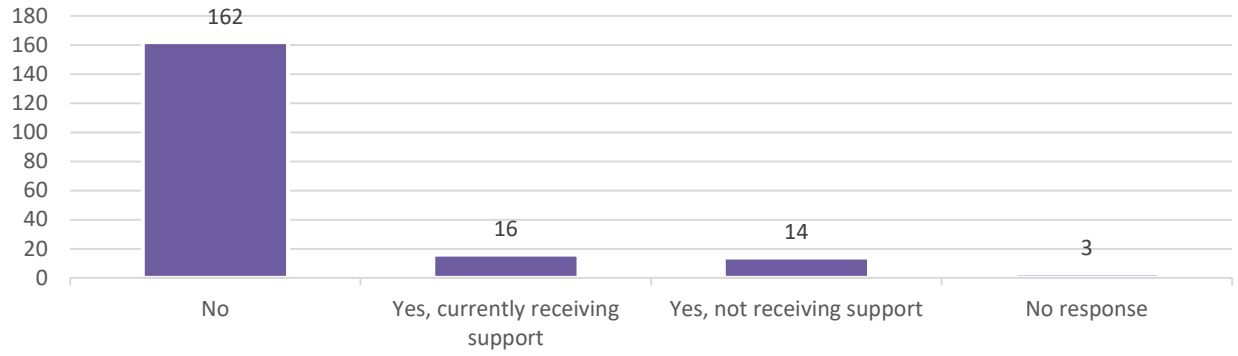


Table 1 Respondent access to employment support services

Theme	Count	%
Support from Enable	11	31%
Job coaching	3	8%
Work experience / internship	3	8%
Supported employment	2	6%
Access to work	4	11%
Would like support / no support at present	7	19%
Other	6	17%
Total	**36**	**100%**

Table 2 Services mentioned within comments

Type of support	Count
Enable	11
Access to Work	5
Able Futures	1
Genius Within	1
ESR (Electronic Staff record to allow movement of staff within the NHS)	1
Day Opportunities (Albrighton Moat and Greenacres)	1
Job Box (Telford)	1
Total	**21**

Example comments – Employment support

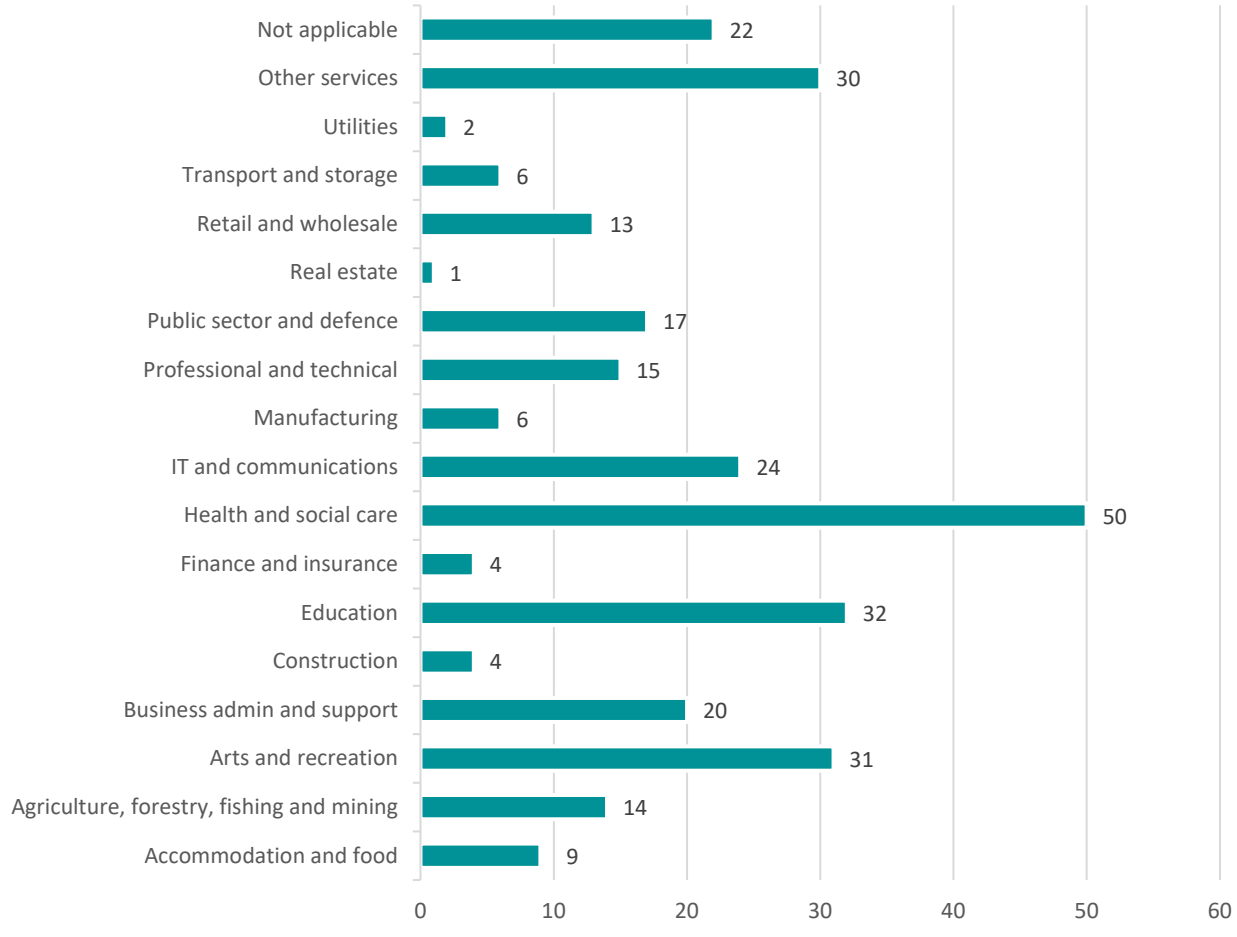
- *"8 hours supported employment."*
- *"Enable supported internship."*
- *"Job coaching from Access to Work."*
- *"Access to Work, Able Futures."*
- *"Did have help from Enable previously and also from Access to Work service part of the DWP."*
- *"Not having it anymore but used to do a Supported Internship at Shropshire Council and had*

a Job Coach from Enable to support me."

- *Job Box helping looking for work.*
- *"ADHD Coaching from Genius Within (a private provider)."*
- *"I used to but not now. I as I'm fine in my job. I used to have dyslexia support as needed it in the workplace to help me with letters and time management and equipment."*
- *"I receive support from my Neurodivergent Specialists from my college."*
- *"Enable - Job Mentor, available for me to reach out and ask for advice regarding Job related things but also apprenticeship related things Apprenticeship provider - Safeguarding time, mostly helps with mental health issues and making sure I am as well as possible during my apprenticeship[p and flag any issues + Learning support services, helps with getting accommodations during my apprenticeship, making sure I am doing alright with the content and amount of work ATW - About to provide a bunch of software that hopefully helps me."*
- *"Go to Albrighton moat and Greenacres where I am supported to work."*

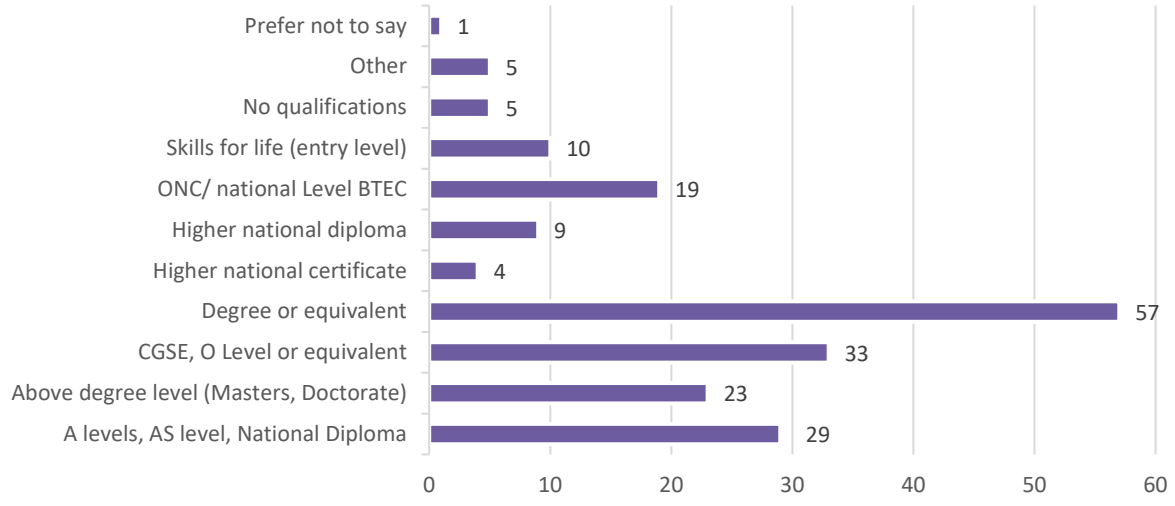
Survey respondents were asked about the types of employment that are of interest to them. Figure 8 displays the results and includes all types where there was at least one response (other employment sectors were included but not selected). The most commonly selected area of employment was health and social care followed by education, arts and recreation and other services. 22 of the respondents selected not applicable to indicate that they are not seeking employment opportunities, this reflects the previous results highlighting that not all respondents are necessarily in a position to be considering employment opportunities and support.

Figure 8. Survey respondents by areas of employment of interest



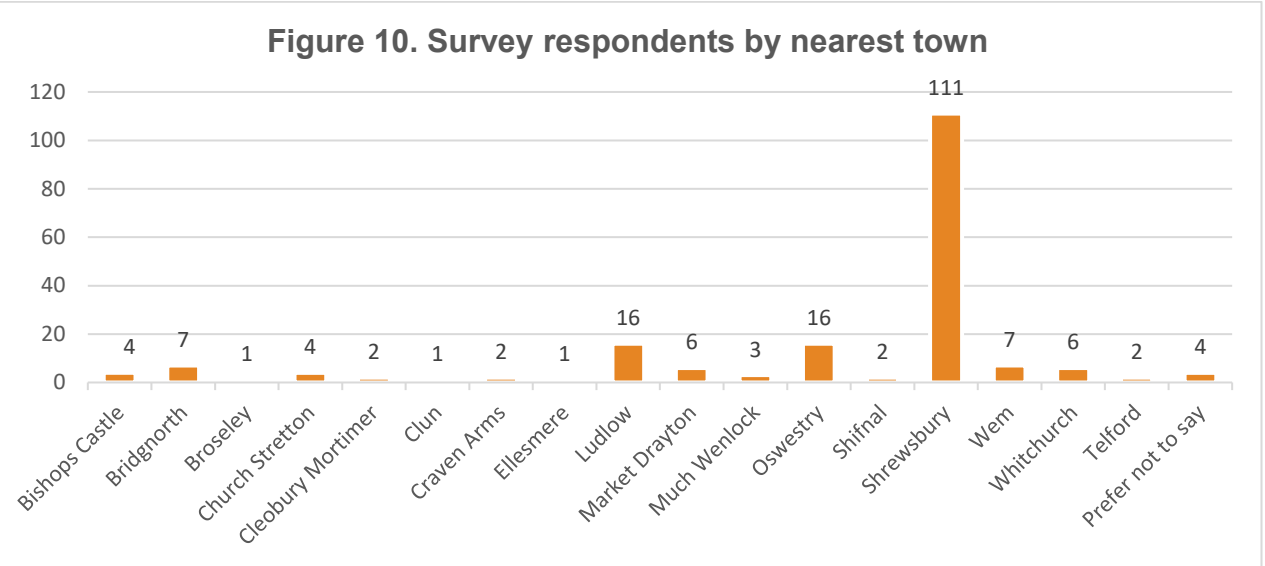
Survey respondents were asked about their level of education with the question reading 'What is the highest level of education you have completed?' The results are shown in Figure 9. There is a good representative mix of survey respondents across all levels of education. Only 5 (3%) of the 195 do not have any qualifications and a high proportion (41%) have a degree level qualification or above degree level (e.g. Masters, Doctorate). 15% completed education following A levels, AS level or National Diploma and 17% completed education following GCSEs, O Levels or equivalent qualifications. This spread if helpful in ensuring people across Shropshire are represented within the sample and the range of educational experiences may impact on how people experience employment entry and opportunities.

Figure 9. Survey respondents by highest level of education completed

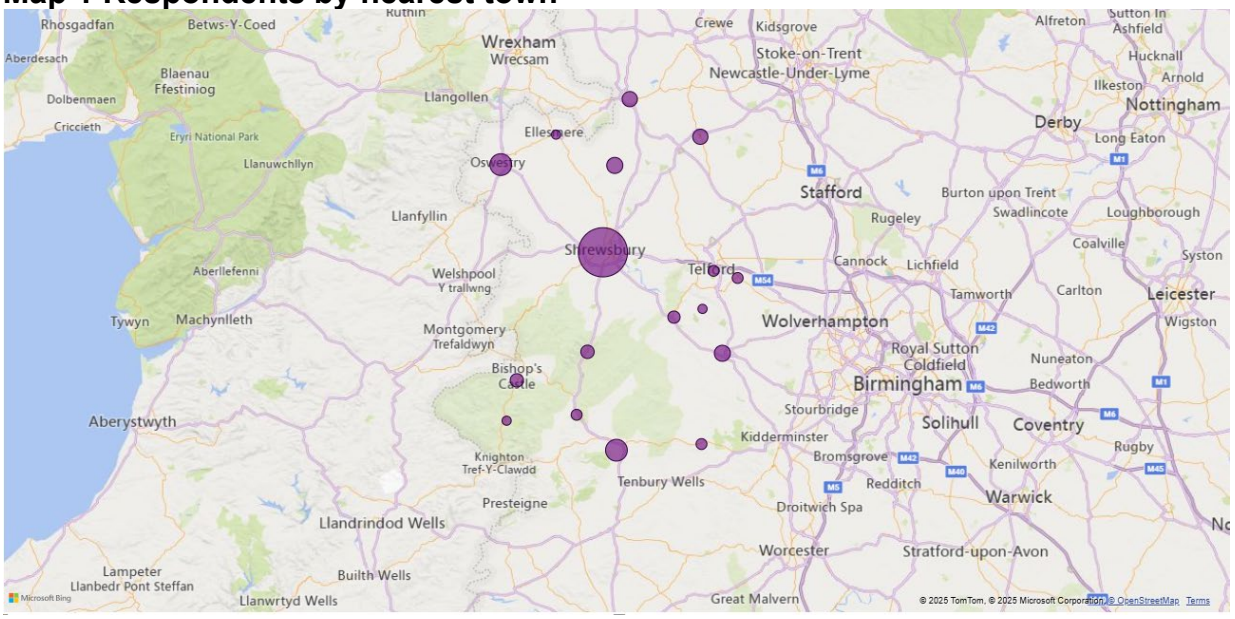


The last question included within the section on respondent characteristics considers where in the county survey respondents live, by noting the nearest market town to home location. The results are shown in Figure 10 and Map 1. Figure 10 and Map 1 display the nearest market town to respondents' home locations. A large proportion of the responses are from Shrewsbury (57%) but there are smaller numbers of responses from across the county, as Map 1 shows.

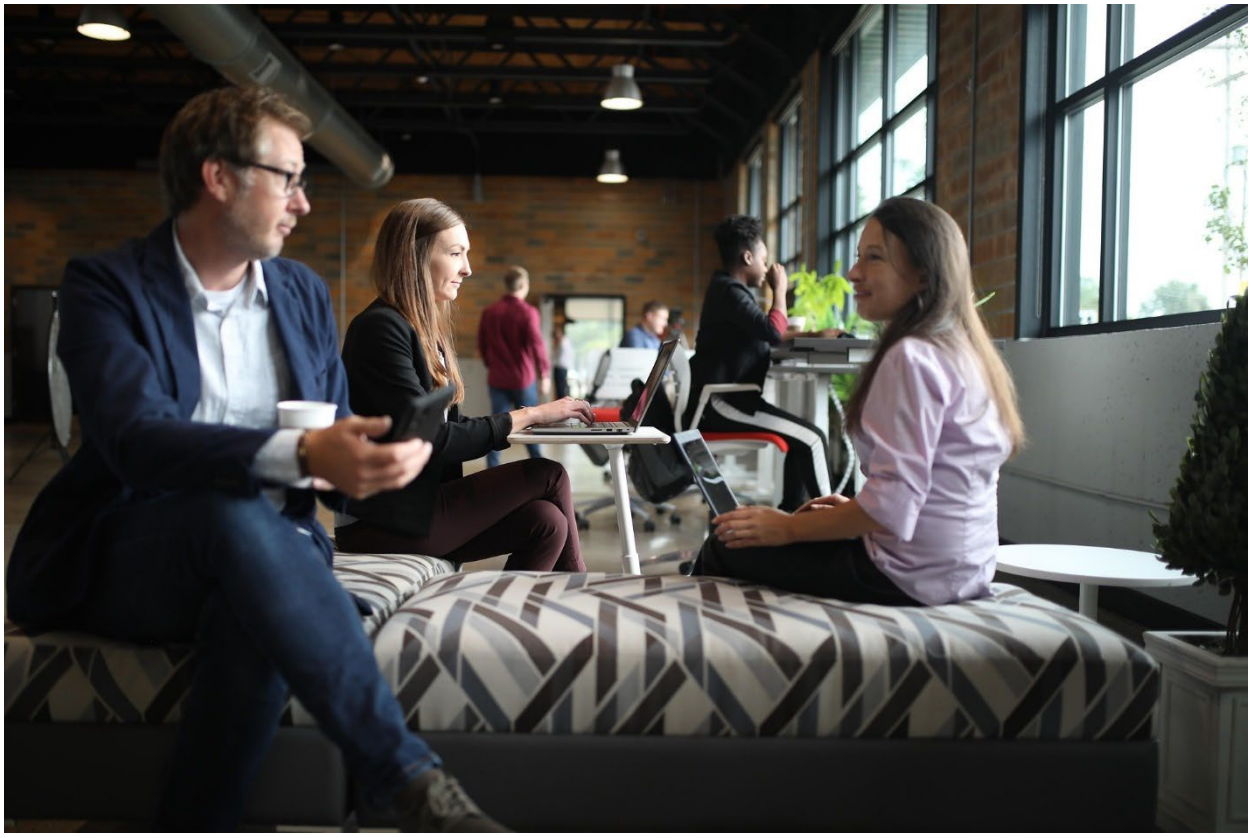
Figure 10. Survey respondents by nearest town



Map 1 Respondents by nearest town



The next section of the report considers how survey respondents feel about preparation for work, their experience of work, and employment opportunities they may be interested in exploring.



3 Preparation for Work

The first main topic covered within the survey was on the theme of preparation for work. All survey respondents were asked if they feel prepared for work. The results are shown in Figure 11. This question was answered by most respondents despite various different employment status and age groups, and only 12 of the 195 did not respond. 55% feel prepared for work (108) and 39% don't feel prepared (75). A closer analysis of this suggests that those who don't feel prepared for work are spread fairly evenly across the 4 age groups encompassing 16-59 year olds. Considering employment status shows 16 full time students don't feel ready for work, 15 unemployed respondents are not ready for work and 14 people who are already employed don't feel prepared for work. There were smaller numbers spread across the other categories. The additional analysis suggests there isn't a clear pattern linked to gender, age or employment but educational achievement is a factor (those educated to degree level or above are more likely to feel prepared for work).

Figure 11. Whether survey respondents feel prepared for work

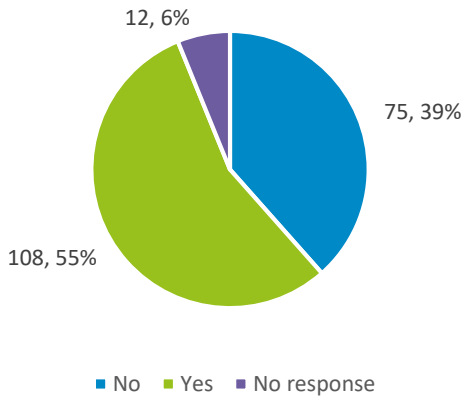
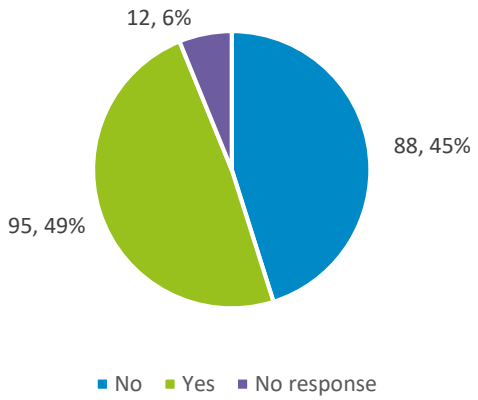


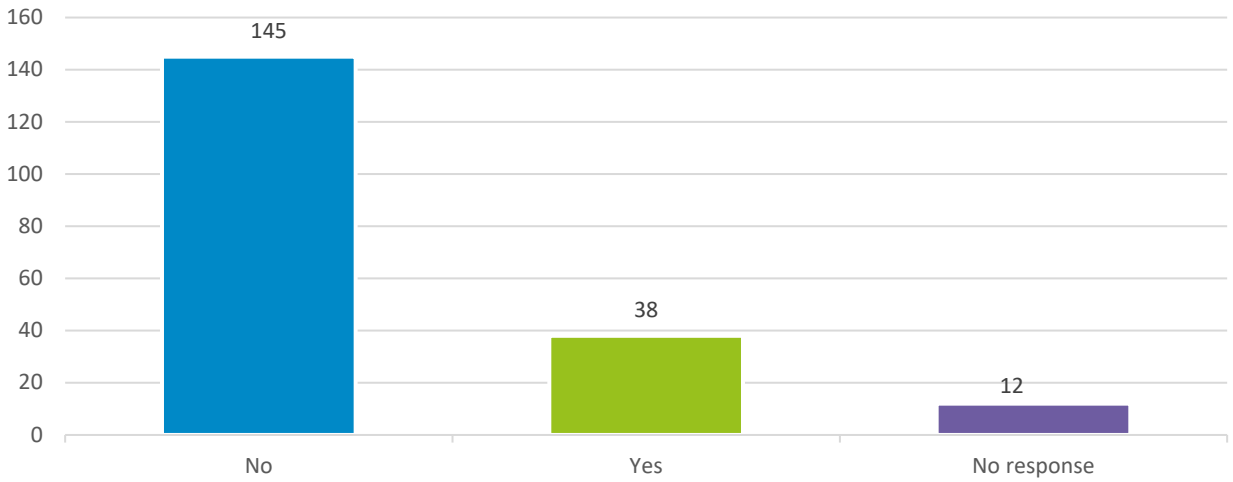
Figure 12 shows that there is a fairly even split between those who understand the options available to them and those who don't.

Figure 12. Whether survey respondents feel clear about the options available (e.g. volunteering, supported internships, apprenticeships, employment options etc.)



All survey respondents were asked whether they have an EHCP or have been statemented. A large proportion answered ‘no’ (74%). Of the 38 respondents (19%) who answered ‘yes’ most were under the age of 29, with only 10 people older than that (and 8 of those in the 30-44 age bracket). This highlights that older survey respondents are much less likely to have an EHCP or have been statemented (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. Whether survey respondents have an EHCP or have been statemented



When asked about work experience, a significant proportion of the survey sample do have work experience with only 20 people answering ‘no’ (10%). Figure 14 illustrates the feedback obtained. This result supports previous findings suggesting a large proportion of the survey respondents are in in employment.

Figure 14. Whether survey respondents have any work experience

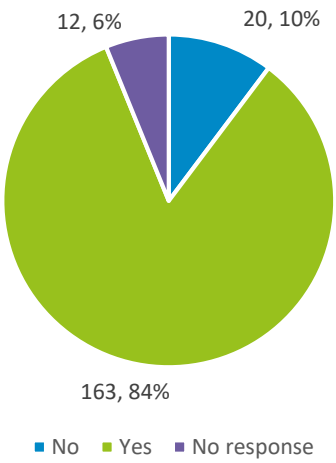
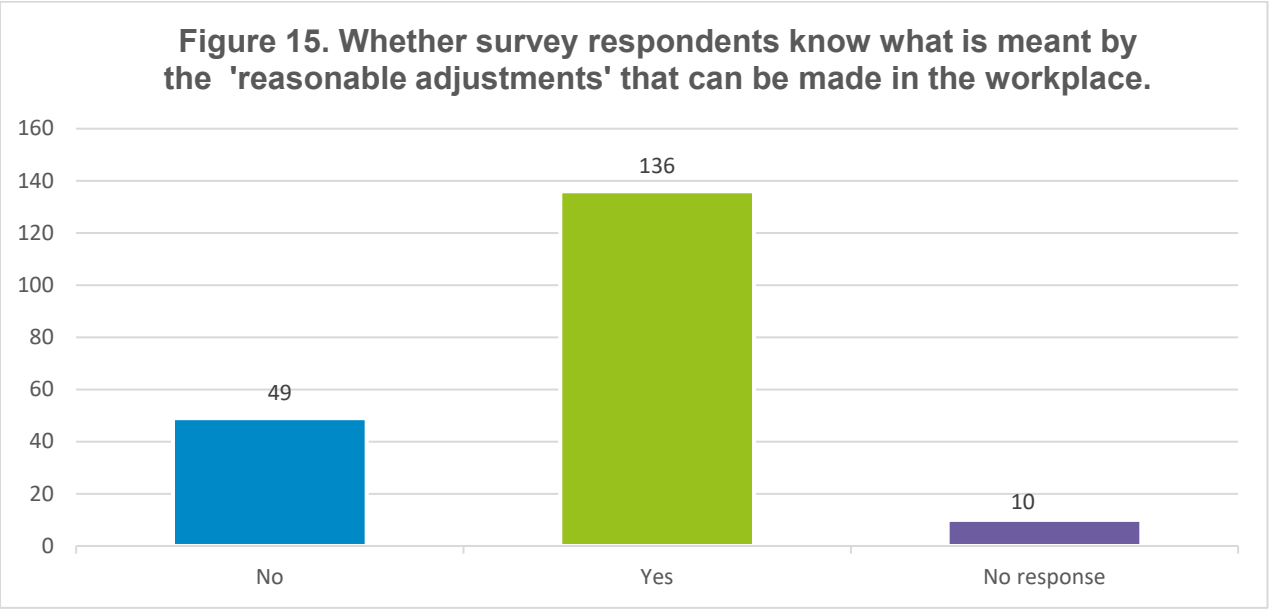


Figure 15 displays a good overall level of understanding of the term reasonable adjustments in the context of the workplace. 70% understand and 25% do not (5% didn’t say). Although a positive overall result, this does mean that 49 individuals among those surveyed are not aware of reasonable adjustments and so further awareness building may be required.



The next question included within the survey, and the final question on the theme of preparation for work, considered work opportunities that survey respondents would be interested in exploring. 63 people made comments and there were 67 separate themes within those comments. Table 3 displays a summary of the feedback. Working in the arts was the top theme within the comments followed by working in catering/hospitality and leisure and working in care. A significant number of respondents (21 comments) were not sure and didn't have any particular employment opportunities in mind. Some commented that they may need support to decide. Example comments are also used to better illustrate the comments made.

Table 3 Employment opportunities of interest to survey respondents

Theme	Count	%
Working with animals	5	7%
Working in catering / hospitality / leisure	7	10%
Working in care	6	9%
Working in the arts	11	16%
Working in education	4	6%
Working in agriculture / horticulture	1	1%
Working in business / administration	4	6%
Working in transport	3	4%
Continuing with education / apprenticeship / volunteering	5	7%
Other / unsure/ need more support	21	31%
Total	**67**	**100%**

Example comments – employment opportunities of interest

- *"Environment, learning disabilities, leisure & tourism, retail, broadcasting."*
- *"Anything with Animals, Craft/Art or Film media."*
- *"Media, television and radio."*
- *"Public facing or a driving job."*
- *"I want to work in a laboratory, or a care home. But not with lots of people."*
- *"Internships, full-time IT support related job."*
- *"Not sure what work I could do, but want to."*

- *“I had no choice other than go self-employed.”*
- *“As an experienced trainer I would like to deliver more training.”*
- *“I am a qualified teacher, I have worked, the work itself is not the issue, it’s the social expectations and misunderstandings of colleagues, and often bullying and ostracizing that is the issue not the work itself.”*
- *“Unsure what is available and what I can get into without needing a degree or work experience in that field already.”*
- *“Anything with a career development pathway, rather than being stuck in a rut.”*
- *“Reasonable adjustments, and advocate for this to help me put across my needs.”*
- *“I am fine at the moment as I had my dyslexia diagnosis in 2012 at the age of 40 and if I never had that I would not have known there was something wrong. I think more help is needed for adults who never gained the support at school as it was never a thing when I was growing up, So, more adult support and groups and training and help for us is needed.”*

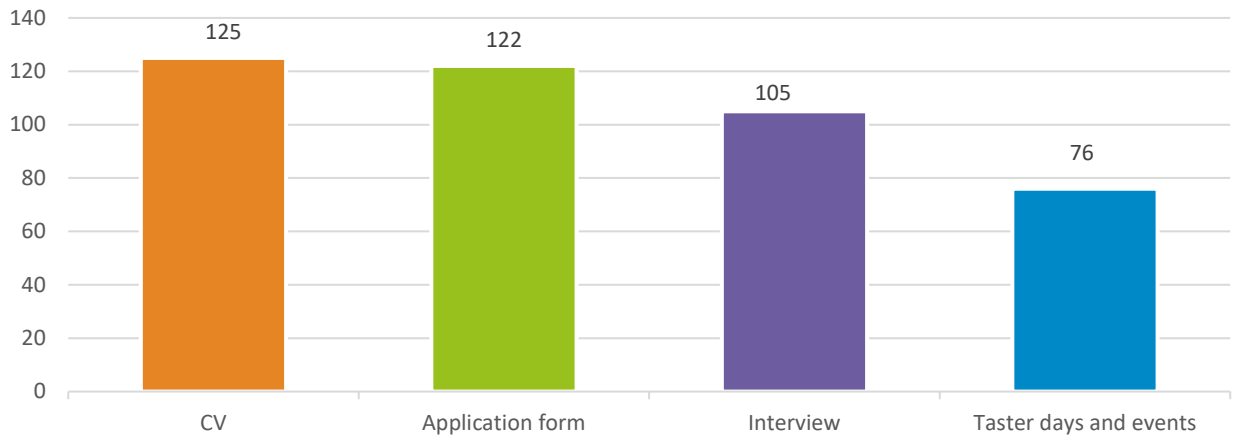
The feedback shows a very broad range of employment types are of interest to the survey respondents and the example comments help to illustrate that there are many different experiences. Some people who are already in employment refer to challenges, which may or may not be linked to their neurodiversity.

The next section of the report considers the process of applying for work and completing job applications. This section of the survey was used to explore experiences and views linked to the process of applying for jobs. It also helps indicate whether people with neurodiversity are successful through the job application process or report experiencing barriers.

4 Job Applications

The survey was used to find out more about how people with neurodiversity find the process of applying for work. All survey respondents were asked if they felt able to participate in writing a CV, completing application forms, interviews and taster days and events. The results were positive with most survey respondents feeling able to participate in CV development (64%) and application forms (63%). 54% feel able to participate in interviews and 39% in taster days and events. It should be noted that a proportion of respondents may not have selected some of these activities because they are not relevant for them (not all are seeking employment).

Figure 16. Job search activities survey respondents feel able to participate in



To find out more from people with neurodiversity all survey respondents were asked to give a view against the 7 statements below. These were included to determine if there are any particular barriers facing people when applying for work.

1. Job descriptions and person specifications are easy to understand
2. Job advertisements are easy to understand and avoid jargon
3. Duties of jobs tend to be clearly described
4. Employers clearly indicate that they welcome applications from ND individuals
5. There should be space to indicate you are ND in applications
6. There should be space to describe any disabilities or challenges at work
7. Employers use alternative communication tools if required (for example Makaton)

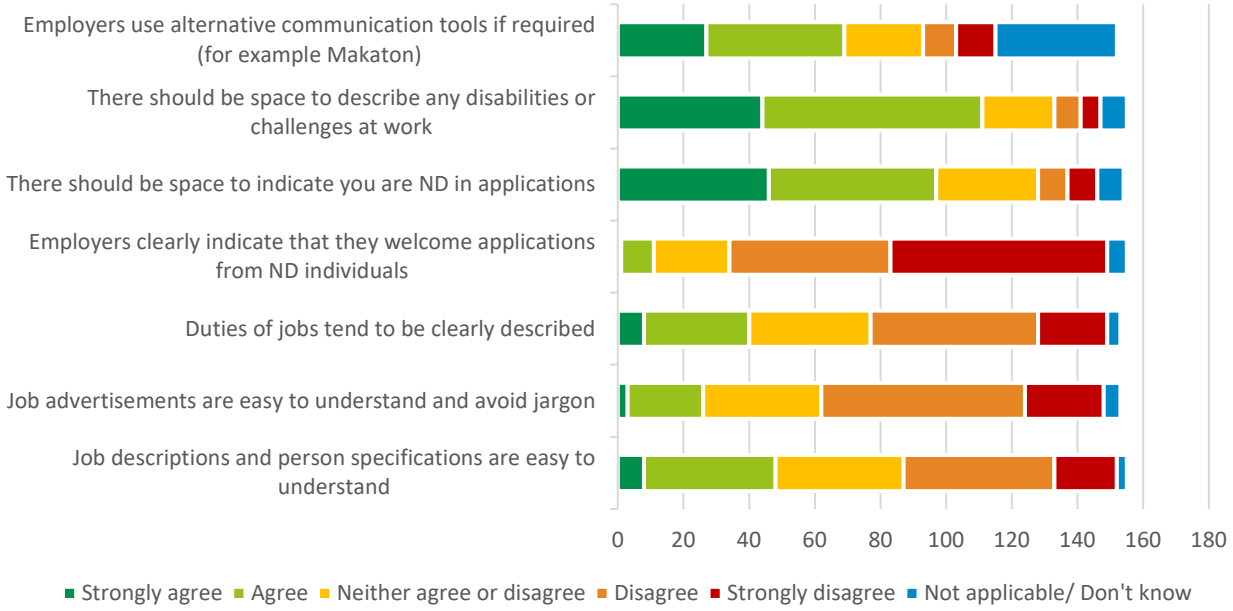
Figure 17 presents the responses received from survey respondents. The feedback shows most people agree or strongly agree with statements 5, 6 and 7 (there should be space to disclose ND in applications and to describe challenges at work and employers should use alternative communication tools if required).

The results are mixed for statement 1, suggesting that some people find job descriptions and person specifications easy to understand and others do not (48 understand and 65 do not).

An overwhelming majority disagree that employers clearly welcome applications from people with neurodiversity. More people disagree or strongly disagree with

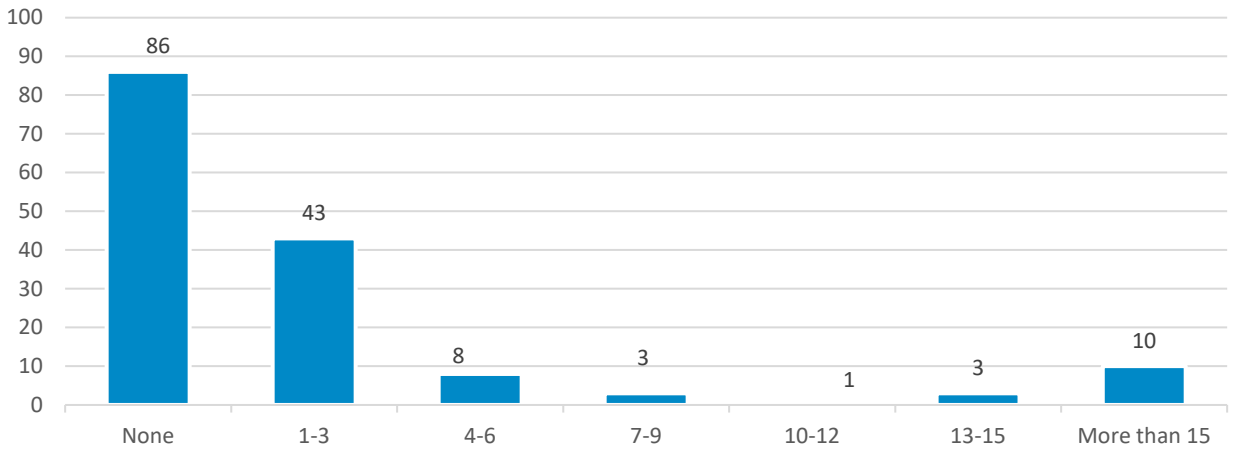
statements 2 and 3 (that job advertisements are easy to understand and avoid jargon and duties are clearly described).

Figure 17. Views on the job application process



The last question within this section aimed to find out how many jobs survey respondents had applied for in the last 12 months. The feedback is shown in Figure 18. The response shows that 86 respondents (44%) have not applied for any jobs (in addition 41% didn't respond to the question (21 respondents). Of those who have searched for jobs and made applications, most have applied for between 1 and 3 jobs (43 people). 10 respondents have applied for more than 15 jobs, perhaps suggesting that the process has been challenging for them.

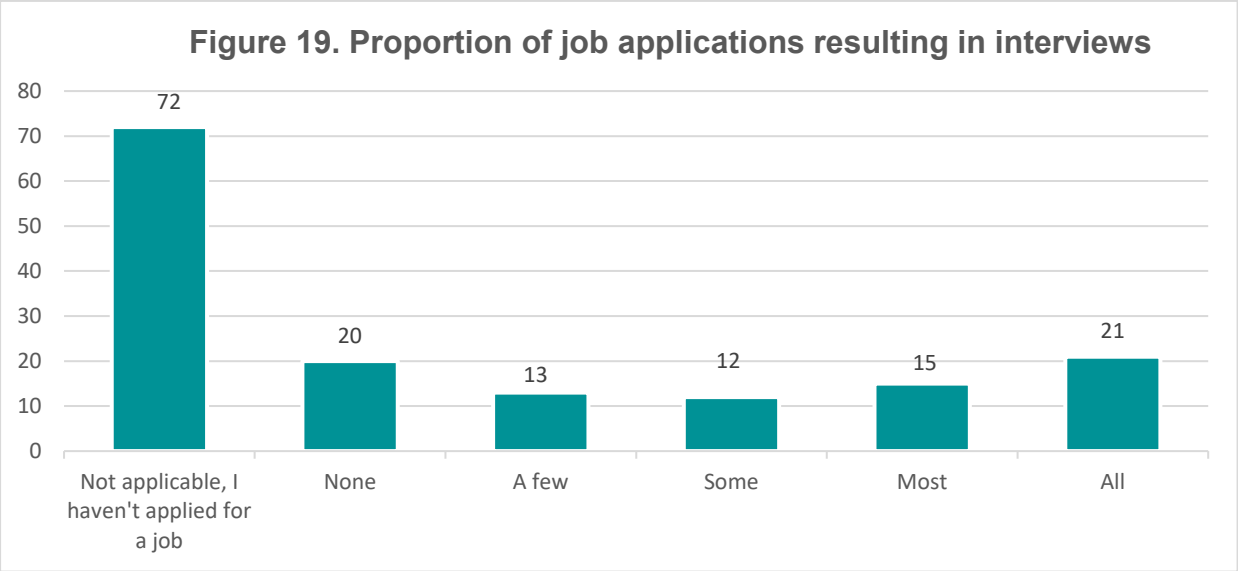
Figure 18. Number of jobs applied for by survey respondents



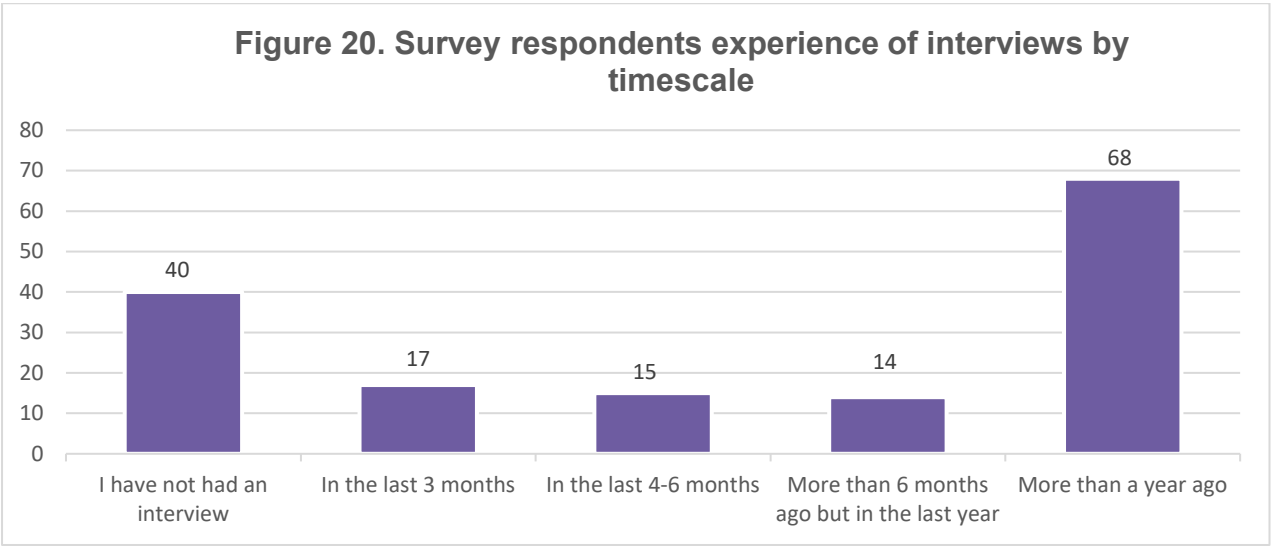
The next section of the report considered interviews and how survey respondents have found that stage of the employment process.

5 Job Interviews

The feedback obtained through the survey indicates mixed experience of the job application process, so it is helpful to understand how this links to access to interviews. A question was included within the survey which read 'How many of your job applications resulted in an interview?' Although this wasn't applicable for 72 of the 195 respondents (37% and an additional 42, 22% skipped the question), there was feedback from 81 people. The 81 who had applied for jobs had mixed results. 20 had not had an interview following applications, 25 had had a few or some interviews and 36 had had interviews from most or all of their applications.



The next question considered the timescales for this and how many survey respondents have had recent experience of interviews. Figure 20 shows that 68 of the 114 who have had interviews have not had an interview within the last 12 months (46 people have). Of the 46, 17 have very recent interview experience within the last 3 months, 15 between 4 and 6 months ago and 14 have had an interview within the last 6-12 months. This provides a good sample to suggest that responses are not based on historic experience but include a range of recent experiences.



To understand more about experience of interviews respondents were asked a series of questions about those interviews:

- Have you been provided with interview questions ahead of an interview?
- Have you been given a choice of interview format (e.g. in person, online)?
- For in-person interviews, were you given information about the set-up of the interview room and other details e.g. photographs?
- Have quiet waiting areas been provided to sit while waiting to be called into an interview?
- Have you felt comfortable discussing your ND or workplace needs in an interview?

Figure 21 shows that most people are not given questions in advance of an interview. Only 12 of the survey respondents have had interview questions in advance, 10 of those sometimes and only 2 always.

Figure 21. Whether survey respondents have had interview questions in advance of an interview

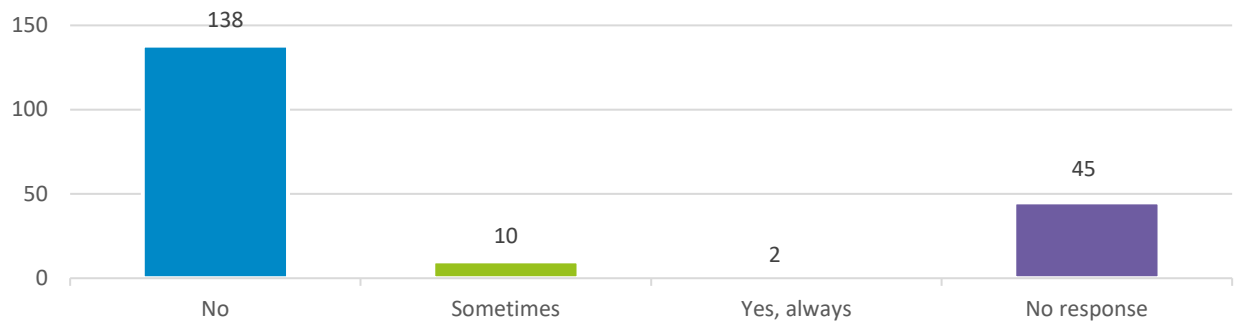
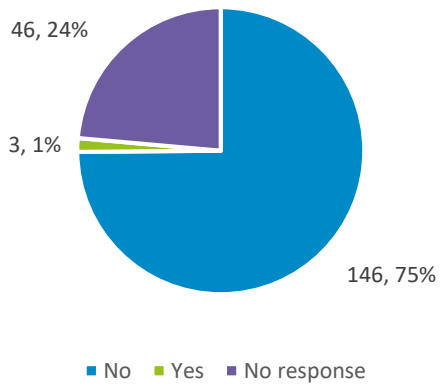


Figure 22 shows that only 3 of the survey respondents have been given a choice of interview format, suggesting it is not common practice to ask those chosen for interview for their preferences in advance.

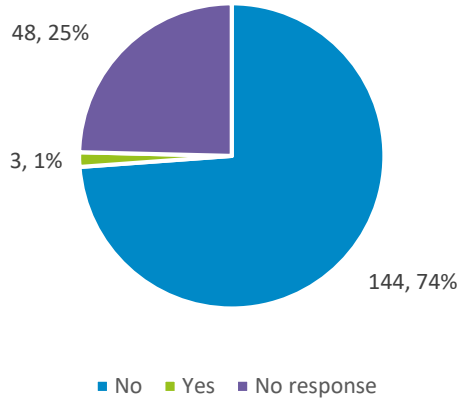
Figure 22. Whether survey respondents have had a choice of interview format (e.g. in person or online)



The results for the next question were very similar (almost identical) with only 3 survey respondents having been given information about an interview room set-up in advance of

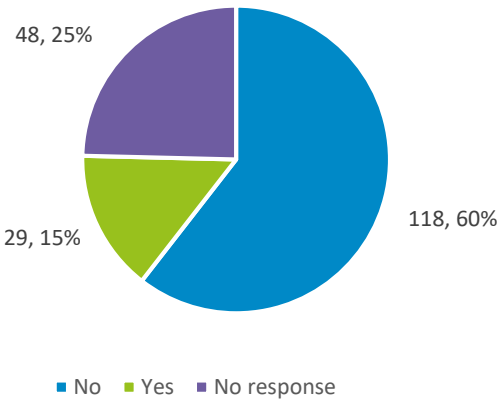
being interviewed (see Figure 23).

Figure 23. Whether survey respondents have been made aware of interview room set up for in-person interviews

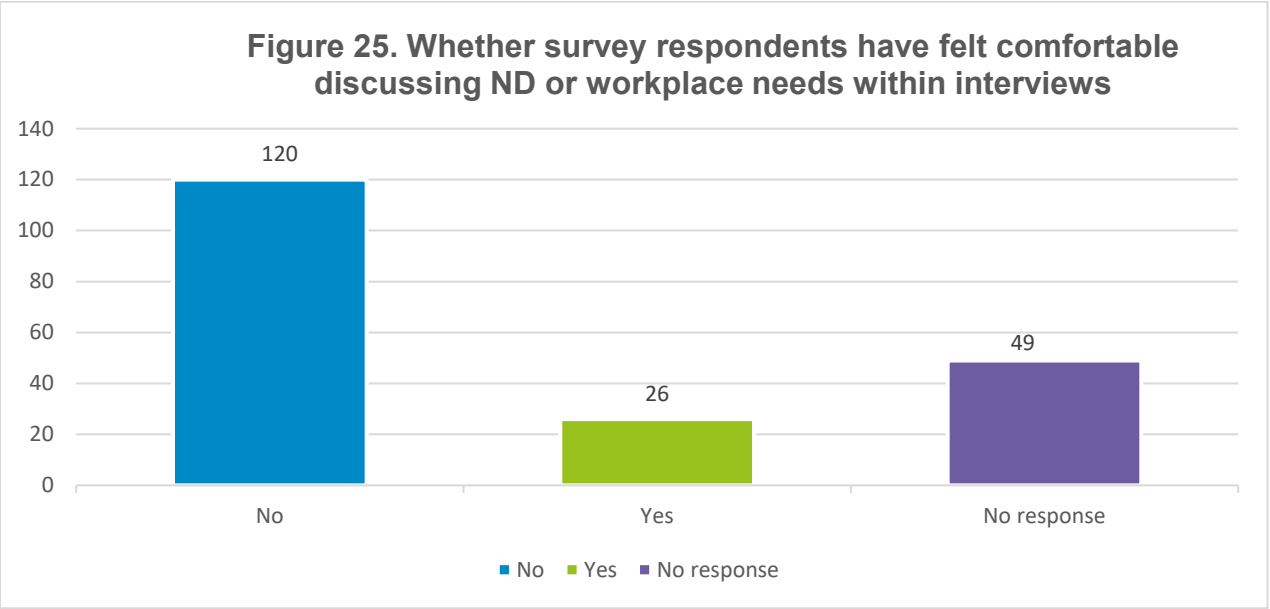


The survey results show that although provision of questions in advance of an interview, choice of format, and provision of information about interview rooms are not common practice, more people are provided with a quiet waiting area to sit while waiting to be called into an interview. 29 of the survey respondents have had a quiet waiting area to sit while 118 report that they have not (it is possible that a proportion of these were not those with recent interview experience).

Figure 24. Whether survey respondents have been provided with quiet waiting areas to sit while waiting to be called into an interview



The last question within this section of the survey was important and asked respondents if they have felt comfortable discussing their ND or workplace needs within an interview. Only 26 people have discussed their ND or any needs and this could be responsible for few reasonable adjustments being made at interview and the results of previous questions. A large proportion of the survey respondents 120 (62%) have not felt comfortable discussing their neurodiversity or any workplace needs when they have spoken to those interviewing them as part of the job application and employment process. The feedback is shown in Figure 25.



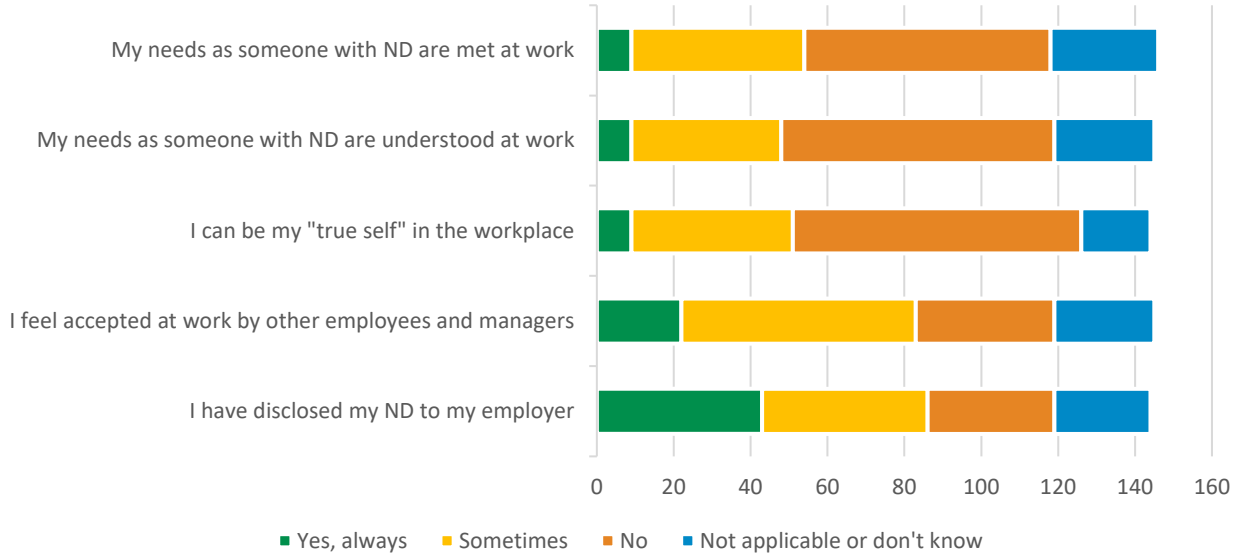
Whether people disclose their neurodiversity or neurodivergence is an important issue and critical to many of the other results within the research. Low levels of communication will lead to limited reasonable adjustments being made because employers will not be aware of the need to make adaptions to the way they recruit new employees. This issue is picked up again within the next section of the report which turns to look at the next stage of the process: when people have been employed and are in work. The next section of the report, 'Being in Work' considers views and experiences linked to survey respondent's experience of the workplace, awareness of their ND, the actions taken by employers, and the comments and suggestions obtained through the research.

6 Being in Work

The section of the survey related to being in work was responded to by approximately 145 of the 195 survey respondents although the responses suggest that 76 of the survey respondents are not in work or don't have experience of work. Figure 26 below highlights the responses to 5 statements designed to learn more about experiences of people with ND in the workplace. The statements were:

- I have disclosed my ND to my employer
- I feel accepted at work by other employees and managers
- I can be my "true self" in the workplace
- My needs as someone with ND are understood at work
- My needs as someone with ND are met at work

Figure 26. Views on ND and being in employment



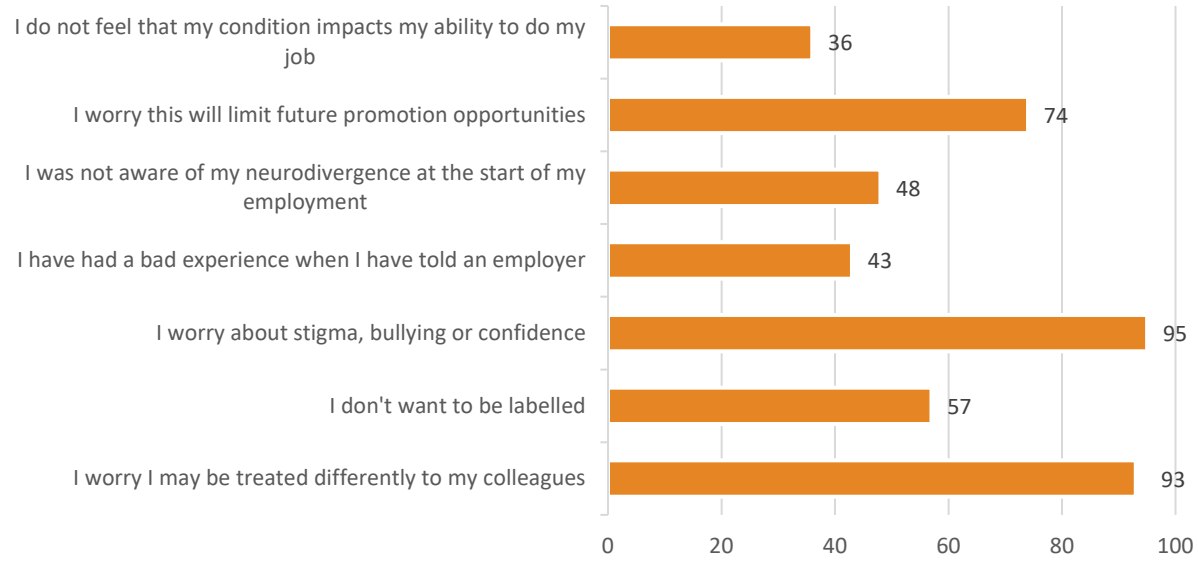
86 of the survey respondents have always or sometimes disclosed their ND to employers, whilst 33 have not (the question was not applicable to many respondents). 83 people feel as though they have been always or sometimes accepted at work by other employees and managers, whilst 36 do not. Looking at the data there is a very strong correlation between these answers. Those who disclose their ND feel accepted and those who haven't disclosed do not. Only 11 of those who have disclosed always or sometimes don't feel accepted. 75 of the 86 respondents in work do not feel that they can be their "true self" in the workplace. This is a shame, but it would be interesting to compare this result to a broader workplace survey. Is it common for people to feel they must adopt a workplace presentation of themselves that does not reflect their full or true nature? For comparison, Personnel Today report that 41% of people felt they could "bring their whole self to work" in 2024 (a drop from 66% in 2020). A similar survey by Hays in 2023 found that 37% if people hide aspects of themselves at work due to fear of judgement.

Only 9 survey respondents feel that their needs, as someone with ND, are met at

work and the same number feel their needs are understood. A further 39 survey respondents feel their needs are sometimes met and 45 believe their needs are sometimes understood. More people (on average 68 people or 35% of all survey respondents) don't feel their needs are understood or met.

To explore experience of ND within the workplace survey respondents were asked how they feel about their ND in relation to work and workplace relationships. Figure 27 displays the response. Very high numbers of survey respondents worry about stigma, bullying or confidence (95) and that they may be treated differently to other colleagues (93). 36 are confident that their ND doesn't impact their ability to do their job. Sadly 43 of the survey respondents have had a bad experience when they have disclosed ND to an employer, and 74 believe that their ND could limit future promotion opportunities. An open comment box was included for any other concerns and 16 people added a comment. All comments are shown below.

Figure 27. Survey respondents' views



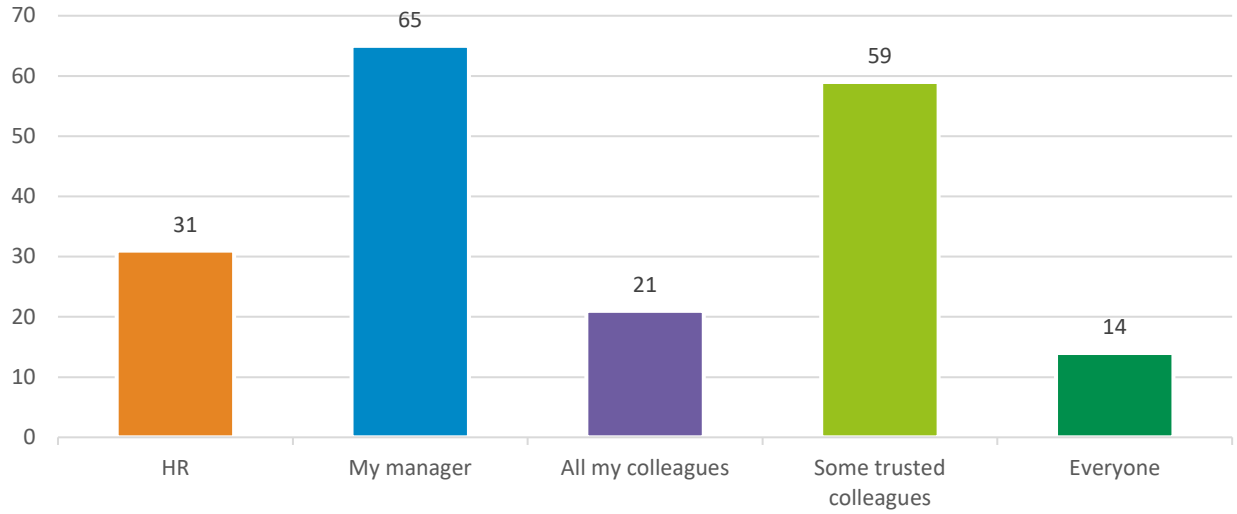
Comments – ND and workplace relationships

- *"I actively sought a role at Shropshire Council knowing that they were a Disability Confident Leader before I moved to this county. I have held several roles at SC and have moved up levels/grades with each new role, however, I am struggling more and more with sensory overwhelm after I've finished a day's work…."*
- *"I am isolated at work by my diagnosis."*
- *"I am treated differently, and it has affected my confidence."*
- *"Don't feel I'd could cope with working without ongoing support."*
- *"I don't want to be treated differently because of it, although it would be helpful for employers to know to be aware of why I may respond / communicate / act in certain ways."*
- *"I feel pigeon-holed into jobs which do not reflect my interests or capabilities. This leads to not being able to do the job properly."*
- *"I have experienced assumptions from other people about what autism is, and how it affects me, which means it's hard to change people's opinions of what autism is, which means I have given up in a lot of areas."*
- *"I need patience and understanding."*

- *“I would never get promotion or managerial responsibilities as I cannot read people.”*
- *“In previous jobs I was not yet aware of why I felt different. But my differences certainly caused frictions. I am now self-employed, and this suits me very well.”*
- *“It largely depends on the employer and workplace culture - it's important to understand that just because an employer cannot treat you in a derogatory way due to your neurodivergence, doesn't mean than they won't.”*
- *“My condition affects my ability to travel outside my comfort zone.”*
- *“My needs change depending on my level of anxiety.”*
- *“Previously been treated poorly due to a lack of experience dealing with ND on a supervisor's part and stereotyped by said supervisor and employees on a different work experience placement to current placement.*
- *“My employer is not interested in anything to do with my autism.”*
- *“There is a lack of understanding of the benefits of ND. It is a difference that needs accommodating not a disability, in many roles it is a superpower, but most systems and application processes are set up against it. Many roles would be better employing "geeks and odd balls" as the best person for the job instead of those most likely to mirror the person interviewing them. It is about getting the job done not fitting in, and employers should bend more to accommodate people who are effective at the job albeit not always the most likeable or personable personality.”*

The comments are helpful in understanding how people feel about their ND and workplace relationships and the concerns and challenges that it brings. To find out more survey respondents were asked ‘Who knows about your neurodiversity?’ Figure 28 shows that a large proportion of survey respondents in work have told their manager about their ND (65) and 59 have told some trusted colleagues. Much smaller numbers have spoken to HR, a wider group of colleagues/all colleagues or ‘everyone’. Only 14 people have told everyone.

Figure 28. Who, in the workplace, survey respondents have told about their ND



The next question read ‘If you have not been able to disclose your ND at work, please explain why (for example, did you want to disclose but didn't feel able to?)’ There were 46 comments made and 57 mentions of key themes within those comments. The summary is shown in Table 4 below. The most common concern was a feeling that the employer would not be supportive or make reasonable adjustments followed by not wanting to be bullied or discriminated against. A significant proportion of the comments also relate to

not wanting to be treated any differently to other employees/colleagues as a result of disclosing ND. Example comments are also shown to better illustrate the concerns highlighted.

Table 4 Disclosure of ND at work

Theme	Count	%
Don't want to be labelled / treated differently to peers	11	19%
Embarrassed / don't want others to know of my diagnosis	9	16%
Don't want to be discriminated against / bullied	12	21%
Don't feel employer will be supportive / make reasonable adjustments	13	23%
Awaiting a formal diagnosis / self-diagnosed	9	16%
Other	3	5%
Total	**57**	**100%**

Example comments – Disclosure of ND at work

- *"Embarrassed, don't like people to know."*
- *"I have tried speaking in the past about it; they don't understand."*
- *"Worried about stigma attached and also being treated differently or worse, not being taken seriously."*
- *"Often judged because of disclosure."*
- *"I thought it would go against me. A reason to not hire me or blame it for difficulties when it may be other human error."*
- *"Didn't want other employees looking or labelling me as difficult or different. I have had bad experience from home and at school with my condition."*
- *"When disclosed no interviews are offered. When not disclosed I get interviews. If disclosed during employment sympathetic initially, no amendments to accommodate, or knowledge and understanding of ND at all."*
- *"Told previous manager, new one not very PC whatsoever."*
- *"Not accepted in the legal profession despite autistic people making excellent lawyers."*
- *"When I did, I was, either deliberately or ignorantly misunderstood, ostracized, bullied, and ultimately pushed out or actively made redundant due to people not being prepared to listen / adjust / see things from another perspective."*
- *"I didn't feel comfortable sharing as I feel it will impact my job prospects."*
- *"I have disclosed to two employers about my ND; however, one had no idea how to treat myself, and more or less worked off stereotypes, whilst the other made through enable disclosed this clearly, and was a great placement."*
- *"I am only self-diagnosed at the moment and haven't had a formal diagnosis, so I'd feel silly informing without a definitive diagnosis. I've also got so far already without needing to tell them so again would feel silly doing it."*
- *"I've been triaged and awaiting assessment - though I strongly suspect I will get a diagnosis, I wouldn't disclose until that point. Unfortunately waiting times are measures in years rather than months."*
- *"Self-diagnosed, fear of ramifications."*
- *"Never diagnosed, but most people can tell pretty quickly."*

The comments highlight the challenges faced and some describe experiences that have not been positive. Some of the comments highlight additional concerns when people are self-diagnosed rather than have a formal diagnosis.

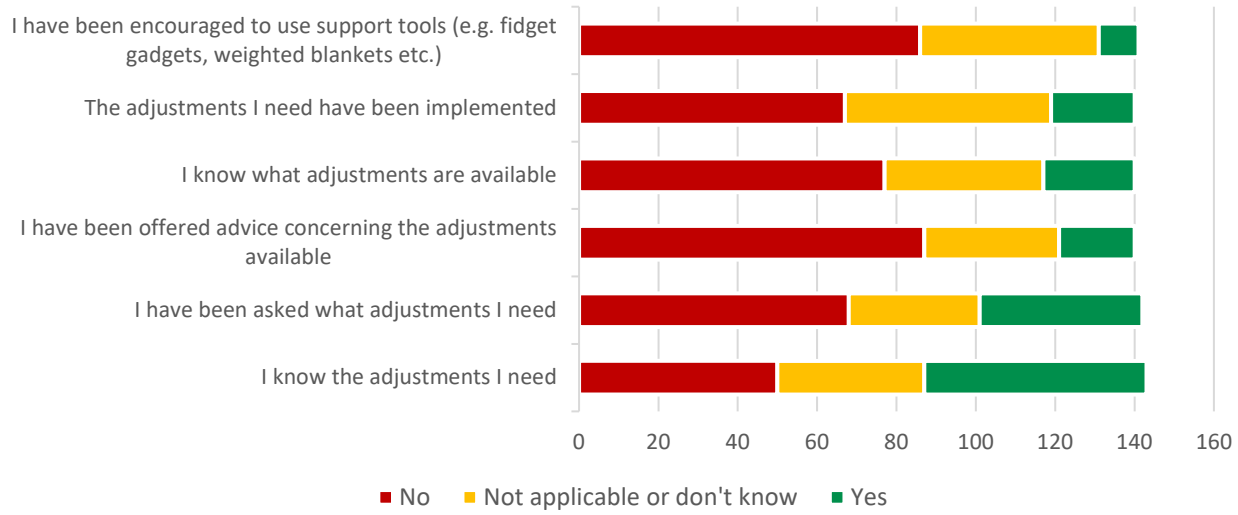
The next question within the survey was used to take a closer look at the issue of reasonable adjustments in the workplace. Survey respondents were asked about the use

of reasonable adjustments from a variety of perspectives. 6 statements were used, and respondents asked to indicate whether this was true in their experience ('yes'), not applicable or false ('no'):

- I know the adjustments I need
- I have been asked what adjustments I need
- I have been offered advice concerning the adjustments available
- I know what adjustments are available
- The adjustments I need have been implemented
- I have been encouraged to use support tools (e.g. fidget gadgets, weighted blankets etc.)

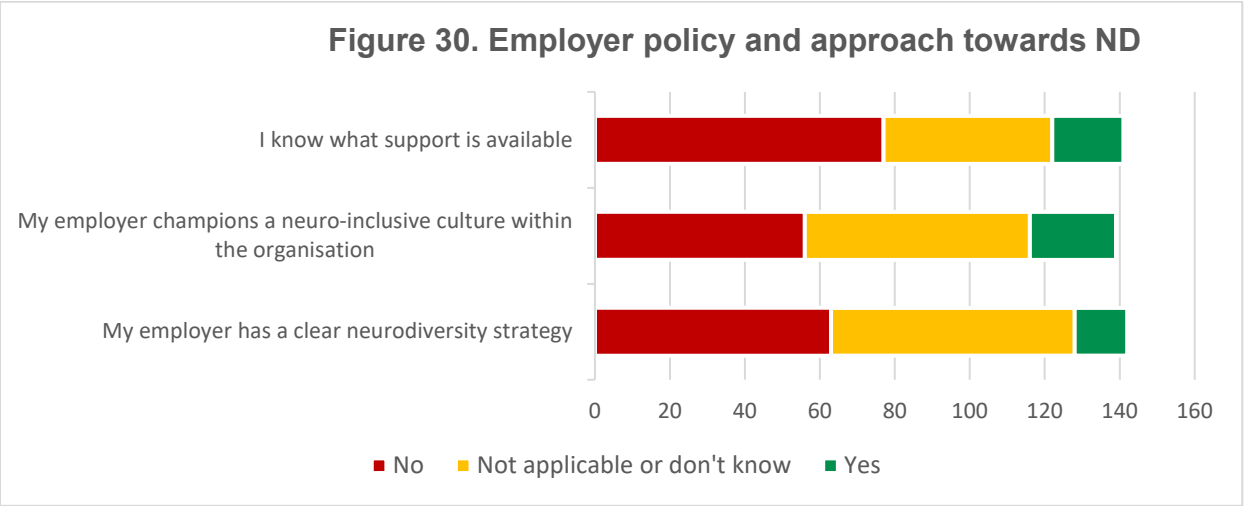
On average 55 survey respondents didn't respond to the question but more selected don't know or not applicable (on average a further 40 respondents). The results are shown in Figure 29.

Figure 29. Views on adjustments at work



The feedback highlights that 56 respondents (29%) know what adjustments they need compared to 50 (26% of all respondents) who don't. 41 of the survey respondents have been asked which adjustments they need at work (68 haven't). There is more of a slant towards a lack of action to put reasonable adjustments in place compared to small numbers who have been encouraged to adopt adjustments or offered advice and support. Only 10 of the survey respondents have been encouraged to use support tools and only 19 of the survey respondents have been offered advice on available adjustments. Slightly more have had adjustment implemented (21) or know what is available (23). Overall, the feedback suggests that employers have more to do before there is a more standard or robust offer of reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

The survey also explored employer policy around ND within the workplace. The feedback obtained is displayed within Figure 30. The results highlight that 14 respondents have an employer with a clear neurodiversity strategy, 19 know what support is available and 23 have an employer that champions a neuro-inclusive culture within the organisation. On average 65 respondents reported that none of these things are in place (a significant proportion didn't know).



The survey concluded with an open comment question encouraging feedback on employment experience to help inform Shropshire Council's All Age Autism Strategy. There were 47 comments in total covering a wide range of themes, many comments covered more than one main theme. The feedback has been read and categorized below in Table 5. Table 5 shows that the theme most commonly referred to was the importance of understanding neurodiversity and many people suggested that additional training is required to increase understanding (28%). The second top theme was linked to comments describing negative experiences with employers (20%). A significant proportion (19%) described a need for improved support for individuals with ND within the workplace. The example comments better help to illustrate these results.

Table 5 Comments to inform the All Age Autism Strategy

Theme	Count	%
Negative experiences with employers	15	20%
Importance in understanding Neurodiversity and additional training	21	28%
Lack of practical implementation of policies by employers	4	5%
Need for reasonable adjustments for ND employees	9	12%
Being treated differently / disadvantaged / bullying	10	13%
Improved support for ND individuals in the workplace	14	19%
Other	2	3%
Total	**75**	**100%**

Example comments - Comment to inform the All Age Autism Strategy

- *"A good manager who understands and doesn't stereotype makes all the difference. I talk about my autism and ADHD regularly in an attempt to normalise neurodiversity. I haven't always been in such a good situation that I am now."*
- *"Although my employer has a strategy/policy in place, there is no evidence that of it in practice and so it is just a piece of paper. If I disclose my ND, they will require me to explain everything to them and explain what adjustments I need exactly. I do not feel prepared enough on my own to discuss this with them, and I doubt I will get much help anyway. I am also scared of being bullied, as this has happened in the past and my previous manager made me feel completely worthless. I think it is better not to share anything personal at work."*
- *"Being in employment was very difficult for me. There was a lot of pressure to be social and that took energy I didn't have. People would also assume sometimes I wasn't capable, and I was. Bullying was a big thing. It knocked my confidence hugely."*

- *"Businesses do not want the expense in accommodating, nor support any adjustments that may impact productivity in a way that is deemed a "normal routine" to other staff. It's an inconvenience and annoyance to have to accommodate the most basic of requests. Even when a manager has training and is to follow company policy and HR advice, on the ground level it is not accommodating, cared about or even tolerated. I have been treated with contempt, disrespect and intolerance on such a scale I became extremely unwell, driving me to experience suicidal ideation.…Explaining the accommodations and why they are needed would be helpful to integrate and prevent the misunderstanding of why they are required, that it's not special treatment. Perhaps even a work buddy to meet and greet at the door, befriend and support with any questions. A role that may only be required during the initial settling down period any new team member requires but with extra support until a ND person has settled and integrated into the new role and new team. Becoming a valued colleague."*
- *"Current systems have let down undiagnosed people with any kind of difference as adequate facilities for identifying and diagnosing true autism are not in place. This leads to extreme psychological distress as the person does not fit the current parameters and becomes mentally burnt out from masking."*
- *Employers do not want someone who cannot move between tasks. There should be more opportunities for neurodiverse people to volunteer or for employers to try before you buy so both parties can see if they are suited.*
- *"I had a pre-assessment for autism and ADHD privately. I told my manager it was very likely I would be diagnosed with both. I asked if there could be any reasonable adjustments if I had a diagnosis and she said "the job's the job". I didn't bother pursuing my diagnosis."*
- *"I have given my employer my reasonable adjustments, but they don't seem to want to put the help in place, only things. So, they are buying me items, but simple things like having time off the phone has not been implemented."*
- *"My employer claims to be neuro inclusive but they are a million miles away from it. It's all for show to the public and has no substance as an employee with autism."*
- *"Luckily, I had my diagnosis while working with my employer, but I feel they would never have hired me knowing I was autistic. I have had severe bullying at work due to being different and no help with this. I have always felt left out and on my own. I don't even bother to ask for help because I'm put down constantly by being told I'm awkward or being a pain, so I try to just get on with my job. I've never been offered any reasonable adjustments. I feel very alone and bullying towards me has actively been encouraged in the workplace."*
- *"I think more needs to be put out about it what support is in place in the workplaces for neurodiverse people and how it can be beneficial to tell your employer. Maybe to have some tips about how to communicate with your employer about being neurodiverse as it can be hard to bring this up."*
- *"I would like there to be greater support for people on the autism spectrum get support for both self-employment and job opportunities. I would like to see all business in the area whether they are local or a national company to undertake training to understand autism better. Half the problem is that most business have no clue when it comes to understanding disability or autism. It all very well the government wanting autistic and disabled people to get into work, but it will not change until you address the ignorance around autism and disabilities.*
- *"More awareness how autism impacts people in work and how to best support them." Especially awareness regarding autistic people that can speak sometimes but not always due to tiredness, overwhelm, etc. and help with giving them options to communicate this with their employer or be able to use Makaton or sign language at work. Opportunities to learn Makaton or sign language for autistic adults. I cannot find anything anywhere, its only for people supporting autistic people and super expensive? It should be free or at least reasonable for autistic people, even if they learn it as adults. Also, more awareness about autistic adults in general for employers, like Autism is not a learning disability, spiky profile and how to work best with an autistic employee."*

The last section of this report summarizes the feedback received through the survey highlighting key findings and next steps.

7 Summary and Conclusion

Shropshire Council's Neurodiversity Employment Survey was conducted from March 3 to May 2, 2025, targeting individuals who identify as neurodiverse, either through diagnosis or self-identification. The survey aimed to gather insights on employment experiences, including recruitment practices, workplace support, and preparation for work. It was promoted through various channels, including the Shropshire Council website, newsroom, surveys mailing list and local networks. The survey was accessible in different formats to accommodate diverse communication needs.

A total of 195 individuals participated in the survey, with 97% identifying as neurodiverse. Among those, 72% had a formal diagnosis of neurodiversity, while 26% were self-diagnosed. The majority of respondents identified as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), followed by ADHD, dyslexia, and sensory processing difficulties. The gender breakdown showed 33% male and 62% female respondents, with a diverse age range represented. The survey respondents live across Shropshire but there were far more from the Shrewsbury area than from other parts of the county (111 of the 195).

The survey also assessed the education and employment status of respondents, revealing that 52% were employed, while others were students, self-employed, or unemployed. Only 16 respondents were receiving support from employment services.

Preparation for Work
When asked about their readiness for employment, 55% of respondents felt prepared, while 39% did not. This lack of preparation was noted across various age groups and employment statuses. Considering employment status shows 16 full time students don't feel ready for work, 15 unemployed respondents are not ready for work and 14 people who are already employed don't feel prepared for work. There were smaller numbers spread across the other categories. The additional analysis suggests there isn't a clear pattern linked to gender, age or employment but educational achievement is a factor (those educated to degree level or above are more likely to feel prepared for work).

All survey respondents were asked whether they have an EHCP or have been statemented. A large proportion answered 'no' (74%). The survey results show that the older survey respondents were much less likely to have been statemented/have an ECHP or equivalent support. A significant proportion of the survey respondents are already in work. When asked about work experience, a significant proportion of the survey sample do have work experience with only 20 people answering 'no' (10%). Additionally, 70% of respondents understood the concept of reasonable adjustments, but 49 individuals were unaware of it, indicating a need for greater awareness.

Job Applications
The survey explored the application process, revealing that 64% felt capable of writing a CV and 63% completing application forms, though only 39% felt comfortable participating in taster days. Feedback indicated significant barriers in understanding job descriptions and advertisements, with many respondents expressing that employers often do not clearly welcome applications from neurodiverse individuals. Of those who have searched for jobs and made applications, most have applied for between 1 and 3 jobs (43 people). 10 respondents have applied for more than 15 jobs, perhaps suggesting that the process has been challenging for them.

Job Interviews
Feedback on job interviews showed mixed experiences, with only 36 respondents having interviews for most or all their applications. Many reported not receiving interview questions in advance or being offered a choice of interview formats. A significant number of respondents felt uncomfortable discussing their neurodiversity during interviews (only 26 of the survey respondents had discussed their needs), which may hinder the implementation of reasonable adjustments.

Being in Work
Approximately 145 respondents provided feedback on their workplace experiences. While 86 reported disclosing their neurodiversity always or sometimes, only 9 felt their needs were met at work. 75 of the 86 respondents in work do not feel that they can be their "true self" in the workplace. A large number expressed concerns about stigma and bullying, with many indicating that their neurodiversity negatively impacted their workplace relationships and opportunities for promotion. Despite this, a proportion of survey respondents in work have told their manager about their ND (65) and 59 have told some trusted colleagues. Much smaller numbers have spoken to HR, a wider group of colleagues/all colleagues or ‘everyone’. Only 14 people have told everyone.

56 respondents (29%) know what adjustments they need compared to 50 (26% of all respondents) who don’t. 41 of the survey respondents have been asked which adjustments they need at work (68 haven’t). There is more of a slant towards a lack of action to put reasonable adjustments in place compared to small numbers who have been encouraged to adopt adjustments or offered advice and support.

Conclusion
The findings from the survey suggest there is a significant need for improved understanding and support for neurodiverse individuals within the workplace. Key themes identified include the necessity for additional training for employers, better implementation of policies, and the provision of reasonable adjustments to enhance the employment experience for neurodiverse individuals. A significant issue highlighted within the comments made is that many individuals don’t feel able to disclose their neurodiversity as a result of previous experiences or understand the reasonable adjustments they may request/ actions available. This creates the challenge that employers are not aware of needs and are therefore unable to respond.

The feedback collected will be critical in shaping future strategies and support mechanisms for neurodiversity in Shropshire, including the further development and implementation of the All Age Autism Strategy. The research findings will be considered by Shropshire Council and its partner organisations working to design and deliver improvements in workplace support for neurodiversity.

May 2025

Analysis and reporting by:
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Shropshire Council Lead Department:
Commissioning

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Shropshire Council

APPENDIX 1

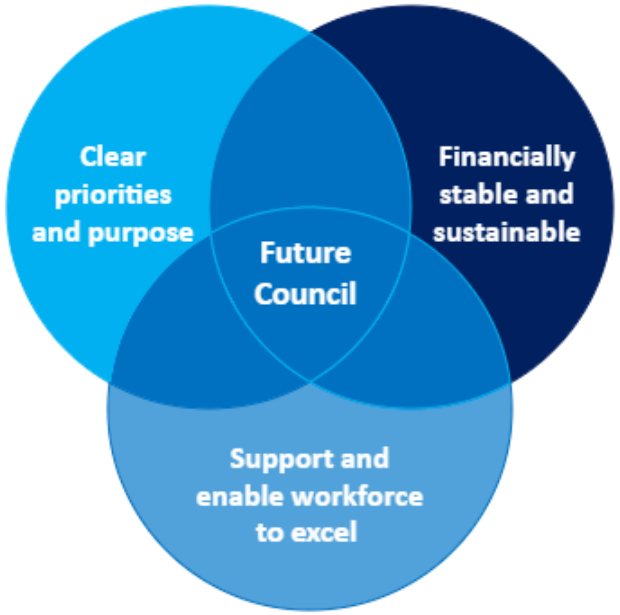
Draft for consideration by Cabinet 03/12/25

Improvement Plan

Our Plan to become a financially sustainable council with clear priorities and a high performing workforce for the benefit of Shropshire and its residents

November 2025

Draft



Foreword from the Leader and Interim Chief Executive

The Council needs to improve. And we need to demonstrate to our residents, partners, and the Government that we are doing so with urgency.

To deliver, enable and influence for the county, the Council needs to quickly get better at managing its finances, be clearer on its priorities, and continue to support our workforce to excel. This Plan sets out how we will do that.

It shows our commitment to address immediate challenges, while ensuring a focus on the future and how the Council will need to look, feel, and operate to best serve the needs of the county and its residents, and being aware of changes in national policy.

We have a serious financial position to address. There is an immediate focus on that. But improvement is not just about fixing problems; it is about creating opportunities. Through this Plan, we will also strengthen our culture, invest in our people, and embed practices that drive continuous improvement. In doing so we will be better equipped to deliver our commitments to residents.

Our ambition is to be a council that is modern, efficient and sustainable —one that operates effectively, works in partnership, stays focused on residents, and is clear on its role and purpose. This Plan provides the framework for achieving that ambition. It outlines the priorities we will focus on, the changes we need to make, and the governance and assurance arrangements that will keep us on track.

We will measure progress transparently, manage risks proactively, and ensure resources are aligned to deliver the outcomes our communities need and expect. An Improvement Board, supported by the Local Government Association (LGA), will provide expert peer challenge and support, while holding us to account for delivery of the Plan.

Delivering the Plan will be a collective effort. Success will depend on collaboration across teams and with partners, strong leadership, and a shared determination to make a positive difference. Together we will build a council that is not only better than today but ready for the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow.

Sitting alongside a new Corporate Plan 2026-30, Shropshire 2050 Plan, and Medium-Term Financial Strategy, it forms part of our overall Shropshire Plan that sets out the strategic priorities and purpose of the Council, and the improvement and resources needed to achieve those.

Councillor Heather Kidd
Leader of Shropshire Council

Tanya Miles
Interim Chief Executive, Shropshire Council

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2. Our Future Council	This section summarises how the Council continues to change how it looks, feels and operates, so that improvement is focused on the future council and context as well as responding to current challenges and issues.	9
3. Our Improvement Aims and Priorities	This section sets out our overall aims and priorities for improvement, and the outcomes and benefits we are looking to achieve. It provides the structure used to organise our improvement activities, governance and reporting.	13
Making sure we deliver: Governance & Assurance Enabling & Supporting Engagement and Communications	This section provides a summary of the arrangements that provide assurance we are delivering the Plan. It sets out how the Council will support the delivery of the Plan and summarises the engagement and communications that has helped to shape the Plan's development and delivery.	19
Appendix 1: **Improvement activity – priority programme summaries**	Provides a summary of the key activity for each of the improvement priorities including key milestones and the accountable and responsible officers.	24
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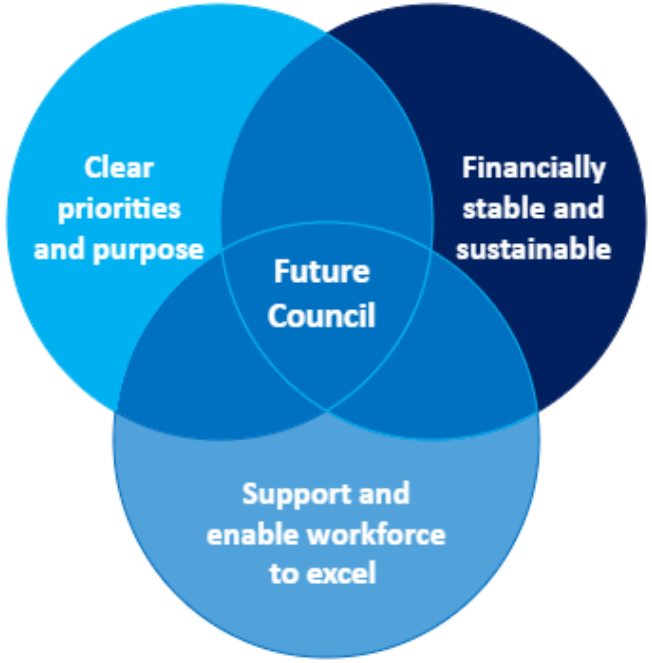
Shropshire Council

Section 1

Introduction



Purpose of this Plan

This Improvement Plan sets out how Shropshire Council will improve. Its' aim is to equip the Council to be a 'best value' authority that delivers, enables, and influences for Shropshire and its residents by:

- **Being financially stable and sustainable**
- **Having clear priorities and purpose**
- **Supporting and enabling our workforce to excel**

The Plan is not a detailed delivery plan. It is a document that provides an overarching framework for our improvement activity. It sets out the aims and priorities that will address the immediate challenges we face, while we work towards longer term change.

Delivering the priorities in the Improvement Plan will provide assurance to residents, councillors, officers, and partners that we are improving how we operate and perform so that we deliver, enable, and influence outcomes for the county and its residents in the most effective, efficient and economical way.

The priority programmes of action referred to in the Plan, provide the basis for our improvement over the next 18 months. The aims will remain as the overall ambitions for our continuous improvement. But the priorities we focus on to achieve them will evolve over time to reflect progress and respond to changing circumstances, policy direction, and pressures.

The need for change

The Improvement Plan has been developed as a response to several events, external reports and recommendations:

- A Financial emergency was declared by the Cabinet on 10th September 2025, after monitoring revealed a significant forecasted year-end overspend that cannot be mitigated by the Council's current resources. Immediate action is required, and a plan to achieve financial stability and sustainability beyond that is needed.
- A Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge delivered in July 2025, and reported to Full Council on 25th September 2025, provided observations and recommendations for improvement, including addressing the financial position and other areas of how the Council operates.
- An External Auditor letter and subsequent Statutory Recommendation 2025 identified that the Council must take steps to mitigate the forecasted end of year overspend and subsequent impacts, review service delivery, improve robustness of savings plans and prevent reliance on Exceptional Financial Support.
- External inspections carried out by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) for Adult Social Care - rated as 'Good' (Feb 2025), and Ofsted for Children's Social Care rated as 'Outstanding' (August 2025). Both inspections identified improvement opportunities and priorities.
- Best Value Duty and Standards. The Statutory Guidance for Best Value Authorities provides the characteristics of a well-functioning authority. We know there are areas to improve on before we can confidently demonstrate excellence against all characteristics.

Immediate action

We have not waited for the development of this Plan to address the challenges. Immediate action has been taken to respond to the financial emergency, including spend control measures and increased monitoring. A draft Financial Strategy 2026/27 - 2030/31 was presented to Cabinet on 15th October 2025, updating the base position to inform the plan to achieve a stable and sustainable financial position over the medium term.

An Action Plan including initial activity against the recommendations made by the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge was reported to the Cabinet on 15th October 2025. Those actions are included in this Plan.

The Council's Audit and Governance Committee will consider the External Auditor Annual Report and its recommendations at its meeting on 27th November 2025.

Improvement Board

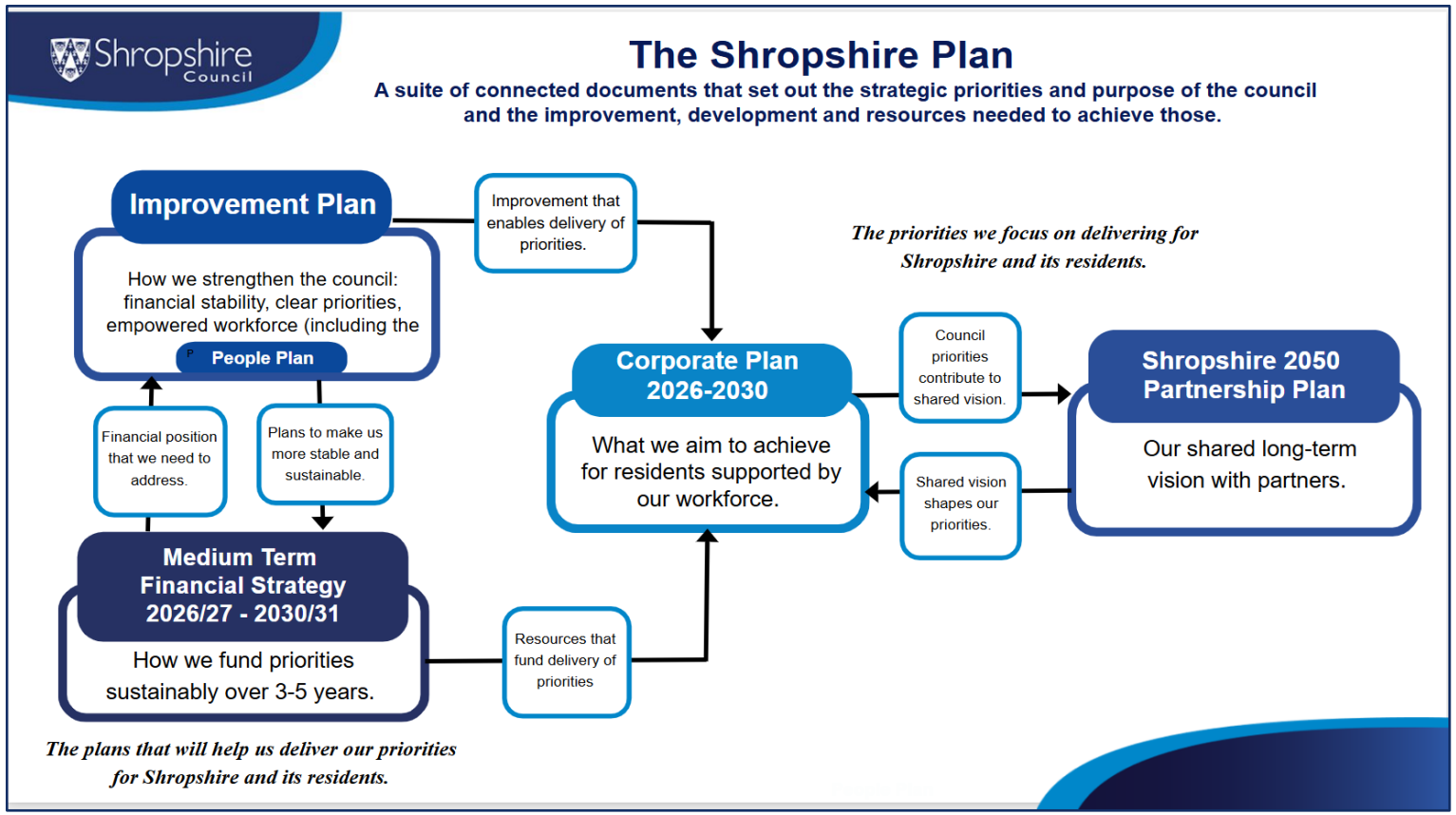
One of the key recommendations from the LGA Peer Challenge was to establish an independently chaired **Improvement Board.** The Board met for its first meeting on 10th November 2025 and will continue to provide external advice, challenge, and expertise to the Council in driving forward the delivery of this Improvement Plan.

Relationship with other strategic plans

This Improvement Plan sits alongside other plans (see Figure 1) to provide an overall framework for the continued improvement of the Council. Together they provide the key components of the **Shropshire Plan,** setting out the strategic priorities and purpose of the Council and the improvement, change and resources needed to achieve those:

- **The Improvement Plan** Sets out our priorities for improving the Council and summarises the plans for achieving financial stability, developing clear priorities, and supporting a workforce that excels (through a People Plan)
- **The Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2026/27-2030/31** Summarises the Council's overall financial position, including forecasts, pressures and risks, over the medium-term, and how we will fund priorities.

Figure 1: Shropshire Plan



- **The Corporate Plan 2026-2030:** Informed by the 'New Direction' ambitions, the plan will set out the priorities the Council will focus on to deliver, enable, and influence better outcomes for Shropshire and its residents.
- **The Shropshire 2050 Plan**: Sets out the longer-term shared vision and priorities for the county (as a place) that the council will agree and work with partners on.

Continuous Improvement

Our improvement journey is already underway. It does not start or finish with this Plan. It is a continuous journey, and this Plan builds on and enhances existing improvement work, as well as initiating new priorities and action. It refers to current programmes and projects that support the improvement aims, and new programmes and projects where activity and plans will need to be further developed.

There are a range of recent improvements that have been delivered over the past few months that demonstrate the Council's commitment to, and delivery of, continuous improvement, including:

Strengthening our corporate governance

We have made several changes to our corporate governance arrangements, including:

- The establishment of a Statutory Officers Board in October 2025 that considers significant governance issues and tracks key actions across the Council including monitoring the implementation of Internal Audit recommendations to improve overall compliance.
- An Internal Audit Business Partnering model has been introduced which includes the development of a dashboard to give Service Directors oversight of recommendations made in their areas.
- Strengthening of the Audit & Governance Committee by increasing its membership from 5 to 9 members covering all political parties. There is greater joined up working between Scrutiny and Audit and Governance Committees supported by a joint chairs meetings and a protocol defining roles and responsibilities. All Internal Audit reports are now shared with Committee members, so they have access to detail to enhance oversight.
- Focussed monitoring of compliance in relation to the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests through the Statutory Officers Board and Information Governance Oversight Group (IGLOO).
- Plans to implement the new Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) complaint handling code from April 2026.

Organisational change and improvement

The Council is focussed on delivering improvement across a range of areas, driven by a corporately supported and resourced transformation programme. This includes projects focussed on operational efficiency and financial savings such as:

- Improving enabling and support services (e.g. HR, Payroll, Legal services and Programme Management Office) as part of the 'New Ways of Working' programme.
- Rebuilding the intranet to deliver visible and impactful change, with a focus on search functionality and content, to support and empower staff.
- A 'Third Party Spend' Programme that has centralised/consolidated the Commissioning function and focussed on delivering cross-council transformation on processes involving external spending, achieving financial savings, and implementing robust contract management and procurement practices.

Much of the above will continue as part of the Improvement Plan and its programmes of action. A review of current transformation activity will be undertaken so it is aligned to the aims and priorities of this Plan and the plans being developed to achieve financial stability.

LGA supported improvement

A range of activity has been provided by the LGA to support learning and improvement. This has included opportunities for elected members and officers to learn from peers in other councils.

Improvements in Housing

We have maintained a focus on reducing the use of B&B accommodations and our plan aims to eliminate the remaining use by 2026, alongside intensifying prevention efforts to reduce the overall need for temporary housing.

Improvement in Children's Services

Following a targeted Ofsted inspection in November 2023, Shropshire Council recognised the urgent need to strengthen its Children's Social Care services. The inspection identified critical areas for improvement, particularly around safeguarding, case management, and oversight. In response, the Council swiftly established the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) which oversaw the development and delivery of a robust improvement plan.

The Council has now transitioned from the CIB to the Children and Families Ambitions Board, reflecting a shift from reactive improvement to strategic ambition and continuous improvement. This was underpinned by strong performance data and positive feedback from external partners.

The journey culminated in the 2025 Ofsted inspection, which awarded Shropshire Council an 'outstanding' judgement. This outcome marked a significant milestone in the Council's improvement journey.

Improvement in Adult Social Care

The improvement journey for adult social care has been shaped by the recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection, which rated the service as 'Good' under the new assessment framework.

Areas for improvement by the inspection, many of which were already recognised by the Council and had been incorporated into existing improvement plans. As part of its ongoing commitment to improvement, the Council has established a Continuous Improvement Group to oversee progress. and we are now building a plan for continuous improvement over the next 3-4 years.

Responding to the financial emergency

A range of immediate and in-year actions, measures and arrangements have been put in place to contain expenditure in-year, and the projected year-end overspend, including:

- Budget Oversight and Spend Strategy (BOSS) meetings with all Service Directors to ensure an accurate and up to date understanding of actual and forecasted spend, and savings position, enabling a deep dive reset of the in-year position.
- The establishment and implementation of arrangements to ensure stringent financial management, including boards that provide strict oversight of discretionary spending (spend control, workforce review, technical boards).
- Clear and regular communication to elected members, senior managers and all staff about the position, and measures to address it so there is an understanding of roles and responsibilities.

Work will continue to develop and deliver a balanced budget year-end position for 2025/26 including in year Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) and recognition of all financial risks.

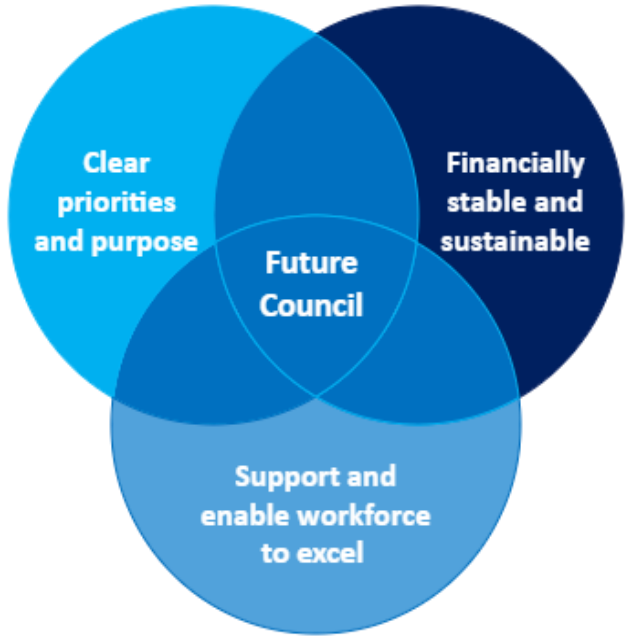
Planning for financial stability

The Council has been undertaking work to develop proposals and plans for budget stability aligned to the 'New Direction' report approved by Council (25th September), including:

- The identification and exploration of priority areas for review and associated savings strategies to bring budget stability and realign the transformation programme to achieve service change, cost reduction, savings and income.
- The development of other short to medium term initiatives including a pre-budget report in December to rebuild the foundations for the Council's budget and align finance strategies to financial stability e.g. a new reserves strategy, fees and charges pricing policy.
- This will be taken forward as part of a Financial Stability programme within this Plan.

Section 2

Our Future Council



Our future council

Our improvement needs to include an immediate response to the financial emergency (declared by Cabinet on 10th September 2025), the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations, and other external review and inspections. But that response needs to be developed and delivered in the context of our future ambitions as a council – both in terms of what we want to deliver, enable and influence for the residents of Shropshire, and how the council will look, feel and operate to do that.

A New Direction

The local elections in May 2025 brought a change in the Council's administration, with the Liberal Democrat Group taking overall control of the Council. A report - 'A New Direction' was presented to the Council meeting on 25th September 2025, outlining the strategic direction proposed by the new administration, intended as a precursor to the development of a new Corporate Plan.

The report proposes a focus across three key priorities: (i) financial recovery and stability, (ii) contract reform and value for money, and (iii) people including community empowerment and partnership, becoming a 'can do' enabling council. Key initiatives include developing a new highways contract, launching the Shropshire Partnership, and supporting community-led initiatives.

The report also proposes a focus on improved customer care, inclusive planning and housing policies, expanded youth and SEND services, climate-conscious infrastructure, and transparent governance.

New ways of working

We know that new ways of working will be required to deliver those priorities while being a financially sustainable organisation. We have started to set out how we will look, feel and operate through:

- A report ('Shropshire Council Strategic Operating Model') presented to the Cabinet on 17th July 2024 that set out the foundations for a future way of working that provides a more efficient way of interacting with customers, a focus on early help and prevention, and working alongside our partners to make sure our residents are connected to support in their communities to stay healthy and well.
- A report ('Shropshire Council Strategic Operating Model') presented to the Council meeting on 27th February 2025 that set out a new operating model and revised structure for the Council. Following the Peer Challenge report and financial emergency, interim arrangements have been put in place to support the new ways of working.

The model is intended to deliver the requirements and associated benefits of a more efficient (reduced cost) and more effective (improved delivery of duties and services) Council, agile enough to respond to the future national and local requirements for local government and delivering financial savings and statutory responsibilities.

It describes how the Council of the future will look and operate, beyond the immediate priority of financial stability. Together with the direction set out in '**New Direction**', it suggests key principles that should guide how the Council will operate to realise the priorities of the Shropshire Plan.

Our changing role and purpose

We will need to be clear about the role and purpose of the Council in achieving our priorities – whether that is delivering services, or enabling, supporting, or influencing others to deliver outcomes. Our focus will increasingly be on working with partners, town and parish councils, and our communities, and on earlier intervention and support that prevents demand for services. This will help us utilise our resources in the most productive way and achieve 'best value'.

Whether our role as a Council is delivering, enabling or influencing outcomes, we will be committed to creating a focused, energised and *'can do'* organisation that:

- Provides *clear and visible leadership* from our officer Leadership Board and Cabinet to make our priorities for delivery and change clear for everyone.
- Adopts a *'One Council' approach*, prioritising joined up working internally and externally.
- Ensures *our workforce is supported and enabled to excel and* has a relentless focus on *performance and continuous improvement* (enabled through our People Plan).
- Operates *good governance* to ensure compliance with statutory standards and requirements.
- Delivers *value for money* through high standards of financial discipline and management, and a commercial mindset to make every pound count and every minute matter.
- Provides *good customer service* that gives people a consistent and positive experience when they contact and interact with the Council.
- Continues to *engage with our residents* about the changes we need to make – and ensure our priorities are informed by what is most important to them.
- Is a *learning council* that regularly asks for feedback, learns from complaints, and seeks external challenge and review. We will learn from other councils about what they do differently and how they have improved.

Transforming into the council we want to be

It is critical that the Council has a clear direction for its further improvement, financial stability and delivery of policy priorities. The principles in figure 2 (below) will guide how we work and provide a basis for our continued improvement and development into a council that is financially sustainable and equipped to deliver, enable, and influence for Shropshire and its residents in the most effective, efficient and economical way:

Figure 2: principles that guide our we will operate, improve and transform

A clear direction

A key aim of this Improvement Plan is to ensure the Council has a clear purpose for its transformation. That needs to align with our vision for the future and be driven by our financial stability and sustainability plans, and the wider organisation wide improvement needed.

We will review, refresh and re-align our transformation programme so it helps us achieve financial stability and culture change across the organisation. We will also:

- Continue to develop our new ways of working as a council – including further defining our approach to partnership working and working with town and parish councils.
- Further consider and develop our role and purpose in place shaping and the longer-term economic growth of the county.
- Embed the principles in figure 2 across the organisation so that managers and their teams understand what they mean in terms of guiding day-to-day service management and improvement.

National policy context

Our improvement must also be undertaken in the context of national policy and likely changes and developments. For example:

- Devolution: The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill (July 2025): proposes a major shift of powers to local areas through devolution to Strategic Authorities which will have powers over transport, housing, skills, and economic development. The Neighbourhood Governance Review contained in this includes local authorities working with local people.
- Families First Partnership Programme (FFP): A major national reform in children's social care which aims to shift the system toward earlier intervention and family-led solutions, reducing the need for children to enter care and improving outcomes for families.
- National Missions and Local Government Outcomes Framework (LGOF): From April 2026, there will be a new set of priority outcomes that councils will report performance against, expected to cover areas including housing, homelessness, climate and environment, health and wellbeing, children and families.
- Housing policy is increasingly shaped by a strong emphasis on regulatory oversight, ambitious affordable housing delivery, and reforms to renters' rights. The Regulator of Social Housing has reinstated proactive inspections—covering consumer and economic standards for large landlords.
- The Council is taking part in national pilot and pathfinder projects including the National Referral Mechanism, the SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Change Programme, and the Local Youth Transformation Fund.

Culture change

Achieving our aims will require changes in our organisational culture, as well as improvements in policy, practice and statutory compliance. The Council needs a positive and inclusive culture, where there are clear roles, responsibilities and expectations of elected members and staff. This will be critical to the Council being member-led, officer-run and resident focused.

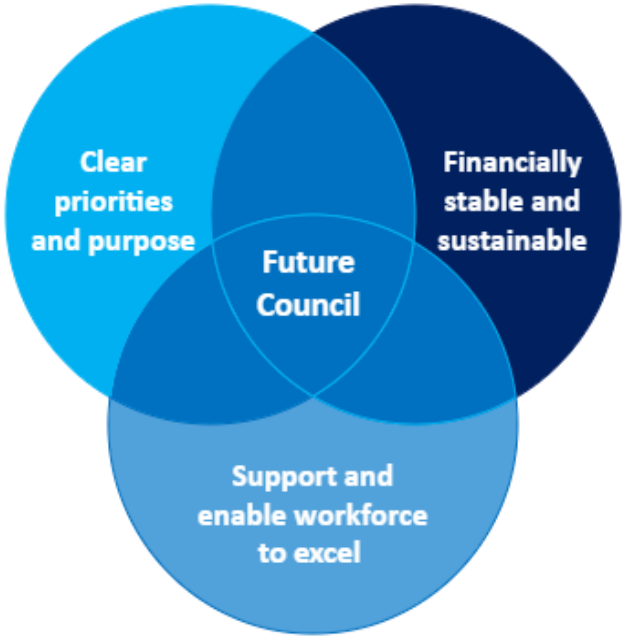
Many of the priority programmes of action will support and enable culture change – particularly those that are focused on supporting and enabling our workforce to excel. This is brought together in our People Plan and Digital Programme.

We will further develop how people are engaged and involved in developing policies and improving services, ensuring that there are more opportunities to inform and shape how we do, and improve, things.

The Plan also focusses on further improving our corporate governance and a culture of compliance, and how some of our internal services and systems can better support people to do their jobs, so we operate more efficiently and effectively, and barriers and constraints to a high-performing culture are removed.

Section 3

Our Improvement Aims & Priorities



Our Improvement Aims & Priorities

Our improvement aims

This Improvement Plan sets out how we will address immediate challenges, such as measures to a respond to the financial emergency, while ensuring a focus on the future and how the Council will need to look, feel and operate to best serve the needs of the county and its residents.

We want to be a 'best value' authority that **delivers, enables, and influences for Shropshire and its residents.** To achieve this, we need to be:

A Council that is financially stable and sustainable:

The Council needs to 'live within its means', deliver a balanced budget for 2026/27 and develop a **plan to achieve financial stability and sustainability** beyond that. This will be achieved through immediate spend controls and stronger fiscal discipline, changes to how we do things to deliver further savings or income, ensuring resources align with priorities, securing Exceptional Financial Support, and strengthening our financial planning and management practices.

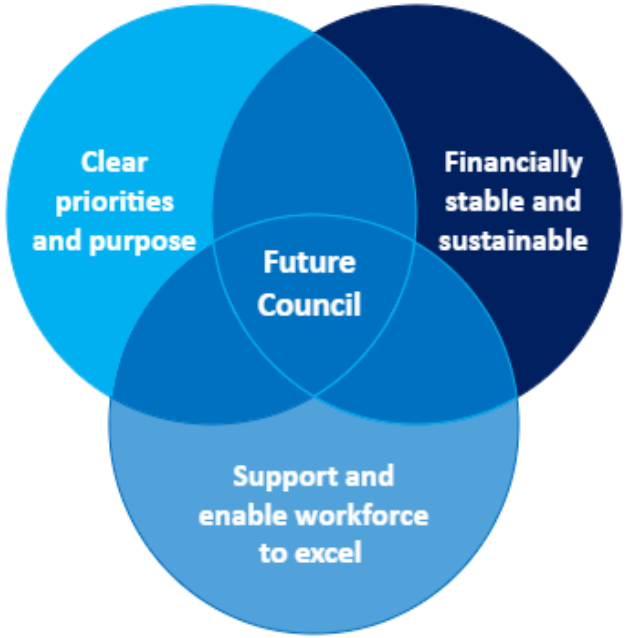
A Council that has clear priorities and purpose:

The Council needs to be clear on its ambitions and 'new direction' through a **Corporate Plan** that summarises priorities and outcomes which reflect resources available and is clear on our role of enabling and influencing others to deliver. This will include empowering communities and strengthening our partnership working as means to achieving outcomes, and continuing our transformation to a 'can do' organisation that looks, feels and operates differently.

A Council that supports and enables our workforce to excel:

The Council needs to become a modern, customer focussed organisation operating efficiently, effectively and ethically by increasingly focussing on our performance, productivity and value for money. This will be achieved through a **People Plan** that empowers and supports an engaged, diverse and collaborative workforce who understand their roles, are accountable for their responsibilities, and are supported by clear priorities, standards, and governance.

These aims are interdependent. All are critical to our improvement and development towards the council we want to become.



Our Improvement Aims & Priorities

Improvement priorities and programmes

To achieve these aims, the Improvement Plan is focused on an initial set of 9 *Priority Programmes of Action* (see **figure 3).**

It is likely these programmes and projects will change over time. Programmes vary in size and scale. Some will be standalone programmes with their own programme structures and governance, while others comprise several workstreams or projects, or a set of related activities.

Programmes and projects are aligned to a single Improvement Plan aim for governance purposes, but most are interdependent, and the outcomes will be cross-cutting and contribute to all three Improvement Plan aims. All programmes of action aim to make the Council more financially and operationally sustainable.

Some programmes are a continuation of current and planned work (e.g. future council, new ways of working, People Plan), while others need to be fully scoped and their activities defined. For example, a review, refresh and realignment of the transformation programme is likely to result in new projects and activity that are driven by our financial stability plans.

Aims	Priority programmes of action that will achieve the aims:
A Council that is financially stable and sustainable	Programme 1: Financial stability Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy Programme 3: Strengthening financial management policy & practice
A Council that has clear priorities and purpose	Programme 4: Corporate Plan 2026-30 Programme 5: Future council – including: • Embedding principles and ways of working • Enabling partnerships and communities • Place shaping role Programme 6: Review and realignment of transformation programme
A Council that supports and enables our workforce to excel	Programme 7 : People Plan – including: • Employee engagement and involvement • New Ways of Working - services that support staff Programme 8: Getting the basics right (Strengthening corporate governance and compliance) Programme 9: Digital programme

Figure 3: list of improvement priority programmes of activity

Aim: A Council that is financially stable and sustainable

The Council needs to address the current financial emergency and position through actions to secure immediate survival, a plan to achieve financial stability and sustainability beyond that so it can 'live within its means'.

The focus of this aim is:

Immediate controls and fiscal discipline, a plan for financial stability including a balanced budget for 2026/27, and a longer-term strategy for financial sustainability. All underpinned by actions to strengthen financial planning and management policy and practice.

Outcomes and Benefits (the things that will tell us we are achieving our aim):

- A balanced budget for 2026/27
- Improved delivery of savings and income through more robust plans
- Transformation proposals that will deliver financial stability and sustainability
- Robust financial monitoring, management and accountability
- A sustainable financial strategy aligning revised service delivery to available financial resources
- Strengthened procurement and contract management practices

The key programmes of action that will deliver this improvement and change are:

Programme	Description and Purpose
Financial Stability	A range of immediate and actions, measures and arrangements put in place to contain expenditure in-year to reduce and minimise the projected year-end overspend, improve financial monitoring and future budget setting through Budget Spend Control and BOSS (Budget Oversight and Spend Strategy) meetings. The programme is also focussed on the development of the council's approach and route to financial stability (including revised service delivery, strong plans for reducing expenditure and increasing income through transformation, asset management, reviewing our capital programme, and Exceptional Financial Support) and the development of a proposed balanced budget for 2026/27.
Financial Sustainability Strategy	The development of an approach and strategy that outlines how the longer-term goal of financial sustainability will be achieved ensuring the Council 'lives within its means' and does not become reliant on Exceptional Financial Support.
Strengthening financial management practice and policy	A programme of actions to strengthen financial literacy and discipline across the organisation, including significantly strengthening the internal control environment in response to the opinion of the Chief Audit Executive, and responding to the External Auditor recommendations. The programme will ensure there is improved financial compliance across the organisation by strengthening procurement and contract management practices, budget monitoring and forecasting, income collection and debt recovery.

Aim: A Council that has clear priorities and purpose

The Council needs to be clear on its ambitions and 'new direction' through a Corporate Plan that summarises priorities and outcomes which reflect resources available and is clear on our role of enabling and influencing others to deliver – including empowering communities and strengthening our partnerships.

The focus of this aim is:

Creating and communicating the Council's priorities and its role in delivering them so it can work more effectively, efficiently and economically with others to achieve outcomes, and be clear on how the organisation needs to change and transform to do that while becoming financially stable and sustainable.

Outcomes and Benefits (the things that will tell us we are achieving our aim):

- New plans approved - Corporate Plan 2026-30 and 2050 partnership vision and plan
- Increased employee understanding of council priorities and their roles in delivering them
- Transformation programme aligned with corporate plan, improvement plan and financial stability plan
- More transformation projects delivered on time and within budget
- Future Council principles embedded and guiding delivery, transformation and continuous improvement
- More collaboration with partners and communities
- Increased stakeholder confidence and satisfaction

The key programmes of action that will deliver this improvement and change are:

Programme	Description and Purpose
Corporate Plan 2026-30	The development of a new **Corporate Plan** informed by political ambitions set out in the 'New Direction' and financial position. The programme will also include activity to ensure the corporate performance framework and business planning are aligned to the Plan.
Future Council	Continuing the work to develop how the council supports, enables, empowers and influences others to deliver priority outcomes, including: • Embedding the principles that guide how the council will operate and provide a basis for its continued improvement and transformation. • A focus on developing an approach to working with town and parish councils. • Place shaping – the role and purpose of the Council and development of a long-term vision, economic growth strategy, and outcomes for the county.
Review and Realignment of Transformation Programme	A review of current transformation programme to ensure it is aligned with the future ways of working, national policy context, and the need to deliver financial stability and sustainability. The programme will also ensure there are robust programme management, support and assurance arrangements in place.

Aim: A Council that supports and enables its workforce to excel

The Council needs to become a modern, customer focussed organisation operating efficiently, effectively and ethically by increasingly focussing on our performance, productivity and value for money.

The focus of this aim is:

The development and implementation of a **People Plan** that empowers an engaged, diverse and collaborative workforce who understand their roles, are accountable for their responsibilities, and are supported by clear priorities and standards, and strengthened governance and compliance.

Outcomes and Benefits (the things that will tell us we are achieving our aim):

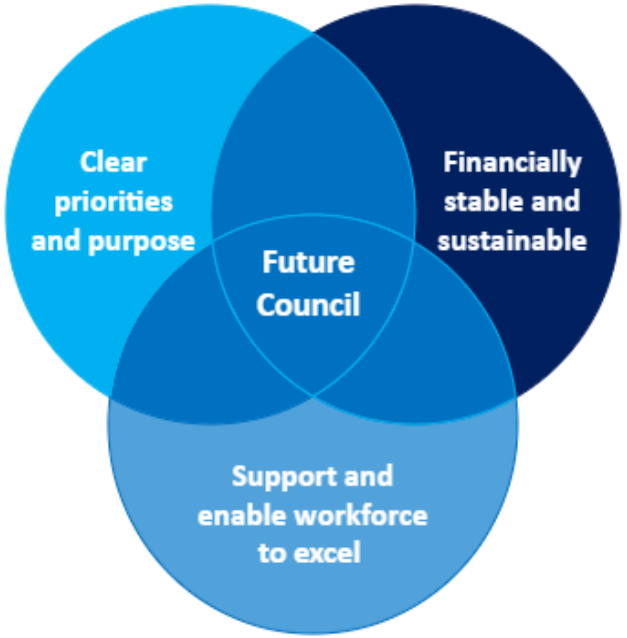
- Increased levels of staff satisfaction and engagement
- Reduced levels of staff absence
- Less turnover of staff
- Increased numbers of PDPs completed
- Increased levels of mandatory training completed
- Increased performance for FOI and complaints handling

The key programmes of action that will deliver this improvement and change are:

Programme	Description and Purpose
People Plan	A Plan and programme of activity to become an organisation where people are proud to work for, feel valued, and can thrive with the right support and development that enables them to perform to their best. There will be an initial focus on: • **Engaging and Empowering Employees:** Further development of staff engagement and involvement, including activity to improve the visibility of managerial and political leaders, and evolving and embedding existing channels and mechanisms that facilitate a dialogue, and support and inform change across the organisation. • **Improving support services:** Continuing the programme of activity to implement the New Ways of Working for Enabling Services and Processes, including an initial focus on Information Governance and HR & Payroll.
Getting the basics right (Strengthening governance and compliance)	A programme of actions and activity focussed on strengthening overall corporate governance and ethical standards, by improving awareness, understanding of, and compliance with, the constitution and key operating policies, processes, procedure rules and customer standards (e.g. finance, procurement, information management, data protection, complaints, FOI). Alongside the programme focussed on 'strengthening financial management' it will ensure the Council has a tighter grip on its delivery, performance and risk management.
Digital programme	A programme of initiatives and developments to modernise our services, improve operational efficiency, and better serve our residents and stakeholders, building on the Digital Customer programme, reviewing and reprioritising planned initiatives, and the implementation of a new intranet. At the heart of the programme is an ambition to provide simpler, efficient, secure, predictive, data-led services, that cost less to deliver.

Section 4

Making sure we deliver



Making sure we deliver the Plan

There are three key things we will do to make sure we deliver the Improvement Plan:

1. *Governance and Assurance:* We will put in place governance and assurance arrangements based on agreed principles (see **figure 4**), including clear accountability, responsibility and transparency. There will be relevant risk management and delivery monitoring, facilitated by a Corporate Programme Management Office (PMO) ensuring independence and integrity. These arrangements will help ensure the Improvement Plan is delivered and achieves the required progress and impacts.

2. *Supporting delivery:* Significant and sustained investment is required to deliver the scale and pace of change required. We will ensure the Plan and its programmes are supported through relevant resources and support. New programmes of action will need to be resourced, which may mean reviewing and deciding on where business as usual activity can be reprioritised and capacity redeployed, or assessing and identifying where there are additional resource requirements.

3. *Engagement, Involvement and Communications:* Engagement has taken place at different levels and through different forums throughout the process of developing the Improvement Plan and will continue as the Plan is delivered.

This has ensured understanding of the Plan, the context it is responding to and the aims we are pursuing. It has also ensured it has been developed collaboratively and that priorities have been continuously iterated using internal peer review, challenge and feedback (via Senior Leaders Forum).

Corporate Strategy & Change function

Led by the Service Director (Strategy & Change) and comprising strategic support and enabling functions – including the programme management office, policy, strategy, performance, and communications teams – the function will provide both advisory (guidance, advice, standards) and delivery capacity to support change and improvement across the organisation.

Risk management

Risks and interdependencies between programmes and projects will be set out and managed for each one. There are also overarching risks and dependencies across the whole Improvement Plan which are set out in **Appendix 2**.

Risks will be reviewed regularly and will change e.g. with new risks being included as and when they are identified. The table of risks is not an exhaustive list, and both the risks and mitigations will be kept under review.

Improvement Plan Performance Framework

The priority programmes of action contribute to defined outcomes. Those are underpinned by key performance indicators (KPIs) – listed at **Appendix 3** - that will enable progress to be demonstrated. Reporting on delivery will use a combination of delivery milestones and KPIs.

Reporting progress

Regular reporting to the Cabinet, Audit Committee and Transformation & Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee will take place for the duration of the Plan. This will provide assurance to elected members and residents we are making progress towards the commitments we have made

Assessing and managing impacts

Unplanned consequences and negative impacts of changes the Council is making will continue to be a key consideration through wider governance and assurance. In particular, the impact on residents of further budget savings and how they are delivered. This will be captured and managed through completing Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) for all new policy/strategy development and major changes to service delivery, and consultation (where relevant and required), to ensure the implications of our decisions on our residents are understood and considered.

Governance and Assurance

Our governance, monitoring and assurance arrangements will provide a clear framework to ensure the Improvement Plan is delivered and achieves the required progress and impacts. The principles that underpin this are set out in the **figure 4** below:

Principle	Arrangements
Accountability and responsibility for delivery	**Senior Accountable Officer (SAO):** Each Improvement Plan Aim has an SAO, accountable for ensuring the outcomes of the programmes within their aim are achieved. This will include effective and timely engagement with stakeholders such as elected members. The SAO will chair a Portfolio Board for the Aim they are accountable for. **Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):** Responsibility for ensuring day-to-day delivery of programmes and projects. RDL activities might include ensuring the setting up of project teams, steering groups, arrangements and processes to progress delivery, and escalating key risks and blockages not resolved in the project.
Seeking external challenge and learning	We are committed to seeking external challenge and learning from other councils, organisations and experts to contribute to the development and delivery of the improvement plan. An externally chaired **Improvement Board** is a significant component of this principle, where the Board will provide challenge and ideas, and the Council will be sharing evidence of assurance and progress.
Governance structures	The Council's existing governance structures maintain a core role in the governance for the improvement plan • Member-led Governance - Council and Cabinet provide the political decision making, and Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Audit and Governance Committee provide the oversight and assurance. • Officer-led governance – the Leadership Board has a role in direction setting, operating as a **Transformation and Change Board**, holding SAOs and RDLs to account and being a forum for escalation, receiving significant change requests, resource allocation, and oversight of interdependencies between programmes and projects.
Monitoring and assurance	Impact and progress assurance reporting will be carried out each month (initially) to ensure a timely, consistent and accurate view of delivery against the Plan. It will be important to ensure a clear picture of each programme and project is maintained, as appropriate. A deeper dive review will be completed periodically on delivery to help confirm the scope, resourcing and timeframe of each programme/project. This will also provide the evidence to stop, change or continue.
Transparency	There will be one view of progress and impact through the progress assurance reporting. This will provide assurance on the progress being made. Monthly reporting will be through the Corporate Programme Management Office (PMO) to the Transformation and Change Board [Leadership Board] and to the Improvement Board.
Member scrutiny	Executive members will provide oversight and challenge on the programmes and projects aligned to their portfolios. Group leaders are members of the Improvement Board and Portfolio Holders (or their deputies) will be invited to attend as required. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees will take a view of the progress and impact of delivering the improvement plan in their remits and the Audit and Governance Committee will maintain their role looking at improvement plan risk management and controls.

Figure 4: Governance principles

Making sure we deliver: governance and assurance

The role of the Corporate Programme Management Office (PMO)

The Corporate Programme Management Office (PMO) will play a key role in the supporting the delivery of the improvement plan – ensuring we have both 'grip' and 'drive'. The PMO will fulfil three functions:

- *Monitoring and assurance:* ensuring progress monitoring happens, that outputs are reviewed and challenged each month, and providing the analysis required by the Transformation and Change Board (Leadership Board) and Improvement Board.
- *Supporting delivery:* providing project management, business analyst and change consultant capability to support the delivery of the Council's transformation activity to achieve its improvement aims. The PMO will also maintain an overview of the transformation requirements for the whole council which will inform resourcing decisions.
- *Setting the standards:* providing guidance, toolkits and templates to support consistent project and programme management standards and best practice across the organisation.

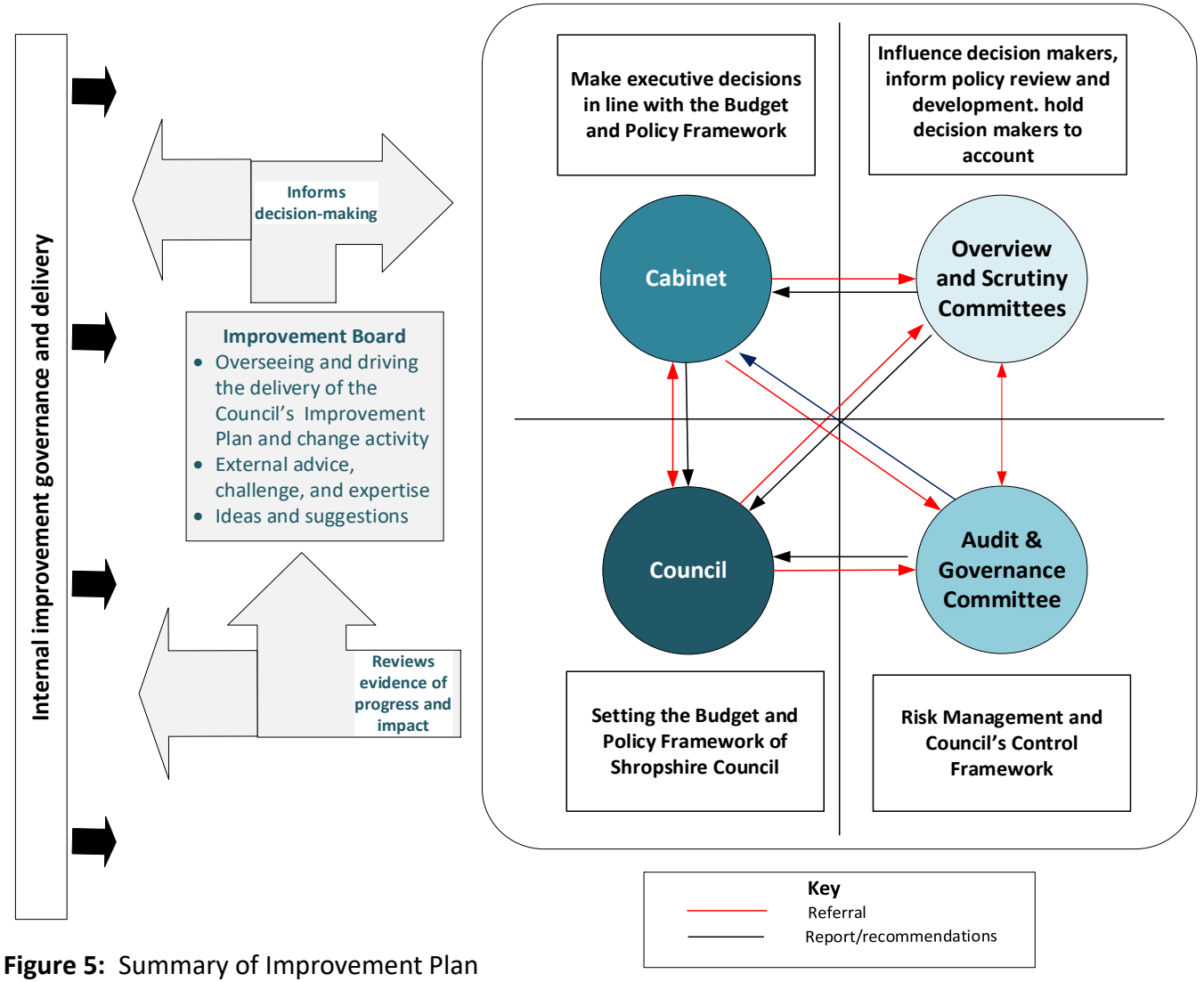


Figure 5: Summary of Improvement Plan governance structures

Resourcing the Plan

The Plan incorporates existing programmes together with newer and emerging projects. As such there are already some resources in place and deployed in these areas with work established and underway. Additional budget provision, reliant on Exceptional Financial Support (EFS), will need to be aligned to new activity.

The further scoping of these programmes of work will define further resourcing requirements. The SAOs and the RDLs will work together to consider how the programmes and projects they are accountable and responsible for will be resourced. Our resourcing approach is summarised in **figure 6** below.

External support

The Council has been supported by the Local Government Association (LGA) in developing its improvement response and will continue to work closely with them and others including the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). Further support may include bringing in independent external expertise and perspectives to provide challenge to major change and improvement activity to identify where there is potential to do more or identify further opportunities.

Component	Approach
Internal Council resource	A refocussing of internal resources to support the development and delivery of transformation and budget savings proposals. Identification of capacity from across the organisation that can potentially be redirected and/or deployed to support Improvement Plan delivery
Interim additional capacity	Short-term capacity and technical expertise that will work in a blended way with and within internal teams to support development and delivery of improvement and change proposals.
Transformation support	Engagement of external partners where necessary to support the delivery of major change proposals and projects

Figure 6: Resourcing approach

Engagement and involvement

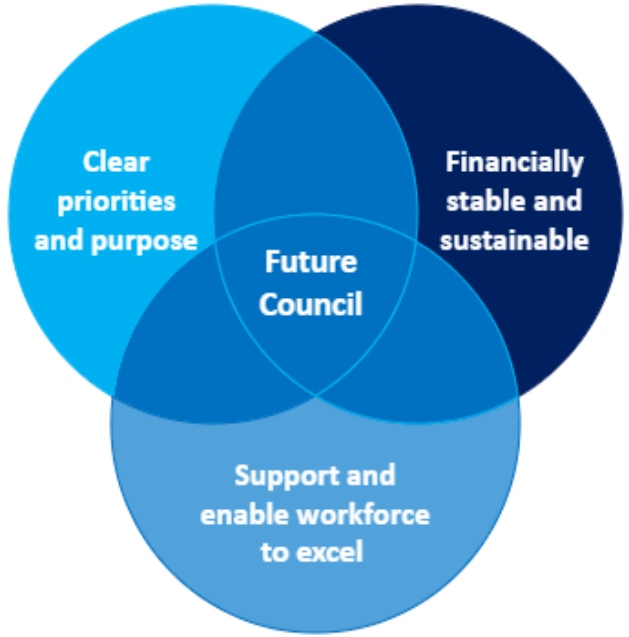
We have engaged through the following activity to inform the development of the Plan:

Mechanism / Activity	Purpose /Description	Audience / Stakeholders
Weekly CEX email bulletin to all staff	Regular and frequent update on the Plan development, and promotion of engagement opportunities	Staff
Senior Leadership Forum (SLF)	Updates on Plan development, and engagement to inform priorities and activity to deliver those	Top 3 tiers of managers
Staff Engagement Hub	Engagement Form to suggest ideas for improvements in policy and practice	Staff
Leader/Deputy Leader	Updates on the development of the Improvement Plan and seek steer on key issues	Leader and Deputy Leader
Executive Directors and Cabinet Members	Updates on the development of the Improvement Plan to test key aims and priorities	Executive Members/Leadership Board
Transformation & Improvement Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Share thinking and proposed aims and priorities for feedback. A run through draft Plan for feedback.	O&S Committee Members
All member briefing	To update members on the Improvement Plan and explain its purpose and priorities	All members
Budget Forum	To engage group leaders on the development of the Plan (finance stability elements)	Group Leaders
Improvement Board	To present elements of the draft Plan for review and feedback	Improvement Board (includes Group Leaders)

As the Council's improvement journey continues, we will continue to engage and communicate on our plans and progress to our residents, elected members, staff, partners, and other stakeholders. We will listen and learn from them and adjust and update the Plan in line with new and emerging priorities.

Shropshire Council

Appendix 1:
Priority Programmes of Action - Summaries



Shropshire Council

Aim: A Council that is financially stable and sustainable

Programme 1

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director (S151 Officer)
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Deputy S151 Officer
Executive Member:	Finance Portfolio Holder

Financial Stability

A range of immediate and in-year actions, measures and arrangements put in place to contain expenditure in-year to reduce and minimise the projected year-end overspend. The development of a plan detailing the council's approach and route to financial and operational stability – including opportunities for reducing expenditure and increasing income

Activity:	Start	End
Declare a financial emergency and agree immediate emergency measures to reduce all non-essential spending between September 2025 and March 2026	Sept 2025	Sept 2025
Establish and implement arrangements to ensure stringent financial management – including boards that provide strict oversight of discretionary spending	Sept 2025	Mar 2026
Undertake a deep dive reset of the in-year position (including learning from the Internal Audit Outturn review) – through BOSS (Budget Oversight and Spend Strategy) meetings with all Service Directors to ensure accurate and up to date actual and forecasted spend, and savings position in year, to inform an in-year EFS application	Oct 2025	Dec 2025
Develop and deliver a balanced budget year-end position for 2025/26 including in-year Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) and recognition of all financial risks (including NWRR write off, transformation funding, unachieved savings and spending pressures)	Oct 2025	June 2026
Implement plans for all recommendations and lessons learnt from internal and external reviews and support including the Statutory Recommendation from External Audit	Nov 2025	Mar 2026
Develop a proposed balanced budget for 2026/27 for Council approval, utilising: • BOSS meetings to ensure 2026/27 Budget takes account of existing service delivery, appropriate workforce needs, investment requirements linked to change programmes, and robust saving plans to deliver cost reductions and increased income • Short term initiatives including a Pre-Budget report to rebuild the foundations for the Council's 2026/27 budget and align finance strategies to future financial stability e.g. a new fees and charges pricing policy, and reserves strategy • Continued liaison with MHCLG including an application for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) 2026/27 • Public consultation on 2026/27 Budget setting the scene for the MTFS to 2030/31 and implications for service delivery both internally and with residents	Oct 2025	Feb 2026
Identify and develop a revised Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) aligned to the Improvement Plan, including: • Further BOSS meetings with all Service Directors to set robust foundations for stable budgets over the MTFS period aligning to key themes from the New Direction report approved by Council, plans and requirements for growth and investment that bring stability • Plans for review of all services to identify the cost of minimum viable service provision, priority areas and opportunities for transformation activity through a funded change programme over the medium term, with robust plans for savings delivery and income generation • Revised and affordable Capital Programme reviewing all funding including developer contributions, external funding and asset rationalisation to deliver capital receipts • A clear plan over the MTFS period to provide a stable foundation for systemic transformation of the council while able to deliver safe and reliable services at all levels • An EFS strategy over later years of the MTFS including a clear exit plan from the temporary use of EFS	Oct 2025	Feb 2026

Aim: A Council that is financially stable and sustainable

Programme 2

Financial Sustainability Strategy

The development of an approach that outlines how the longer-term goal of financial sustainability will be achieved

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director (S151 Officer)
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Deputy S151 Officer
Executive Member:	Finance Portfolio Holder

Activity:	Start	End
Through a revised focus considering the next five financial years, complete the planning to deliver a sustainable financial position for Shropshire Council over the medium term through a revised Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) approved by Council reflective of the Council's Improvement Plan and ultimately new Corporate Plan.	Dec 2025	Mar 2026
Deliver a robust Section 25 Statement to Council providing assurance to Members on the robustness of estimates used to define costs and available resources over the medium term, and the adequacy of reserves and General Fund Balances to provide a stable route to financial sustainability.	Feb 2026	Feb 2026
Develop, demonstrate and agree a pathway to reducing reliance on EFS over the MTFS period with reducing requirements and a clear exit plan from EFS at an agreed point in the future.	Dec 2025	Mar 2027
Work with the Improvement Board and partners across the region and nationally to influence funding and spend models to deliver a sustainable route away from the structural funding deficit for Shropshire Council.	Dec 2025	Mar 2027
Build on the recommendations contained in the external audit Statutory recommendation, key and improvement recommendations to ensure robust planning is in place to deliver a strong Value for Money opinion in future years.	Jan 2026	Jul 2027
Develop and deliver a suite of updated plans and strategies to align around the Council's future sustainability aim, moving the Council from financial stability to the long-term aim of financial sustainability. These include: • Financial Strategy • Capital Strategy • Treasury Strategy • Reserves Strategy • EFS Strategy • DSG Deficit Recovery Strategy	Apr 2026	Mar 2027

Shropshire Council

Aim: A Council that is financially stable and sustainable

Programme 3

Strengthening financial management practice and policy

The programme will ensure there is improved financial compliance across the organisation by strengthening policy, practice and approaches to budget monitoring, controls and forecasting, income and debt collection, procurement practices and contract management

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director (S151 Officer)
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Strategic Director - Commissioning
Executive Member:	Finance Portfolio Holder

Activity:	Start	End
Develop and deliver an action plan to strengthen the Internal Control Environment in response to the Limited Assurance opinion of the Chief Audit Executive • Develop and agree the action plan • Deliver the action plan	 Oct 2025 April 2026	 March 2026 June 2027
Consider and agree further responses to External Auditor Annual Report and statutory recommendation (as directed by Audit & Governance Committee and Council)	Nov 2025	Jan 2026
Financial literacy training to create strong financial literacy skills across the organisation to develop skills and discipline - including: • Develop clear training plans for budget holders • Deliver training and set a clear expectation for all budget holders to be fully accountable for delivery within agreed budgets	 Nov 2025 Feb 2026	 Feb 2026 Jun 2026
Improve financial management practices - including: • Simplify budget lines/codes and cost centres • Improved controls and processes for moving budgets/savings/funds between codes (e.g. internal transfers) • Better communications around year-end adjustments • An accountability framework – with clear budget holder responsibilities	Feb 2026	Jul 2026
Improve procurement and contract management function and practice – including: • Implement new structure for procurement and contracts team • Look at income for efficiencies • Commission new contracts and procurement system • A review of Third party spend • Development and roll out of a Contracts Resource Toolkit	 Oct 2025 Oct 2025 Jun 2025 Oct 2025 Jan 2026	 May 2026 Mar 2026 Mar 2026 Apr 2026/ongoing Sept 2026
Development of new strategy: • Procurement • Commissioning	 Nov 2025 Dec 2025	 May 2026 May 2026
Continue to embed new governance for commissioning, contract management and procurement (e.g. commercial and commissioning delivery group, joint commissioning delivery group, commissioning, procurement and contracts performance board)	Aug 2025	Dec 2026/ongoing
Review and refresh the approach to income collection and debt recovery to improve collection performance	Jun 2026	Dec 2026

Shropshire Council

Aim: A Council with clear priorities and purpose | **Programme 4**

Corporate Plan 2026-30

The development of a new **Corporate Plan** that is informed by political ambitions set out in the 'New Direction' and financial position. The programme will also include activity to ensure a corporate performance framework is aligned to the Plan.

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director (DASS)
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Service Director – Strategy & Change
Executive Member:	Leader & Deputy Leader

Activity:	Start	End
Agreement of 'New Direction' at Full Council	Sept 2025	Sept 2025
Establish with Members a clear framework for the different phases of activity to realise financial stability, and the plans to achieve the outcomes of the council. Confirmation of the outcomes and priorities of the administration	Nov 2025	Dec 2025
Carry out Shropshire 2050 workshop sessions with stakeholders to establish the long-term vision that the corporate plan fits in, incorporating the outcomes and priorities of the administration	Jan 2026	Feb 2026
Deliver a programme of engagement with all members, staff, partners and communities/ residents on the outcomes and priorities for the plan based on what we want Shropshire 2050 to be. Bring together the feedback to inform the development of the plan and the actions to be taken over the plan period.	Jan 2026	Mar 2026
Co-produce the cross-cutting delivery plans to deliver the outcomes and priorities of the plan and confirm the 'grip' support, and governance arrangements, including the KPIs and milestones that will demonstrate progress and impact.	Mar 2026	Apr 2026
Corporate Plan 2026-30 agreed and adopted	May 2026	Ongoing
Review and update the Performance Management Framework, dashboards and reporting, performance monitoring and management requirements to align with the new Corporate Plan	July 2026	Sept 2026

Shropshire Council

Aim: A Council with clear priorities and purpose

Programme 5

Future Council (1)

Continuing the work to develop how the Council supports, enables, and influences others to deliver priority outcomes, including an initial focus on:

I. Embedding the principles that guide how the council will operate, improve and transform
II. Developing our partnerships with town and parish councils
III. Developing our Place Shaping role and purpose of the Council and development of a long-term vision, economic growth strategy and outcomes for the county, co-created with partners and communities

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director (DASS)
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Director of Children's Services (i) Service Director – Communities (ii)
Executive Members:	Leader and Deputy Leader (i) & (ii)

Activity:	Start	End
(i) Embedding the principles that guide how the council will operate, improve and transform:		
Introduce and hold Regular Senior Leadership Forums for engagement between Leadership Board and their direct reports.	Sept 2025	On-going
Develop a 'Future Council' framework that translates the future Council operating principles into good practice characteristics of service leadership, management and delivery, including: 1. Establish a steering group of SLF members to provide leadership, challenge and input 2. Co-production of a framework through the steering group and reality checking via a sounding board of staff 3. Embed the vision, operating principles and Future Council framework into service planning guidance (for 2027/28) 4. Develop proposals for embedding the framework as a basis for wider improvement activity 5. Identify and/or build organisational capacity, guidance, support for each of the elements of the Future Council framework 6. Embed the Framework into a Role of the Manager (part of the People Plan programme)	Dec 2025	May 2026
(ii) Developing our partnerships with town and parish Councils:		
Carryout Overview and Scrutiny review into the opportunities and arrangements for local partnership working across three phases of work 1. The delegation of functions to Town and Parish Councils (T&PCs) 2. Potential groupings of local councils to deliver local priorities and outcomes 3. Options for local partnership working governance structures and arrangements	 Aug 2025 Nov 2025 Feb 2025	 Mar 2026 Mar 2026 Sep 2026
Identify and quantify potential initial opportunities for the delegation of functions to town and parish Council	Oct 2025	Dec 2025
Roll out programme of developing further opportunities and partnerships with town and parish councils (T&PCs)	Dec 2025	Ongoing

Future Council (2)

Continuing the work to develop how the Council supports, enables, and influences others to deliver priority outcomes, including an initial focus on:

I. Embedding the principles that guide how the council will operate, improve and transform
II. Developing our approach to working with town and parish councils
III. Developing our place shaping role and purpose of the Council and development of a long-term vision, economic growth strategy and outcomes for the county, co-created with partners and communities

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director (DASS)
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Service Director – Place Shaping (iii) Service Director – Infrastructure (iii)
Executive Member:	Transport & Economic Growth Portfolio Holder (iii)

Activity:	Start	End
(iii) Developing our place shaping role, purpose and strategy:		
Recruitment of Service Director (Place Shaping)	Nov 2025	Dec 2025
Position the Council regionally, working proactively to formalise the delivery plan for the Marches Forward Partnership	Nov 2025	March 2026
Utilise the Council's place leadership role to convene strategic partnership working across the county, bringing together partner intelligence and alignment of investment programmes around shared priorities into a Shropshire based investment and infrastructure network	Nov 2025	June 2026 (ongoing)
Develop, with members and partners, a consistent narrative of place for Shropshire that describes the place it will be (which will form the basis of a Shropshire 2050 vision and plan) (CPC action)	Feb 2026	June 2026
Extend regional working to explore and develop future opportunities under the Government's devolution agenda, producing an integrated, long-term plan (Spatial Development Strategies) and creating a platform for strategic engagement and investment	Dec 2025	Dec 2026
Develop a robust investment pipeline which responds to growth opportunities and addresses future sustainability and resilience challenges, providing a clear delivery plan for a refreshed Economic Growth Strategy and an evidence led basis for the Local Plan Review.	Dec 2025	Dec 2026

Shropshire Council

Aim: A Council with clear priorities and purpose

Programme 6

Review and Realignment of Transformation Programme

A review of current transformation programme to ensure it is aligned with the future ways of working, national policy context, and the need to deliver financial stability and sustainability. The programme will also ensure there are robust programme management, support and assurance arrangements in place.

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director (DASS)
Responsible Delivery Leads (RDL):	Service Director – Care & Well Being Service Director – Strategy & Change
Executive Members:	Leader and Deputy Leader

Activity:	Start	End
Develop a refreshed Transformation and Change Programme - including:		
Initial review of current programme to determine non-priority projects that can be pursued as continuous improvement rather than corporately supported transformation	Oct 2025	Jan 2026
Develop new transformation proposals, informed by the financial stability planning, other improvement priorities, future council principles, and national policy thinking and direction (e.g. Families First Partnership) and through engagement with senior managers and elected members	Oct 2025	Dec 2025
Develop fully costed transformation projects and associated delivery plans that will contribute to financial stability and sustainability over the medium-term	Dec 2025	Ongoing
Develop and implement new Improvement Plan governance arrangements that enable oversight of transformation, improvement and change – including: (a) Further strengthen the PMO including development of a monitoring and assurance function (b) Develop and implement a new monitoring framework with quality assurance by the PMO and reports to Leadership Board (Transformation and Change) (c) Develop an approach for challenging and testing transformation and budget savings proposals at an early stage of their formation	 Dec 2025 Dec 2025 Feb 2026	 Feb 2026 Feb 2026 April 2026
Review, refresh and relaunch corporate guidance, standards and templates for project and programme management	Jan 2026	April 2026
Recruitment of Service Director (Strategy & Change)	Nov 2025	Dec 2025

Shropshire Council

Aim: A Council supports and enables its workforce to excel

Programme 7

People Plan

A Plan and programme of activity to be an organisation that people are proud to work for, feel valued, and can thrive with the right support and development that enables them to perform to their best. There will be an initial focus on **engaging and empowering employees** and **improving support services**

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director - DPH
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Service Director – Children & Young People
Executive Members:	Leader and Deputy Leader

Activity:	Start	End
Develop and deliver the **People Plan** for the Council – focused on the priorities of: Our Culture, Leadership & Talent, Capability and Capacity, Performance and Systems & Establishment – including an initial focus on the following projects: • One Purpose, underpinned by our Values • Engagement and Communications • Equity, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging • Valuing and Supporting new and current staff • Leadership and management programme including good conversations • Workforce skills audit • Employee performance management framework	Dec 2025	Jul 2026
Engagement and Communications:		
Further development of staff engagement and internal communications, including activity to improve the visibility of managerial and political leaders and evolving existing channels and mechanisms that facilitate a dialogue to support and inform change across the organisation – including: • Engage employees about how they want to be informed, involved and engaged • Continued Pulse Surveys, including a six-monthly survey that provides a temperature check across several staff sentiment and perception measures • Develop and implement a new internal communications and employee engagement plan/programme that introduces new ways of engaging and involving employees	 Dec 2025 Nov 2025 Jan 2026	 Jan 2026 On-going Apr 2026
Improving support services:		
Continuing the programme of activity to implement the New Ways of Working (NOM) for Enabling Services and Processes – including: • Information Governance and HR & Payroll – through Sprint review and continuous improvement plan • Roll out the approach to other service areas – including property services and finance • Continue the work to define a set of common principles for enabling service Business Partners	Nov 2025	Dec 2025/on-going
Building on previous work, undertake a review and benchmarking of services (staffing, systems, processes) supported by the LGA – with an initial programme focussing on: Legal, Finance, Revenues & Benefits	Dec 2025	March 2026

Shropshire Council

Aim: A Council supports and enables its workforce to excel

Programme 8

Getting the Basics Right (strengthening corporate governance and compliance)

A programme of actions and activity focussed on strengthening overall corporate governance and ethical standards, by improving awareness, understanding of, and compliance with, the constitution and key operating policies, processes, procedure rules and customer standards (e.g. finance, procurement, information management, complaints, FOI). Alongside the programme focussed on 'Strengthen financial management' it will ensure the Council has a tighter grip on its delivery, performance and risk management.

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director - DPH
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Service Director – Planning, Legal and Governance
Executive Member:	Finance Portfolio Holder

Activity:	Start	End
Establish a statutory officer board consisting of the Head of Paid Service (HoPS), S.151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer to provide oversight and direction of key issues for the council and drive good governance (including implementation of internal audit recommendations).	Oct 2025	Oct 2025/on-going
Provide a clear message from the Head of Paid Service reiterating the importance of compliance with our governance and assurance arrangements	Oct 2025	Oct 2025/on-going
Continue activity to address and improve information governance (including FOI responses, data protection, etc).	Oct 2025	Dec 2025/on-going
Provide an analysis of the biggest risks to compliance across the organisation and use this to determine the priorities for action and attention (including development of a performance dashboard for monitoring and managing compliance moving forward)	Nov 2025	Jan 2026
Develop a coordinated and consolidated approach to planning for, and responding to, external review, audit and inspections – to include: (a) Collating a programme of planned and anticipated inspections, reviews and audit activity so we can support them corporately (b) One plan/approach for monitoring of responses to all corporate governance recommendations from inspection, review and self-assessment activity (e.g. AGS, peer challenge, external audit, CQC, etc) – ensuring oversight of performance, implementation and impact	Nov 2025	March 2026
Undertake a review of mandatory training and refresh the programme (People Plan action)	Jul 2025	Apr 2026
Review and refresh the Council's constitution - including: • Work with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to review and refresh the Council's Constitution • Develop and deliver a programme of activity to support the implementation of the new Constitution	Nov 2025	May 2026
Develop and implement a process for learning lessons from complaints (People Plan action)	Jan 2026	Apr 2026
Develop and deliver Audit Committee training (supported by LGA)	Nov 2025	Jan 2026
Implementation of the new Local Government Ombudsman's complaint handling code from April 2026.	Nov 2025	Apr 2026

Aim: A Council supports and enables its workforce to excel

Programme 9

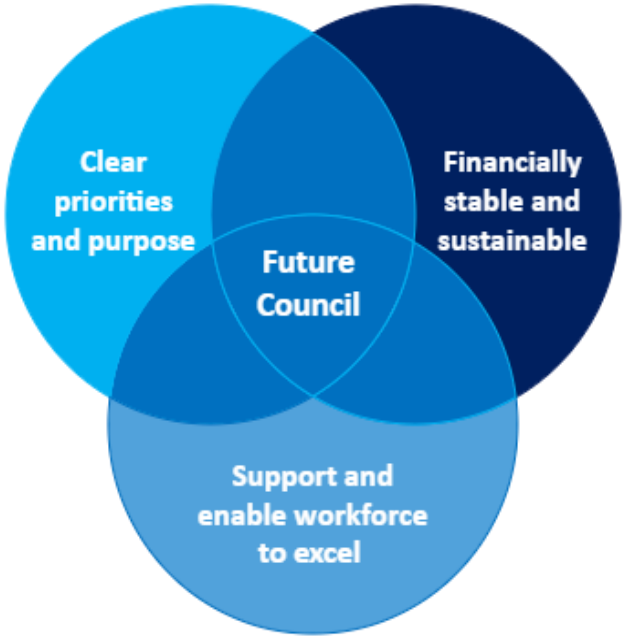
Digital Programme

A programme of initiatives and developments to modernise our services, improve operational efficiency, and better serve our residents and stakeholders, building on the Digital Customer programme, reviewing and reprioritising planned initiatives, and the implementation of a new intranet. At the heart of the programme is an ambition to provide simpler, efficient, secure, predictive, data-led services, that cost less to deliver.

Senior Accountable Officer (SAO)	Executive Director - DPH
Responsible Delivery Lead (RDL):	Service Director – Enabling
Executive Member:	Finance Portfolio Holder

Activity:	Start	End
Review priority areas from opportunity backlogs and discovery work, align to priorities.	Oct 2025	Jan 2026
Establish Chief Digital Information Officer & Digital Transformation Board creating a strong governance model that will ensure accountability, transparency and alignment with statutory obligations, best practice, the DSIT Blueprint and LGA guidance	Oct 2025	Jan 2026
Develop the strategic basis (Digital Strategy, Cyber Strategy, and Data Strategy) to drive the creation of a data-driven, and agile organisation capable of delivering modern, efficient public services.	Oct 2025	Feb 2026
Continue to develop Secure, Resilient Foundations (CAF, PSN, Cyber Exercises)	Oct 2025	July 2027
Web Development (Website migration, Intranet rebuild) delivering visible and impactful change, a strategic hub for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and service delivery, enabling efficiency, compliance, and innovation.	Oct 2025	Mar 2027
Continue to modernise systems with connected platforms so services work together - embracing Automation, AI & Integration (with a focus on the "Top 50" high volume, high cost to service tasks redesigned) - following the Local Digital Declaration and Central Digital and Data Office's mission for secure, efficient, sustainable technology.	Dec 2025	Ongoing (through to Mar 2029)
Further developed 'Digital Front Doors' to deliver user centred inclusive public services, designed around real people, making them easy to use and accessible for everyone, including those who need extra support. This aligns with the Government Design Principles and the Technology Code of Practice.	Jan 2026	Ongoing (through to Mar 2029)
Develop and deliver a programme of Digital Skills, Inclusion and Culture Change that enables confidence we can deliver transformation, build digital skills and capabilities across the council.	Apr 2026	Ongoing (through to Mar 2029)

Appendix 2:
Key risks to the delivery of the Plan

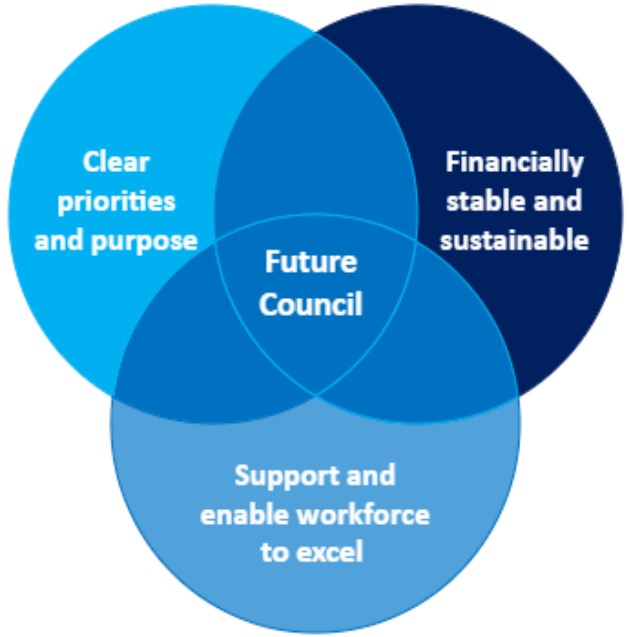


Appendix 2: Risks

As well as specific programme related risks, there are overarching risks across the whole Improvement Plan which are set out below These risks will be reviewed regularly by the Leadership Board and Improvement Board:

Risk title	Risk description	Controls and Mitigations
Capacity and pace of delivery	Failure to deliver the improvement plan in a timely and effective manner due to capacity constraints. Delivering the improvement plan needs to be carried out rapidly, achieving significant changes across the Council. This needs to build on changes delivered to date and incorporate new areas of focus and action. As the Council continues to change the way it works to achieve outcomes for local communities within available finances, capacity to implement these changes when it is required is a challenge and a risk.	A comprehensive a robust view of the resourcing requirements to deliver the plan, with reprioritisation and allocation taking place. Confirming and securing capacity in key teams that will be enabling the delivery of the plan. Clear and consistent leadership setting out the direction, pace, outcomes and expectations of the change required. Governance and delivery arrangements that remove siloed working Accountability and responsibility clearly articulated and demonstrated, including through progress and impact reporting
Resourcing the plan	Inability to reallocate and invest in functions to support the delivery of the plan will lead to difficulties in delivering the improvement plan. The Council has been prioritising resources over several years especially to maintain services, particular to vulnerable people. This has needed the reduction of budgets and therefore staffing in other areas of the Council, including council-wide support services. It is recognised that there may need to invest in these services to enable the improvement plan to be realised and contribute to a sustainable council in the future. Failure to align and free up resources to deliver effective change and improvement is a risk.	The Improvement Plan will set out the strategic framework for improvement activity, bringing together the Financial Stability Plan and the Sustainability Strategy, and overall Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). A new Corporate Plan 2026-30 is being developed, and this will take the priorities of the council, alongside the improvement plan and the financial strategy. Specifying and negotiating with MHCLG the amount and use of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) to deliver financial stability through the Improvement Plan and financial sustainability in the medium to longer term.
Understanding and perception of change	Inability to maintain stakeholder confidence leading to reduced support for the improvement plan. There is a risk that residents, partners, members and staff see short-term changes in performance reducing rather than improving as the Council implements the plan.	Clear and timely internal and external communications and engagement that describes the process the Council is going through with open and honest descriptions of current progress while setting out the rationale for change and where the council is aiming to be in the future.
Managing interdependencies across the plan	Failure to manage interdependencies across the improvement plan leading to disruption, duplication or failure in delivering the improvement plan at pace. There are a wide range of interdependencies between the various change programmes in the improvement plan. Without appropriate management of these interdependencies and the sequencing between them there is a risk that delivery of the Plan could be negatively impacted, activity is duplicated, or programmes could become unviable	The need for direct communications between Senior Accountable Officers (SAOs) responsible for the programmes of action has been identified early. Interdependencies between the programmes have been identified and shared. Changes in the performance or scope of change programmes will be communicated via the Improvement Plan governance structures and arrangements. Clear leadership will set out the aims and priorities of the change required. Strengthened Project Management Office (PMO)

Appendix 3:
Key Performance Measures

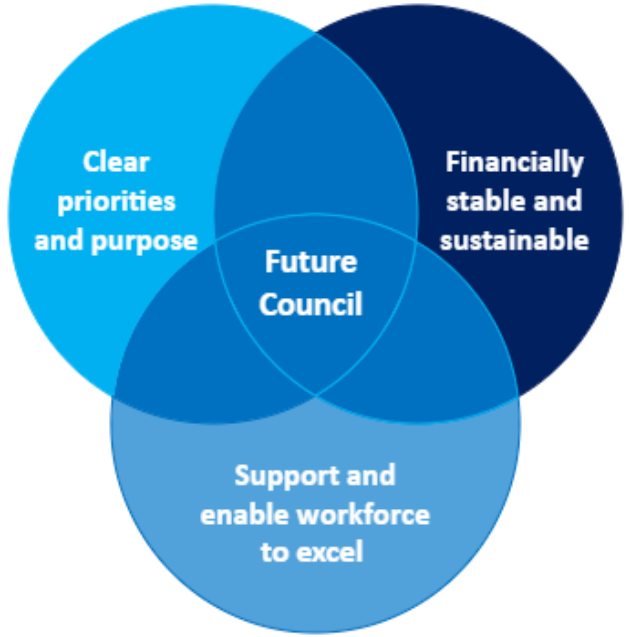


Appendix 3: Key Performance Measures

Reporting on delivery and impact of the Improvement Plan will use a combination of deliverables, milestones, key performance indicators (KPIs) and measures. Listed below are a range of KPIs and measures that we intend to use. Some measures need developing and baseline information/position establishing.

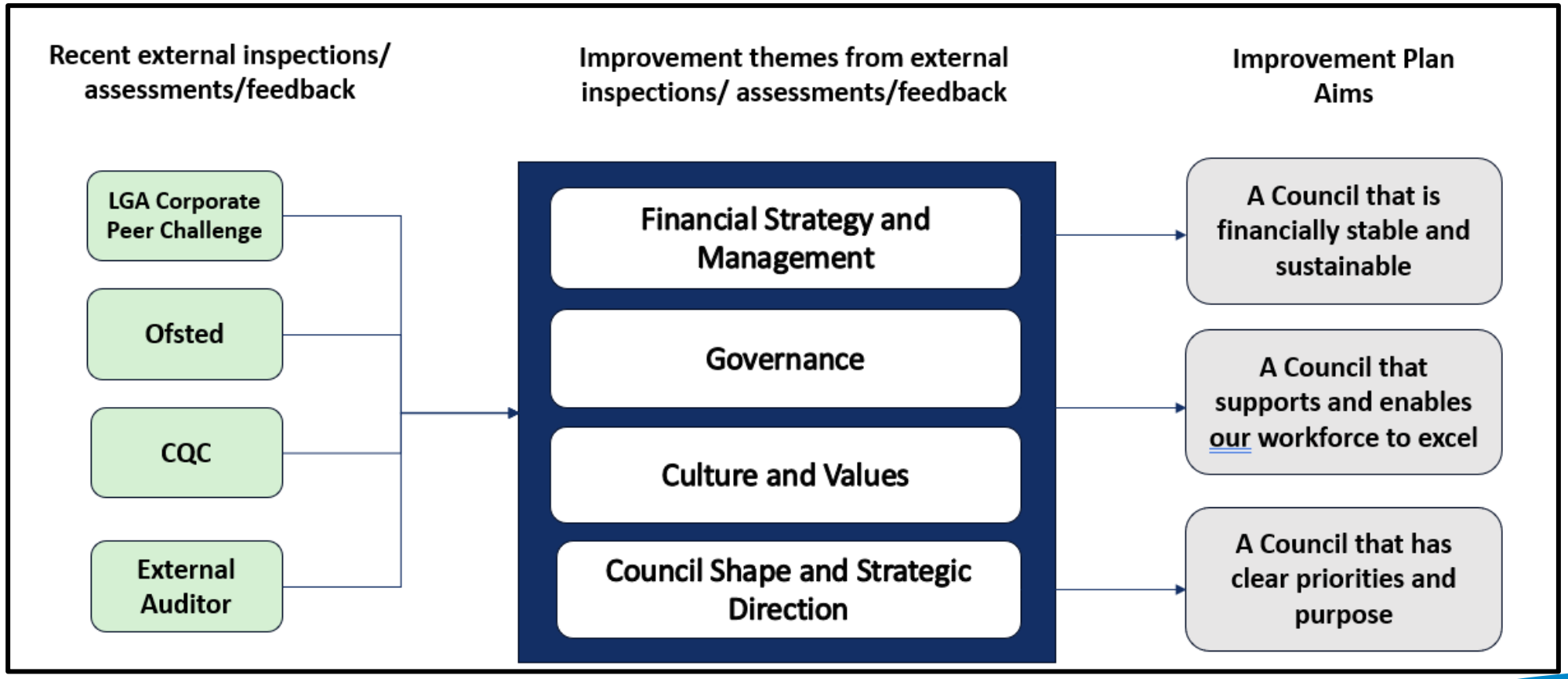
Aim	Benefits/Outcomes	KPIs / Measures
Financially Stable and Sustainable	A balanced budget for 2026/27 Improved delivery of savings and income through more robust plans Transformation proposals that deliver financial stability and sustainability Robust financial monitoring, management and accountability A sustainable financial strategy aligning revised service delivery to available financial resources Strengthened procurement and contract management practices	Budget performance KPIs – against profile, underspend/overspend, GFB resilience Financial health KPIs – e.g. Levels of reserves, levels of debt, use of EFS over MTFS Savings delivery: % of savings plans in place, % savings delivered Income against target / Income collection rates Completion of revenue budget monitoring by budget holders
Clear priorities and purpose	New plans approved (Corporate Plan and 2050 partnership vision/plan) Increased understanding of council priorities and their roles in delivering them Transformation aligned with corporate plan, improvement plan and financial stability plan More transformation projects delivered on time and within budget Future Council principles guiding delivery, transformation and continuous improvement More collaboration with partners and communities Increased stakeholder confidence and satisfaction Improved public perception of the council	New plans approved: corporate plan 2026-30, Shropshire 2050 partnership plan Service delivery plans in place and aligned to Shropshire Plan Staff perception and understanding of council priorities and operating principles External perceptions of council: (a) Residents (b) partners *(to be developed)* Elected member perceptions of the council *(to be developed)*
Staff are supported and enabled to excel	Improved staff satisfaction Increased levels of staff engagement Reduced levels of staff absence Increase in compliance performance (FOIs, SARs, Complaints, etc) Increase levels of mandatory training completed Increase numbers of PDPs completed Reduction in number customer complaints More digital enabled services National recognition/awards	Responding to corporate governance recommendations *(to be developed)* Staff sentiment and perceptions (Pulse Surveys) Number of FOIs and SARs and performance in responding to them Number of: (a) Compliments (b) complaints and performance in responding to them Workforce data – including absence, turnover and retention, % of agency staff Mandatory training completion: (a) staff and (b) elected members % of PDPs completed

Appendix 4:
Mapping external recommendations to the Plan



Appendix 4: How the Plan responds to external feedback and recommendations

The Improvement Plan has been developed to consolidate the improvement-focused recommendations and key issues to the Council that have been made following external reviews and inspections. Over the past 12 months the council has received reports following the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, Ofsted and CQC inspections of Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care and the External Auditor. The feedback and recommendations have been used to inform the Improvement Plan aims and priorities. The diagram and the table on the following pages help to illustrate how the Plan responds to them.



Appendix 4: How the Plan responds to external feedback and recommendations

Improvement Aim	Externally identified recommendations/ key issues			
A Council that is financially stable and sustainable	CPC1: Urgently prepare a multi-year plan (MTFS) demonstrating and detailing the council's route to financial and operational stability. Ensure this is realistic, widely understood and shared. Programme 1: Financial stability Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy	CPC2: Immediately assess and negotiate your EFS requirements for 25/26 and for the period of the MTFS before a s114 notice becomes a necessity. Programme 1: Financial stability Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy	CPC9: Budget monitoring needs to be focussed on actual spend and projections with clear understanding of one off and recurring expenditure with appropriate intervention and action. Programme 1: Financial stability Programme 3: Strengthening financial management policy & practice	
A Council that supports and enables its staff	CPC3: Quickly implement an externally supported, independently led Improvement Board with CIPFA, a governance expert and LGA peers, preferably with support from MHCLG, to advise, assist and drive urgent changes. Programme 8: Getting the basics right	CPC5: Consider how to urgently reinvigorate your cultural connections and relationships across the workforce – the organisation has become fractured, and the current context has blunted the value of initiatives such as 'Getting It Right' Programme 7 : People Plan	CPC8: Improve the status of and make efforts to drive good governance; consider implementing a 'statutory officers board' or similar mechanism to include the head of paid service, monitoring officer and s151 officer which would consider pressing issues, co-ordinate responses and drive implementation of, for example, internal audit recommendations. Programme 8: Getting the basics right	CPC10: Change your narrative, tell your story and clearly celebrate your success as one council. Programme 7 : People Plan Programme 9: Digital programme
A Council that has clear priorities and purpose	CPC4: Prepare a clear whole council transformation plan that carries the aspirations and narrative for the future council and accurately aligns the resources for delivery. Ensure this is realistic, widely understood and shared Programme 6: Review and realignment of transformation programme	CPC6: Coproduce a new council plan that recognises the financial constraints the council is under and delivers the manifesto commitments. Ensure this is realistic, widely understood, socialised and owned. Programme 4: Corporate Plan 2026-30 Programme 5: Future council	CPC7: Improve the visibility of managerial and political leaders to help make the organisation legible for colleagues at a time of great change. Programme 7 : People Plan Programme 9: Digital programme	

CPC – Corporate Peer Challenge recommendation EA – External Auditor Annual Report 2024/25 (see page 42)

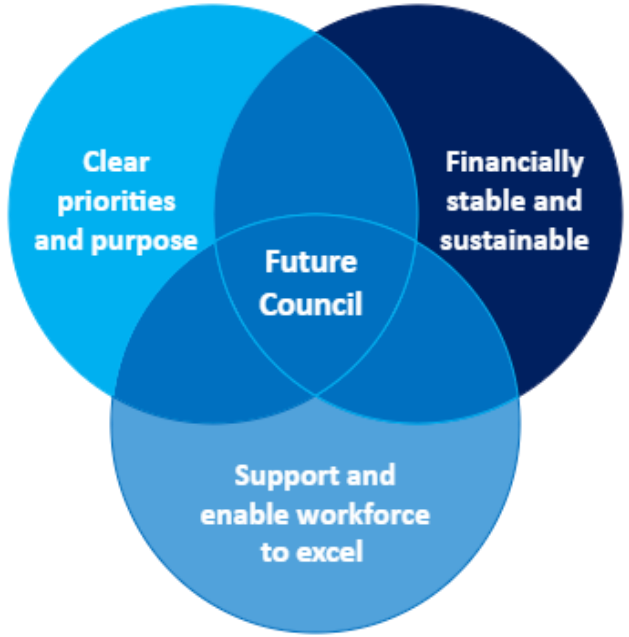
Appendix 4: How the Plan responds to external feedback and recommendations

Improvement Aim	Externally identified recommendations/ key issues			
A Council that is financially stable and sustainable	EA SR1: The Council should: continue, at pace, the action taken to address the financial challenges it faces. In addition, the Council should undertake an immediate review of all service, both statutory and non-statutory, and identify the cost of minimum viable service provision. This will enable the Council to understand the scale of its structural deficit between the cost of service and the income available to the Council. This action should give the Council an understanding of immediate decisions and savings that can be delivered, replicating actions that would be taken were the Council to issue a Section 114 Notice. The Council develop a realistic and deliverable plan over the medium term as to how Exceptional Financial Support will support the increase in financial resilience, and how the Council will reduce reliance on this support to reach a financially sustainable position. Exceptional Financial Support should be temporary in nature, and the Council needs to clearly articulate the plan for reaching a financially sustainable position without undue reliance on temporary sources of support. The Council should also immediately action the recommendations raised in the Internal Audit review and report to Audit and Governance Committee on the progress of addressing the recommendations to avoid a similar situation occurring again in the future. Programme 1: Financial stability Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy	EA KR1: The Council should: review all savings programmes to scrutinise deliverability and ensure that, when setting the budget for 2026/27 the savings programmes included are deliverable and achievable. Programme 1: Financial stability Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy Programme 3: Strengthening financial management policy & practice (link to full report and recommendation wording – EAAR 2024/25)	EA KR2: The Council should: continue to drive forward activity that seeks to mitigate the growth of the DSG deficit whilst continuing to engage through the Schools Forum on the management plan in place. Programme 1: Financial stability Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy Programme 3: Strengthening financial management policy & practice	EA IR1: The Council should: review its approach to reporting on slippage against the capital programme and, as appropriate, enhance the detail of reporting. Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy Programme 3: Strengthening financial management policy & practice
A Council that supports and enables its staff	EA KR3: The Council should: immediately create an action plan as to how to address the pervasive issues across the Council that are contributing to the "Limited Assurance" opinion from the Head of Policy and Governance (Internal Audit). Programme 8: Getting the basics right	EA IR2: The Council should – develop a clear action plan for addressing the recommendations raised in the Corporate Peer Review.		

EA – External Auditor Annual Report 2024/25 – SR (Statutory Recommendation), KR (Key Recommendation), IR (Improvement Recommendation)

Shropshire Council

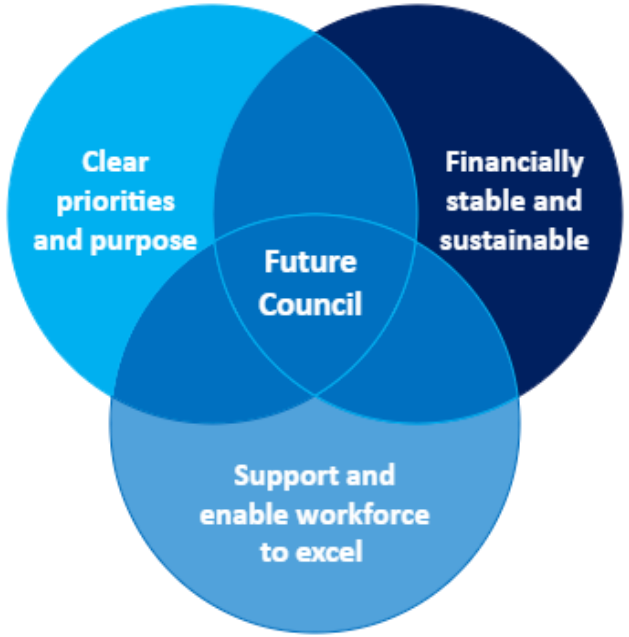
Appendix 5:
Glossary of Terms



Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Local Government Association (LGA)	The national membership body for councils in England and Wales. Its main role is to represent and support councils, acting as the voice of local government to national government and other stakeholders
Care Quality Commission (CQC)	The independent regulator of health and adult social care services in England. Its main purpose is to ensure that care provided is safe, effective, compassionate, and high quality
Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)	The non-ministerial department of the UK Government responsible for inspecting and regulating services that care for children and young people, as well as those providing education and skills training
External Auditor	An external auditor for councils is an independent audit professional or firm appointed to review and provide assurance on a council's financial statements and arrangements for securing value for money. In Shropshire, the appointed external auditor is Grant Thornton
Best Value	A statutory requirement under the Local Government Act 1999. It requires councils to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which their functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness
Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)	An independent body in England that investigates complaints about councils, adult social care providers, and certain other public services
General Fund Balances and Reserves	Funds held by councils as a mitigation against the risk of unknown or unexpected financial pressures
Programme Management Office (PMO)	A function or team within an organisation that provides governance, standards, and support for managing programmes and projects
Exceptional Financial Support (EFS)	Temporary financial assistance provided by the UK Government to councils facing severe financial difficulties
Third Party Spend	Refers to the money the Council spends on goods and services provided by external suppliers or contractors rather than produced internally.
Strategic Operating Model	A high-level framework that defines how an organisation delivers its strategy through its structure, processes, technology, and people
Regulator of Social Housing (RSH)	The independent body in England responsible for regulating registered providers of social housing, such as housing associations and councils
Local Government Outcomes Framework (LGOF)	A national framework that sets priority outcomes for local authorities and measures progress using agreed metrics
SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)	Children and young people who have learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn compared to most others of the same age
Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)	An independent, national body that supports councils and other public bodies to improve governance, accountability, and scrutiny practices.
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG)	The UK Government department responsible for housing policy, local government oversight, community development, and planning
CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy)	A professional accountancy body that provides qualifications, training, and guidance and sets accounting standards for councils

Shropshire Council



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Committee and Date **Transformation and Improvement OSC 1 December 2025** **Cabinet 3 December 2025** **Council 11 December 2025**	Item Public

Shopshire Council Improvement Plan

Responsible Officer:	Tanya Miles – Interim Chief Executive	
email:	tanya.miles@shropshire.gov.uk	
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Heather Kidd	

Synopsis

Shropshire Council needs to address its serious financial position with urgency. The Improvement Plan sets out how the Council is going to ensure it has stable and sustainable finances, a clear purpose and priorities to work to, and staff who are enabled to excel, including the immediate response to the Financial Emergency.

Executive Summary

2.1 In July 2025 the Local Government Association (LGA) carried out a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) at the invitation of the Council. The peer challenge identified 10 recommendations and several additional opportunities for the council to address and recognised the challenging financial position of the council. The recommendations, which were all accepted, included establishing an Improvement Board with an independent chair. In addition, during 2025 the council has received other external feedback including reports from Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) for Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care, rating these services as Outstanding and Good respectively, and the annual External Auditors letter (reported to the 26 September 2025 Audit and Governance Committee) and the

External Auditors Annual Report (reported to the 27 November 2025 Audit and Governance Committee). Additionally, the Council declared a Financial Emergency at 10 September 2025 Cabinet.

2.2 In response to this external feedback and the declaration of the Financial Emergency, the Council has taken immediate action to address the issues raised. This has included an action plan responding to the recommendations from the CPC (reported to Cabinet on the 15 October 2025), setting up the Improvement Board, which had its first meeting on Monday 10 November, appointing an independent chair, and developing the Improvement Plan attached at Appendix 1. The CPC action plan has been incorporated into the Improvement Plan. It is intended that this wider Improvement Plan, as the first part of the Council's Strategic Plan, will be presented to Council in December 2025. The council has received significant support from the Local Government Association to contribute to the improvement journey.

2.3 This paper presents the draft Improvement Plan (appendix 1) for consideration, feedback and confirmation before being presented to Council on 11 December. The Plan is not a detailed delivery plan. It is designed to be a single framework and plan for the Council's improvement activity. In doing so it sets out the governance and support arrangements that will ensure that the council delivers the plan, and brings together existing and new activity and actions that will enable strong foundations that will enable the council to deliver its priorities and outcomes for Shropshire communities.

2.4 The Plan is structured around three aims which together will support the Council to make best use of the resource it has available to it to better deliver, enable, and influence for Shropshire and its residents by:

- Having clear priorities and purpose
- Being financially stable and sustainable
- Supporting and enabling our workforce to excel

Each aim initially has three priority programmes of action (see paragraph 7.2) Some of this action is a continuation of existing work and some activity is new. As a single overarching plan, it makes the links to a range of strategies and plans that contribute to realising the aims, including a new People Plan which will include much of the activity that helps us to be a Council that improves how we support and enable our workforce to deliver. That Plan is also presented to Cabinet (03/12/25) for consideration. There are also key elements of the financial stability activity on that will be presented to Cabinet and Council over the coming months including the Capital Strategy, draft Financial Strategy, Fees and Charges and Treasury Management Strategy.

2.5 The Improvement Plan has been developed with a clear eye on the future council. The Council has previously considered how it needs to adopt new ways of working to deliver its priorities while being a financially sustainable organisation. Reports to Council in July 2024 and February 2025 set out thinking on a new operating model. Together with the 'New Direction' report agreed at Council in September 2025, they suggest several key principles that should guide how the Council will operate and improve. The Improvement Plan draws on those to ensure that improvement activity does not simply focus on addressing the immediate issues but has a strong

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focus on enabling the council to deliver the outcomes and services it has priorities in the way that it has identified it want to work.

2.6 The Plan has been developed with engagement with staff at all levels and with Members. There have been weekly updates to the Senior Leadership Forum, six briefing sessions during the first week of November for all staff, an online form for staff to share thoughts and feedback, regular development conversations with Leadership Board, introductory meetings with all Group Leaders, weekly updates with the Leader and Deputy Leader, two briefings for the Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and an all member briefing. Throughout these briefings, feedback has been taken, and questions asked and responded to. A key message has been that there will more engagement and involvement of staff in particular, and Members in the implementation of the Plan, the development of the Corporate Plan, and for all strategies and plans that are developed going forward.

2.7 As highlighted in previous reports to 25 September Council and 15 October Cabinet on the CPC and improvement work, the Improvement Plan is part of a suite of organisation wide strategic plans which together form the Shropshire Plan. The suite also includes the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which will be agreed at Council in February 2026, the Corporate Plan which has started in its preparation and will be further developed in the new year for agreement at Council in May 2026, and the Shropshire 2050 Partnership Plan, which will set out a more outward focus about the place and how the council will work with others to realise shared outcomes.

Recommendations

T&I OSC are asked to:

3.1 Consider the draft Improvement Plan (Appendix 1)

3.2 Provide observations and any recommendations through a verbal report by the Chair to Cabinet at their meeting on the 3 December 2025

3.3 Identify how and where the committee can and will add value to the delivery of the Improvement Plan

Cabinet are asked to:

3.1 Review, comment on, and recommend the draft Improvement Plan (Appendix 1) to Council.

3.2 Recommend to Council the governance arrangements set out in the Plan.

3.3 Recommend to Council that the capacity and resources to support the delivery of transformation required through this plan will be aligned to the MTFS.

Council are asked to:

3.1 Consider and agree the draft Improvement Plan (Appendix 1).

3.2 Agree the governance arrangements set out in the Plan.

3.3 Agree that the capacity and resources to support the delivery of transformation required through this plan will be aligned to the MTFS.

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Report

Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

4.1 The Council needs to improve and demonstrate to residents, partners, and the Government that it is doing so with urgency. It has a serious financial position to address and needs to do this by both pursuing the opportunities to do this and managing and mitigating the risks to achieving them. Failure to do so could result in Government intervention. The Improvement Plan has been developed with a clear view of what authorities that have been subject to intervention have been required to do and sets out how the Council will deliver the improvements it needs to make over the next 12 to 18 months to the end of March 2027.

4.2 The following set out the risks to achieving the improvement plan at this current point in time. Additional and amended risks will be identified and managed as they arise as the Plan is implemented. The Council's Strategic risks are also currently being reviewed which includes how they align to the requirements of the Improvement Plan and the Improvement Board.

Risk	*Mitigation*
Capacity and pace of delivery - Failure to deliver the improvement plan in a timely and effective manner due to capacity constraints	• A comprehensive and robust view of the resourcing requirements to deliver the plan as delivery arrangements are confirmed by responsible lead senior officers, with reprioritisation and allocation taking place. • Clear and consistent leadership setting out the direction, pace, outcomes and expectations of the change required. • Governance and delivery arrangements that remove siloed working • Accountability and responsibility clearly articulated and demonstrated, including through progress and impact reporting
Resourcing the plan - Inability to reallocate and invest in functions to support the delivery of the plan will lead to difficulties in delivering the improvement plan	The delivery approach for the Improvement Plan will set out the strategic framework which improvement activity will be delivered within, bringing together the Financial Stability Plan and the Sustainability Strategy, with the MTFS. A new Corporate Plan is being developed and this will take the priorities of the council, alongside the improvement plan and the financial strategy. Specifying and negotiating with MHCLG the amount and use of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) to deliver financial stability through the Improvement Plan and financial sustainability in the medium to longer term.
Understanding and perception of change - Inability to maintain stakeholder confidence leading to reduced support for the improvement plan	Clear and timely internal and external communications and engagement that describes the process the Council is going through with open and honest descriptions of current progress while setting out the rationale for change and where the council is aiming to be in the future.

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Managing interdependencies across the plan - Failure to manage interdependencies across the improvement plan leading to disruption, duplication or failure in delivering the improvement plan.	• The need for direct communications between Strategic Accountable Officer (SAOs) responsible for the programmes of action has been identified early. • Interdependencies between the programmes have been identified and shared. • Changes in the performance or scope of change programmes will be communicated via the proposed governance structure. • Clear leadership will set out the aims and priorities of the change required. • Strengthened Corporate Programme Management Office (CPMO)

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 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.

5.2 The initial costs associated with the development of the Improvement Board and the creation of an Improvement Plan have been funded by contributions from LGA or managed within existing resources.

5.3 The calculation and confirmation of the resources required to implement the Improvement Plan and what is required to realise financial sustainability into the future is taking place. Delivering the plan will require the council to reprioritise resources to achieve the necessary change and include identifying where investment will be needed. The council has written to the government in relation to requesting Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) for the remainder of 2025/26, and for the coming years, which will enable this. This investment will be essential in enabling the council to develop and implement changes to achieve sustainable models of working and service delivery of achieve the outcomes within the available finances.

5.4 The financial implications of the Improvement Plan will be set out as accurately as possible in early December to inform the EFS application to MHCLG. The detailed

position will ultimately be reflected in the Financial Strategy due to be approved by Council in February 2026.

Climate Change Appraisal

6.1 Whilst this report and the Improvement Plan do not present options and recommendations that directly impact on climate change, the decisions that need to be taken and the actions that will need to take place to deliver financial sustainability and the priorities and outcomes of the council are likely to have impacts.

6.2 Opportunities to decarbonise the provision of services and increase energy efficiency of council assets may require some capital investment but will realise financial benefits e.g. through reducing energy usage, or through the generation of energy on council assets that either bring costs down or can generate income.

6.3 Climate change appraisals will need to be undertaken as appropriate for each project and approach that is developed to ensure that opportunities are identified and pursued, and that any 'invest to save' opportunities are investigated and fully evidenced to ensure that these can be taken into account in decision making.

Background

7.1 The Improvement Plan sets out how Shropshire Council will improve, ensuring it is a 'best value' authority that that is efficient and cost-effective and delivers, enables and influences for Shropshire and its residents. Delivering the improvement plan will provide assurance to residents, Members, staff, and partners that the council is improving how it operates and performs.

7.2 The Improvement Plan is not a detailed delivery plan. It acts as an overarching framework for council improvement activity, which are aligned to three aims. The priorities and initial programmes of action in the plan sit beneath these three aims and provide the basis of improvement for the next 18 months, up to the end of March 2027. Although the aims and programmes are set out in a table (see below), there is no hierarchy or sequencing behind where they are located, as they should be seen as interdependent elements of the Plan. They provide a basis for governance and performance reporting. The programmes vary in size, scale and complexity, and not all have been fully developed.

Aim	**Priority activity/project/programme**
A council that is financially stable and sustainable (Pounds)	Programme 1: Financial Stability
	Programme 2: Financial Sustainability Strategy
	Programme 3: Strengthening financial management policy & practice
A Council that has clear priorities and purpose (Priorities)	Programme 4: Corporate Plan 2026-30
	Programme 5: Future Council – including: • Enabling partnerships and communities • Place shaping role • Operating principles and ways of working
	Programme 6: Review and realignment of the transformation programme

A council that supports and enables our workforce to excel (People)	Programme 7: People Plan – including: • Employee engagement and enrolment • New ways of working – services and support staff
	Programme 8: Getting the basics right (strengthening corporate governance and compliance)
	Programme 9: Digital programme

7.3 The Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) recommended that the council took action to strengthen corporate governance and compliance, which is one of the programmes of action in the improvement plan (Programme 8 in the table above).

7.4 The plan also sets out the arrangements by the council to ensure the delivery of the plan to achieve the three aims. This includes the role of the functions that will provide support to the delivery, as well as confirming the senior officer roles and Portfolio Holders who will be accountable and responsible. It also shares the role of the Improvement Board and how it fits with the council's political governance structures (Council, Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and the Audit and Governance Committee).

7.5 The aims in the plan will last beyond this timeframe and should form the basis of the council's continuous improvement. The approaches to how they are delivered will need to adjust to changing requirements and the environment the council is operating in.

7.6 The Plan needs to have a clear eye on the future way that the council is going to work and what it is prioritising. It needs to frame the improvement that will be made against this to ensure that the changes are sustainable and don't just address the immediate issues. As part of this the operating principles have been set out in the improvement plan, consolidating what has been previously agreed around the future way of working These are set out below:

Principle	**What it means**
Agility and Adaptability	We will take an agile and adaptable approach, focussing on what works best, not on a fixed idealistic approach to our role. Some service areas may need to stop, some brought in-house, some delivered in partnership, and some delivered through contract.
Early Intervention and Prevention	We will focus on prevention across all areas of our work. This means resolving issues as early as possible, improving compliance, and reducing the cost of failure. By working with partners and communities, we will make sure people can access the right support at the right time—helping prevent problems before they escalate.
Working with others in Partnership	We will work in genuine partnership at every level to improve services for Shropshire residents. This means enabling and empowering Town and Parish Councils, voluntary groups, and communities to take ownership of local priorities to help where we can no longer deliver key services alone.
Digitally Enabling and Automation	We will make use of new technology and wherever possible and appropriate, will use it to deliver services efficiently and effectively,

	reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and enabling more automation and self-service. Our approach is digital by choice.
Resident and Customer Focus	We will put customers (residents, businesses or communities) first in everything we do so that they receive the right services at the right time and enable a more efficient way of interacting and engaging with our customers and communities.
Data, Insight and Demand Management	We will use data to get a better understanding of current and future demand for services and support and use insight and evidence from stakeholders to inform our decision making.

7.7 The plan responds to the improvement needs established through events and external reports and recommendations. These include the council announcing a financial emergency at Cabinet on the 10 September 2025, the report and recommendations of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge in July 2025 and reported to Council 25 September 2025, recent CQC and Ofsted inspections (rated Good and Outstanding respectively), the External Auditors Letter reported to the Audit and Governance Committee on 26 September 2025 and the Annual Report of the External Auditor (Audit and Governance Committee 27 November 2025), and the Best Value duty and standards for Local Authorities.

7.8 Immediate action has been taken to respond to the financial emergency which includes spend control measures and increased monitoring. The draft Medium-term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was presented to Cabinet on the 15 October, and an action plan responding to the recommendations from the LGA Peer Challenge was reported to the same meeting. These actions have been incorporated into the Improvement Plan.

7.9 In addition to responding to these different sources of external feedback, the Improvement Plan consolidates the different improvement focused activity of the council into a single plan. This includes programmes and actions to deliver the People Plan, Capital Strategy, Fees and Charges Policy, Capital Strategy, Treasury Management Strategy, and Financial Strategy. Having one improvement plan that brings all relevant improvement actions into a single plan to help ensure consistency, remove duplication, alignment of activity and enable the council to be efficient, economic, and effective. This will be followed by the development of the corporate plan building on these and the New Directions for Shropshire paper presented to council on the 25 September 2025.

7.10 The development of the plan has been informed by engagement with staff and the Members. There were six engagement sessions for staff carried out during early November where the three Improvement Plan aims and the then draft priority programme areas were tested and feedback sought. These sessions were a mix of online and face to face sessions attended by staff across different levels. The Leadership Board and the Senior Leaders Forum have been engaged and involved in the Plan development at least weekly. There has also been strong engagement with Members including weekly updates with the Leader and Deputy Leader, discussions with Cabinet, introductory meetings with Group Leaders, an all-Member briefing, and briefings for the Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

7.11 The following table shares the overall structure of the improvement plan and provides brief descriptions of what each section covers.

Section	Purpose
1. Introduction	This section explains the purpose of the Plan and sets out the context for the Council's improvement. It is part of the council's Shropshire Plan strategic plan suite with the Corporate Plan 2026-2030, the Shropshire 2050 Partnership Plan, and the MTFS 2026/27-2030/31. The Improvement Plan sets out how the council will be strengthened. It can be considered to be the first chapter of the strategic plan, setting out the organisational health priorities.
2. Our Future Council	This section summarises how the Council will need to change how it looks, feels and operates so that improvement is focused on the future council **–** picking up the key principles and ways of working set out in previous reports agreed at Council on the future operating model and more recently the New Direction paper that was presented to Council on the 25 September 2025.
3. Our Improvement Aims and Priorities	This section sets out our overall aims and priorities for improvement, and the outcomes and benefits we are looking to achieve. It provides the structure used to organise our improvement activities.
4. Making sure we deliver	This section provides a summary of the arrangements being developed and strengthened to support and enable the delivery of the Plan, including: • Governance arrangements that provides robust programme management, monitoring and assurance reporting • Capacity and resources to support the delivery of transformation • Communications and engagement to support the development and delivery of the Plan and its programmes of action
Appendix 1: Improvement activity – priority programme summaries	Provides a summary of the key activity and milestones for each of the priority programmes of action
Appendix 2: Risks	Provides a list of the key risks to delivery of the Improvement Plan
Appendix 3: Key Performance Indicators	Lists the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and measures we are considering to demonstrate progress towards the overall aims and realisation of the intended benefits and outcomes.
Appendix 4: Mapping improvement activity to external recommendations	Lists key improvement plan aims and programmes against the external improvement focused recommendations the council has received

7.12 Enabling the delivery of the Improvement Plan is a key consideration for the council. This will require some current areas of work to be reduced or paused whilst others are accelerated and introduced. This will mean that resources, both financial and employee, will need to be reprioritised and refocused at as early a stage as possible starting in December 2025, and that agreement from Government for the council to

access funding via Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) will be required. EFS will bridge any current gaps and help close future funding gaps related to the Council being able to deliver the change at pace that is needed to become a financially sustainable organisation able to deliver its responsibilities, priorities and outcomes. There will also be the need and opportunity for staff to be involved and engaged in the implementation of the Plan, helping to develop how the aims are put into action and the Council being stable and sustainable.

Conclusions

8.1 The Improvement Plan provides the overarching and coherent framework of the council's improvement work to March 2027, being a single plan that consolidates plans, strategies and actions.

8.2 The Improvement Plan aims are designed to be relevant and appropriate into the medium and longer term, beyond the timeframe of the plan, and provide the structure for continuous improvement by the council. This plan is being developed alongside the MTFS and will help the council be financially stable and sustainable and ensure that staff are enabled to move the council forward for Shropshire communities.

8.3 Successfully delivering the improvement plan will give the council a strong platform to deliver the priorities and outcomes that have been articulated in the New Direction for Shropshire paper presented to 25 September 2025 Council that and will inform the Corporate Plan 2026-2030 and the Shropshire 2050 Partnership Plan.

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

Q1 Financial Monitoring Report – 17 September Cabinet (check whether P4 report)

CPC Report – 25 September 2025 Council

CPC Action Pan – 15 October 2025 Cabinet

Draft Financial Strategy – 15 October 2025 Cabinet

Local Member:	All

Appendices [Please list the titles of Appendices]

Appendix 1 – Draft Shropshire Council Improvement Plan

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Committee and Date:
Cabinet 3rd December 2025

Item

Public

People Plan

Responsible Officer:	Rachel Robinson		
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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Cllr Heather Kidd		

1. Synopsis

The Shropshire Council People Plan is a comprehensive roadmap for developing a high-performing, inclusive, and sustainable workforce. It is central to achieving the Council's vision for the future, supporting the workforce, and delivering the outcomes set out in the Improvement Plan and forthcoming Corporate Plan as part of the one Shropshire Plan.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 In July 2025 the LGA carried out a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) at the invitation of the Council. The peer challenge identified 10 recommendations and a number of additional opportunities for the council to address and recognise the challenging financial position of the council. The recommendations, which were all accepted, included those which recognised the need to be a Council that improves how we support and enable our workforce to deliver. The Council want every member of our team to feel valued and supported as we move forward together.

2.2 In response to this external feedback and the declaration of the Financial Emergency, the Council has taken immediate action to address the issues raised. This has included an action plan responding to the recommendations from the CPC

(reported to Cabinet on the 15 October 2025) including developing The People Plan and Improvement Plan.

2.3 This paper presents the draft People Plan (appendix 1) for consideration, feedback and approval. The plan is not a detailed delivery plan. It is designed to be a single framework and plan for the Councils workforce improvement activity, setting out the governance and support arrangements that will ensure that the council delivers the people plan, consolidating existing and new activity and actions that will enable strong foundations to enable the organisation to deliver its outcomes.

2.4 This plan recognises the dedication and resilience of our staff, and this plan is shaped with our staff's wellbeing and growth at its heart. The people plan sets out Shropshire Council's ambition to be an employer of choice—where staff feel valued, supported, and empowered to excel. It is a five-year, living document that will be regularly reviewed and updated to remain relevant to the Council's evolving needs and external factors, including national agendas for change. The Plan is a key pillar of the Council's wider Improvement Plan and forthcoming Corporate Plan, ensuring that people, culture, and organisational development are at the heart of delivering excellent services to our residents and community.

2.5 The Plan is structured around five interconnected aims, each critical to the Council's transformation and future success. These aims reflect our shared hopes for a workplace where everyone can excel:

- **Culture**: Shaping and embedding a positive, inclusive culture that reflects organisational values, promotes collaboration, diversity, and innovation, and empowers staff to make a difference.
- **Leadership & Talent**: Developing leadership at all levels, ensuring the right skills, behaviours, and mindset to drive improvement and support staff.
- **Capability & Capacity**: Identifying and addressing current and future workforce needs through targeted recruitment, retention, and development strategies.
- **Performance**: Implementing a transparent performance management framework that aligns individual and team objectives with organisational goals.
- **Systems & Establishment**: Streamlining systems and processes to support effective, efficient service delivery and organisational sustainability.

2.6 The Plan outlines a series of programmes and actions, including:

- Disseminating and embedding the People Plan and Shropshire Values across the organisation, ensuring that all staff and Members adhere to these principles. These values will be fully incorporated into our competency and behaviour framework and practices, with measurable outcomes assessed against them.
- Developing a comprehensive communications and engagement plan, including regular staff engagement, Pulse survey's, CE Update's and monthly Senior

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leadership Forums. Engagement and coproduction are at the heart of making the Council of the future achieve its ambitions.

- We look forward to celebrating staff and community achievements and milestones, recognising the difference staff make every day.
- Update and deliver an organisational wide Equity, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EEDIB) Plan.
- Conducting workforce skills audits and launching targeted training, especially in digital and data skills.
- The wellbeing of our staff is a priority, and we are committed to listening and responding to what matters most to staff.
- Introducing a new performance management framework and council-wide performance dashboard, including appraisal/good conversations monitoring.
- Regularly measuring progress through key performance indicators (KPIs) such as staff satisfaction, retention, diversity, engagement, and training uptake.

2.7 The People Plan has been developed with a clear eye on the future council. The Council has previously considered how it needs to adopt new ways of working to deliver its aims while being a financially sustainable organisation. The plan has been coproduced with Senior Leadership Forum, Staff including post pulse survey staff engagement sessions and regular development conversations with Leadership Board and discussions with cabinet. The Plan builds on and has been directly developed in response to surveys, events and feedback from external reports and recommendations (page 6 provides more detail). The Plan places strong emphasis on culture change—building trust, encouraging innovation, and motivating staff to do their best. We want every member of our team to feel valued and supported as we move forward together. It commits to open communication, regular feedback, celebrating achievements, and supporting staff wellbeing and career development. The Council will foster an environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and able to contribute to organisational values and goals.

2.8 Delivery of the Plan will be overseen by a dedicated People Change Board, reporting to the Leadership Board and Cabinet, with robust governance, risk management, and regular progress reporting. The Plan is designed to be collaborative, with ongoing engagement and feedback from staff at all levels.

2.9 The People Plan is fully aligned with the Council's Improvement Plan, also being presented at Cabinet (03-12-2025) for consideration. Together, these documents provide a clear direction for the Council's modernisation, improvement, financial sustainability, and delivery of better outcomes for Shropshire's residents. The People Plan ensures that the workforce is equipped, motivated, and supported to deliver on these ambitions.

2.10 The Shropshire Council People Plan is a comprehensive roadmap for developing a high-performing, inclusive, and sustainable workforce. It is central to achieving the

Council's vision for the future, supporting staff to do their very best, and delivering the outcomes set out in the Improvement Plan and Corporate Plan.

3. Recommendations

3.1 Review, comment on, and recommend to full Council the approval of the draft People Plan (Appendix 1).
3.2 Agree the governance arrangements, the aims and values, set out in the Plan.
3.3 Agree the capacity and resources necessary to support the delivery of organisational change and development, as outlined in this plan, are aligned with the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to ensure effective and sustainable implementation

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

We understand that change can be unsettling, and we will support our staff through every step.

Risk	*Response*
Capacity and pace of delivery - Failure to deliver the improvement plan in a timely and effective manner due to capacity constraints	A comprehensive a robust view of the resourcing requirements to deliver the plan, with reprioritisation and allocation taking place. Clear and consistent leadership setting out the direction, pace, outcomes and expectations of the change required. Governance and delivery arrangements that remove siloed working Accountability and responsibility clearly articulated and demonstrated, including through progress and impact reporting
Resourcing the plan - Inability to reallocate and invest in functions to support the delivery of the plan will lead to difficulties in delivering the People Plan	The delivery approach for the People Plan will set out the strategic framework which workforce activity will be delivered within, bringing together the Improvement Plan and the Sustainability Strategy, with the MTFS. A new Corporate Plan is being developed, and this will take the priorities of the council, alongside the People Plan, improvement plan and the financial strategy.

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	Specifying and negotiating with MHCLG the amount and use of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) to deliver financial stability through the Improvement Plan, supported by the People Plan and financial sustainability in the medium to longer term
Understanding and perception of change - Inability to maintain stakeholder confidence leading to reduced support for the people plan	Clear and timely internal and external communications and engagement that describes the process the Council is going through with open and honest descriptions of current progress while setting out the rationale for change and where the council is aiming to be in the future.
Managing interdependencies across the plan - Failure to manage interdependencies across the people plan leading to disruption, duplication or failure in delivering the people plan.	• The need for direct communications between Senior Accountable Officer, SAOs responsible for the programmes of action has been identified early. • Interdependencies between the programmes have been identified and shared within the action plans, for example performance monitoring and training cut across delivery of several priorities and plans. • Changes in the performance or scope of change programmes will be communicated via the proposed governance structure. • Clear leadership will set out the aims and priorities of the change required. • Strengthened Organisational Development Functions and Programme Management Office (PMO)

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. While we must make difficult decisions, we remain committed to open communication and supporting our staff through these changes. 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.

5.2. The initial costs associated with the development of the People Change Board and the creation of a People Plan have been met internally.

5.3. The calculation and confirmation of the resources required to implement the People Plan and what is required to realise financial sustainability into the future is taking place. Delivering the plan will require the council to reprioritise resources to achieve the necessary change and include identifying where investment will be needed. This will need to be refelcted in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

6.1 Whilst this report and the Plan do not present options and recommendations that directly impact on climate change, the decisions that need to be taken and the actions that will need to take place to deliver financial sustainability and the priorities and outcomes of the council are likely to have impacts.

Opportunities to decarbonise the provision of services and increase energy efficiency of council assets may require some capital investment but will realise financial benefits e.g. through reducing energy usage, or through the generation of energy on council assets that either bring costs down or can generate income.

Climate change appraisals will need to be undertaken as appropriate for each project and approach that is developed to ensure that opportunities are identified and pursued, and that any 'invest to save' opportunities are investigated and fully evidenced to ensure that these can be taken into account in decision making.

7. Background

7.1. The People Plan sets out how Shropshire Council develop a high-performing, inclusive, and sustainable workforce. Delivering the people plan will provide assurance to residents, Members, staff, and partners that the council is improving how it operates and performs.

7.2 The People Plan is not a detailed delivery plan. It acts as an overarching framework for the council's workforce improvement activity, which is aligned to five aims. The aims and initial priority programmes of action in the plan sit beneath these five aims and provide the basis of our plan for the next 5 years but also summarised activity and priority programmes of action within the next 12 months aligned to the improvement plan. Although the aims and programmes are set out in a table (see below), there is no hierarchy or sequencing behind where they are located, as they should be seen as interdependent elements of the Plan. They provide a basis for governance and performance reporting. The programmes vary in size, scale and complexity, and not all have been fully developed.

Shropshire Council People Plan: Aims and Programmes

Aim	Related Priority Programmes/Activities
Culture	1. One purpose, underpinned by our values 2. Engagement and communication 3. Equity, equality, diversity and inclusion 4. Valuing and supporting new and existing staff
Leadership & Talent	5. Leadership, visibility, communications and competency framework 6. Leadership and management programme
Capability & Capacity	7. Coaching and mentoring 8. Strategic workforce planning 9. Workforce skills audit
Performance	10. Performance management 11. Apprenticeship strategy
Systems & Establishment	12. Transformation aligned to our aims and priorities 13. Data Insights

7.3 The aims in the plan will provide this timeframe and should form the basis of the council's continuous improvement. The approaches to how they are delivered will need to adjust to changing requirements and the environment the council is operating in.

7.4 In addition to responding to different sources of external feedback including from the CPC, the improvement plan consolidates the different people focused activity of the council into a single plan.

7.5 The following table shares the overall structure of the people plan and provides brief descriptions of what each section covers.

Section	Purpose
Foreword	Foreword by the Interim Chief Executive Developing an effective people plan is one of the most important things to do for the success and growth of our Council, alongside financial stability; the two go hand in hand we need both to make the Council Sustainable in the future
1. Introduction	To give an overview of the purpose and development of the plan and the structure of the plan. It also describes the organisational values and behaviours which drive our culture
2. Our Future Council	To describe how we have developed the plan and how it has aligned to our future Council and one organisational plan

3. Our People Plan Aims and Priorities	This section details our five key aims for the plan and the key priority activity to support these
4. Making sure we deliver	This gives assurance around the governance for delivery recognising this is a live document
Appendix 1: **Improvement activity – priority programme summaries**	Provides a summary of the activity and actions for each of the improvement aims and priorities including key milestones and the accountable and responsible officers
Appendix 2: **Risks**	Provides a list of the key risks to delivery of the Plan aligned to the improvement plan
Appendix 3: **Key Performance Indicators**	Lists the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and measures we will use to demonstrate progress towards the overall aims, also aligned to the improvement plan

7.6 The plan sets out our values for the organisation Our values enable us to work as One Organisation, One Plan and One Place. Underpinning our plan is our commitment to the organisations core values which drive our culture. We'll bring these values into everything we do. This means building strong by good relationships, working together, with respect, creating opportunities, seeking understanding and developing a Can-Do Culture with high standards.

7.7 Changing our culture will take time and everyone's effort. It's not just one goal—it's about all our plan working together to enable Shropshire to flourish. The following image shows our values for our workforce – to be Proud and the behaviours that support these values.

Contact: Rachel Robinson, rachel.robinson@shropshire.gov.uk

7.8 Enabling the delivery of the People Plan is a key consideration for the council. This will require some current areas of work to be reduced or paused whilst others are accelerated and introduced. This will mean that resources, both financial and employee, will need to be reprioritised and refocused, and that agreement from Government for the council to access funding via Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) will be required to bridge any current gaps and help close future funding gaps related to the Council being able to deliver the change at pace that needed to become financially sustainable organisation able to deliver its responsibilities, priorities and outcomes for residents and staff.

8. Conclusions

8.1. The People Plan provides the overarching and coherent framework of the council's workforce improvement work for the next five years, highlighting key actions for year one.

8.2. This plan sets out Shropshire Council's ambition to be an employer of choice—where staff feel valued, supported, and empowered to excel. It is a five-year, living document that will be regularly reviewed and updated to remain relevant to the Council's evolving needs. The Plan is a key pillar of the Council's wider Improvement Plan and Corporate Plan, ensuring that people, culture, and organisational development are at the heart of delivering excellent services to our residents and community

Appendices [Please list the titles of Appendices]

Appendix 1: The People Plan

Contact: Rachel Robinson, rachel.robinson@shropshire.gov.uk

Shropshire Council

People Plan

Our Plan to support and enable our workforce to excel

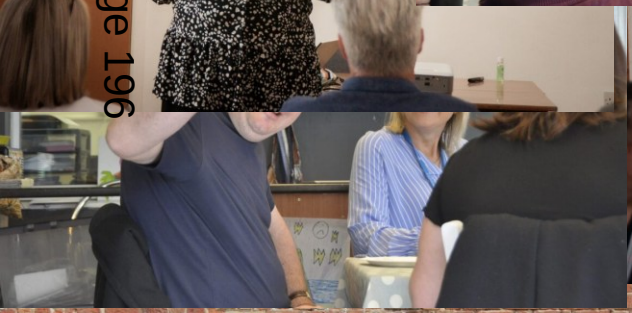
2025-2030

November 2025

Draft

Cookie Dough
Brownie £1

Shropshire Council
Local



TEACHERS
TEACHING ASSISTANTS
CARETAKERS
ADMINISTRATORS
COVER SUPERVISORS
EXAM INVIGILATORS
LABORATORY / IT TECHNICIANS
NURSERY NURSES

Foreword

In Shropshire our ambition is to become an employer of choice, where people are proud to work for Shropshire Council, feel valued, and can thrive with the right support and development to enable people to perform their best. Our People Plan will enable us to achieve this.

Our People Plan helps us create an enabling “Can Do” culture in a modern, efficient, and sustainable council; transforming how we work to better serve our community.

We are committed to making sure everyone is treated fairly and with respect at work, so all staff can be themselves and feel valued for who they are; we welcome diversity in every form and will meet equality responsibilities, making sure our services are fair and accessible to everyone.

Developing an effective people plan is one of the most important things to do for the success and growth of our Council, alongside financial stability; the two go hand in hand we need both to make the Council Sustainable in the future.

Together, we will establish a stronger and more sustainable ‘can do’ Council, supported by a workforce that embodies our organisational values and is fully prepared to address future challenges and opportunities.

Tanya Miles – Interim Chief Executive of Shropshire Council

Contents

Section	Purpose	Page
Foreword	Foreword by the Interim Chief Executive Developing an effective people plan is one of the most important things to do for the success and growth of our Council, alongside financial stability; the two go hand in hand we need both to make the Council Sustainable in the future	
1. Introduction	To give an overview of the purpose and development of the plan and the structure of the plan. It also describes the organisational values and behaviours which drive our culture	
2. Our Future Council	To describe how we have developed the plan and how it has aligned to our future Council and one organisational plan	
3. Our People Plan Aims and Priorities	This section details our five key aims for the plan and the key priority activity to support these	
4. Making sure we deliver	This gives assurance around the governance for delivery recognising this is a live document	
Appendix 1: **Improvement activity – priority programme summaries**	Provides a summary of the activity and actions for each of the improvement aims and priorities including key milestones and the accountable and responsible officers	
Appendix 2: **Risks**	Provides a list of the key risks to delivery of the Plan aligned to the improvement plan	
Appendix 3: **Key Performance Indicators**	Lists the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and measures we will use to demonstrate progress towards the overall aims, also aligned to the improvement plan	

Section 1

Introduction

Purpose of this Plan

Our vision is to create a workforce that is supported and enabled to excel, this in turn will support delivery of our ambition for the Future Council.

Our People Plan outlines how we will turn our ambitions into reality, focusing on practical actions from the perspective of our workforce**.**

We aim to be an employer of choice, fostering a culture where staff feel valued, supported, and empowered to excel. By embracing a “Can Do” ethos within a modern, efficient, and sustainable council, we will continually improve how we work to deliver outstanding service to our community.

We are committed to making sure everyone is treated fairly and with respect at work, so all staff can be themselves and feel valued for who they are; we welcome diversity in every form and will meet equality responsibilities, making sure our services are fair and accessible to everyone.

This plan brings together the people aspects—such as shaping our culture, values, leadership, and everyday behaviours—with the practical side of how we organise ourselves, develop systems, and establish processes. This ensures our workforce is positioned to work collaboratively, supporting the council’s priorities and helping us fulfil our ambitions.

The need for change & development of the Plan

The People Plan has been developed as a response to several surveys, events, feedback and external reports and recommendations. They reflect external factors and trends, themes within our key strategic plans, and internal challenges we face. including:

- Pulse and Employee Surveys
- Getting Leadership Right
- Employment Engagement Forum
- The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge
- Engagement Sessions and Focus Groups
- Surveys and Staff Feedback through Webinars, Q&A
- Informal Cabinet,
- Senior Leadership Forum
- By evidence from directorate workforce planning
- The Strategic Review of Organisational Development
- ,Local Government Association (LGA)
- Workforce data and
- The learning derived from the COVID-19pandemic.

Moving forward we will continue to check our progress regularly with surveys and feedback sessions, listening to everyone’s views to keep improving (see appendices)

Getting it right

Delivering the goals of Our People Plan describes and offers the strong commitment we make to our staff in response to their contributions to our Future Council. A strong employee promise is important to ensure we focus on whats important:

- **Attracting Talent:** It helps bring in skilled people by showing why our council is a good choice.
- **Keeping Staff:** It encourages employees to stay, making them feel valued and part of the team.
- **Boosting Engagement:** When staff believe in what we offer, they are more motivated and productive.
- **Culture Change:** It supports positive changes in how we work and strengthens our values.
- **Clear Communication:** It sets clear expectations, building trust and transparency.
- **Business Success:** Happy and engaged staff help us achieve better results.

Structure of this Plan This document will guide you through the 5-year plan. It lays out how we aim to build a Council that values its residents and staff, delivers services with pride and respect and operates with transparency and financial discipline.

This plan is part of our wider Improvement Plan (link here).

Our People Plan is a 5-year, living document that will be regularly reviewed and updated through ongoing collaboration and feedback, ensuring it remains relevant to our evolving needs.

Our Values

Our values enable us to work as One Organisation, One Plan and One Place.

Underpinning our plan is our commitment to the organisations core values which drive our culture.

We'll bring these values into everything we do. This means building strong partnerships, developed by good relationships, working together, with respect, creating opportunities, seeking understanding and developing a Can-Do Culture with high standards.

Leaders will help us innovate and grow and supporting new ideas and drive transformation. We'll encourage open conversations, give regular feedback, and celebrate when things go well. Training, development and clear communication will help everyone understand and live our values.

Changing our culture will take time and everyone's effort. It's not just one goal—it's about all our plan working together to enable Shropshire to flourish.

Shropshire Values: PROUD

Our Values: What guides our actions, behaviours and decisions

Partnerships

We recognise the importance of partnerships and are committed to fostering collaborative relationships, working closely with others to achieve shared goals.

- One Organisation
- Working Together
- Public Service
- High standards
- Lead by example
- Staff Engagement
- Clarity and Transparency

Respect

Valuing every person, listening openly, working as one team, and challenging ideas with kindness. We foster inclusion and keep our promises to build a positive environment for all.

- One team
- Listen
- Challenge with Warmth
- Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging
- Deliver on Promises
- Environment

Opportunities

We believe in creating opportunities for all, supporting learning, innovation, and growth. By enabling change and growth we strengthen what we do.

- Learning Organisation
- Encourage Innovation
- Drive Quality
- Embrace curiosity
- Be Open to Change
- Offer and seek feedback
- Enable Opportunities for Residents

Understanding

Understanding is at the heart of how we serve Shropshire, our residents, and our workforce.

- One Vision
- One Plan
- Clarity of Expectations
- Communicate Openly
- Enabling Communities though Understanding
- Understand the bigger picture

can Do

We foster a can-do attitude by proactively finding solutions, empowering others, removing barriers, driving positive change, taking responsibility, acting quickly, and celebrating success.

- Be a Can Do Council
- Enabling approaches
- How Can We Help
- Take responsibility for actions
- Be Proactive
- Respond quickly
- Celebrate Success

Shropshire Council

Our Workforce

3,418 Employees and 3,492 Posts (Nov 2025)
Down from 3,639 (2023/24)

Full Time Equivalent 2,860 (Nov 2025)

Starters and Leavers
1237 in 2024/25 729 in 2024/25
455 financial year to date and 382 leavers

Disability 12% of employees have declared a disability
We have disability data for 28% of staff

Average Age
47.13 years

Gender diversity
Female 2549
Male 869

Full Time Equivalent (FTE)
57.72% Full Time
42.42% Part Time

Religion:
Religion % of Headcount

Buddhist	0.3%
Christian	39.8%
Hindu	0%
Jewish	0%
Muslim	0.3%
No religion	35.3%
Other religion	1.3%
Prefer not to say	3.3%
Sikh	0.3%
Unknown	19.4%

Ethnicity:
Ethnicity % of Headcount

Asian or Asian British	2%
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	1%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	1%
Other ethnic group	0%
Prefer not to say	1%
Unknown	11%
White	85%

Sickness
Days lost 30,830 2024/25 estimated 2.81m cost:
Top 3 Reasons
Anxiety and Stress
Cold Cough and Flu

321 Applicants current and previous for apprentices since 2017

Data from our Current Establishment Dashboard and most recent
shropshire-council-annual-workforce-diversity-report-2022-2023.pdf

Improvement Board

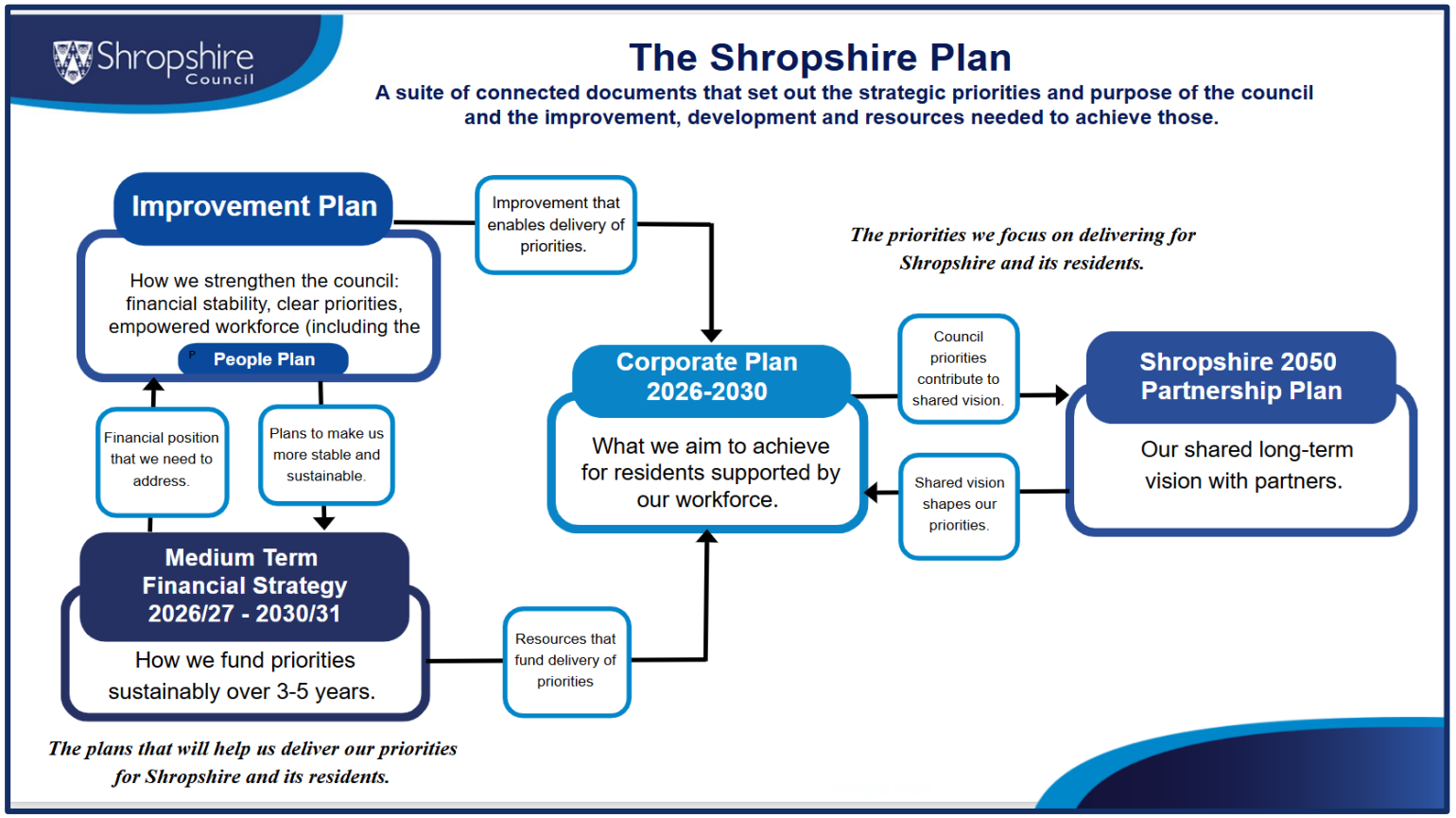
One of the key recommendations from the LGA Peer Challenge was to establish an independently chaired **Improvement Board.** This Board met for its inaugural meeting on 10th November 2025 and will continue to provide external advice, challenge, and expertise to the Council in driving forward the delivery of this Improvement Plan.

Relationship with other strategic plans

The Improvement Plan sits alongside other plans (see **Figure 1**) to provide an overall framework for the continued improvement of the Council. Together they provide a suite of connected documents that set out the strategic priorities and purpose of the council and the improvement, change and resources needed to achieve those:

- **The Improvement Plan** Sets out our priorities for improving the Council and summarises the plans for achieving *financial stability*, developing clear priorities, and supporting a workforce that excels *(*through a *People Plan*)
- **The Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2026/27-2030/31** Summarises the Council's overall financial position, including forecasts, pressures and risks, over the medium-term, and how we will fund priorities.

Figure 1: Shropshire Plan



- **The Corporate Plan 2026-2030:** Informed by the 'New Direction' ambitions, the Plan will set out the priorities the council will focus on to deliver, enable, and influence better outcomes for Shropshire and its residents.
- **The Shropshire 2050 Partnership Plan**: Sets out the longer-term shared vision and priorities for the county (as a place) that the council has agreed with partners.

Shropshire Council

Section 2

Our Future Council

Whether our role as a Council is delivering, enabling or influencing outcomes, we will be committed to creating a focused, energised and *'can do'* organisation that:

- Provides ***clear and visible leadership*** from our officer Leadership Board and Cabinet to make our priorities for delivery and change clear for everyone.
- Adopts a ***'One Council'*** *approach*, prioritising joined up working internally and externally.
- Ensures our workforce is supported and enabled to excel and has a relentless focus on **performance and continuous improvement.**
- Operates **good governance** to ensure compliance with statutory standards and requirements.
- Delivers value for money through high standards of **financial discipline and management**, and a commercial mindset to make every pound count and every minute matter.
- Provides **good customer service** that gives people a consistent and positive experience when they contact and interact with the Council.
- Continues to **engage with our residents** about the changes we need to make – and ensure our priorities are informed by what is most important to them.
- Is a **learning council** that regularly asks for feedback, learns from complaints, and seeks external challenge and review. We will learn from other councils about what they do differently and how they have improved.

Transforming into the council we want to be: Our Future Council

It is critical that the Council has a clear direction for its future and its further transformation, financial stability and delivery of policy priorities. The **principles** in figure 2 (below) will guide how we work and provide a basis for our continued improvement and transformation into a best value council that is financially sustainable and equipped to deliver, enable, and influence for Shropshire and its residents in the most effective, efficient and economical way:

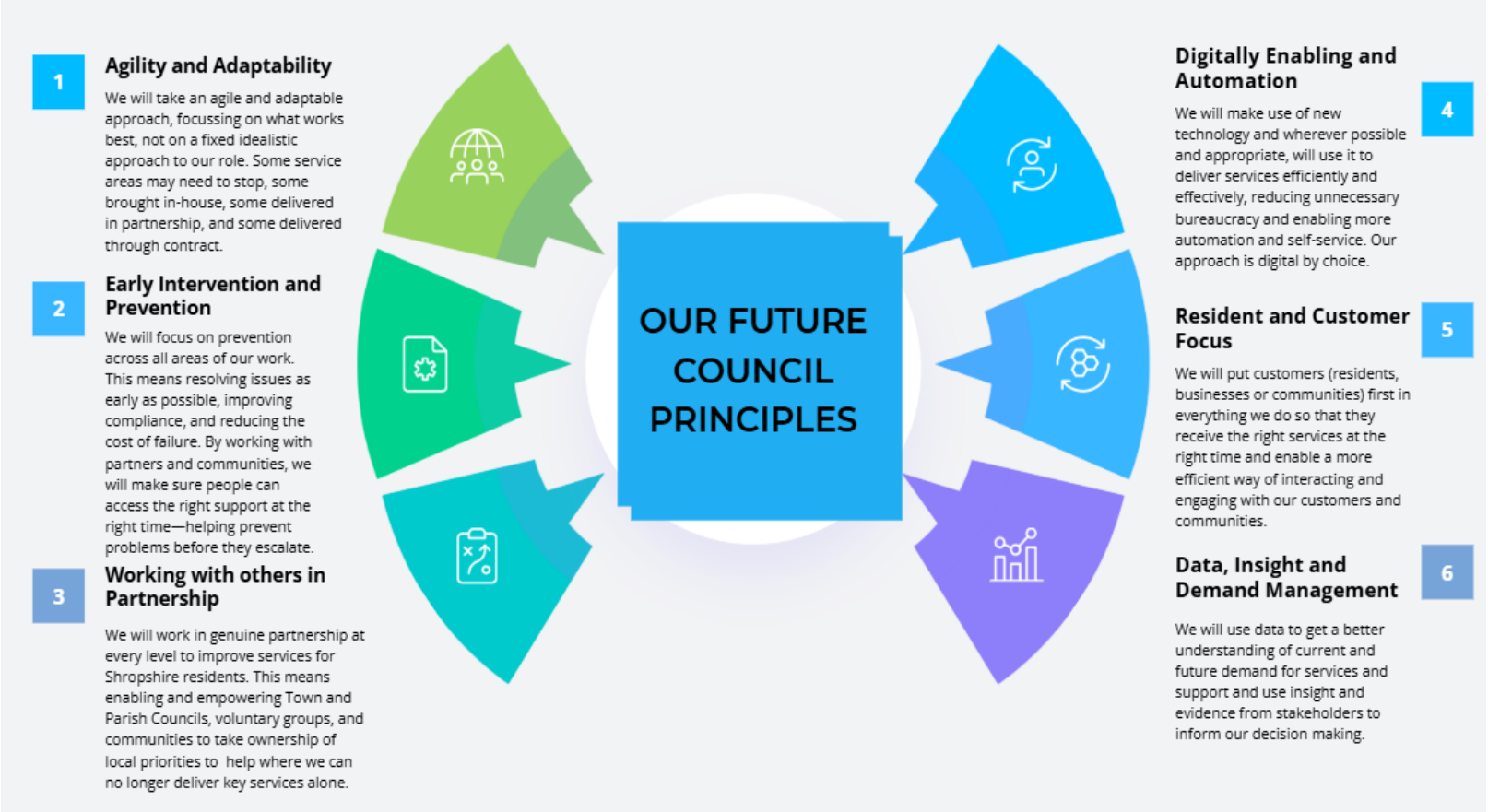


Figure 2: principles that guide how we will operate, improve and transform

A clear direction and the People Plan

Developing an effective people plan is one of the most important things to do for the success and growth of our Council, as a key pillar of our improvement plan alongside financial sustainability and having a clear priority and purpose.

Culture change

Achieving our aims will require changes in our organisational culture, as well as improvements in policy, practice and statutory compliance. The Council needs a positive and inclusive culture, where there are clear roles, responsibilities and expectations of elected members and staff. This will be critical to the Council being member-led, officer-run and resident focused.

Many of the priority programmes of action will support and enable culture change – particularly those that are focused on supporting and enabling our workforce to excel. This is brought together in our People Plan

We will further develop how people are engaged and involved in developing policies and improving services, ensuring that there are more opportunities to inform and shape how we do, and improve, things.

The Plan also focusses on improving our corporate governance and a culture compliance, and how some of our internal services and systems can better support people to do their jobs, so we operate more efficiently and effectively, and barriers and constraints to a high-performing culture are removed.

Shropshire Council

Section 3

Our People Aims & Priorities

Our People Plan

This People Plan supports how we will ensure we are a 'best value' authority that delivers, enables, and influences for Shropshire and its residents through a workforce that is supported and enabled to excel.

To achieve this, we need to deliver on the following five priority areas :

Our Culture:
We will shape and embed a culture that reflects our values and way of working, promotes collaboration, diversity, inclusion and innovation, and empowers our people to make a difference. In everything we do though strong **engagement and communications**.

Leadership & Talent:
Will be developed and supported throughout the whole organisation, ensuring we have the right skills, behaviours and mindset to get leadership and enabling in all we do.

Capability and Capacity: We will Identify and address the current and future capability and capacity needs of the organisation. Align our recruitment, retention and development strategies that enable our staff to grow and excel in their roles.

Performance:
We will establish and implement a consistent and transparent performance management framework that aligns individual and team objectives with the organisational goals, priorities and service plans.

Systems and establishment:
We will continually review and streamline our organisation, systems and processes to ensure they support the way of working effectively and that services and activities are delivered to our residents in the most efficient and effective way possible.

These priorities do overlap and interlink and all are critical to our improvement and development towards the council we want to become.

Shropshire Council

People Plan priorities and programmes on One Page

To achieve these aims, the People Plan has set out its key priorities and following consultation is focused on an initial set of *Priority Programmes of Action*

Programmes and projects are aligned to a single Plan priority for governance purposes, but most are interdependent, and the outcomes will be cross-cutting and contribute to all five priorities and the improvement and corporate plan priorities. All programmes of action aim to make the Council more financially and operationally sustainable, and support its workforce to excel.

Some programmes are a continuation of current and planned work (e.g. GLR Pulse, EDI), while others need to be fully scoped and their activities defined. For example, xxx

Our People Plan Priorities 2025-30

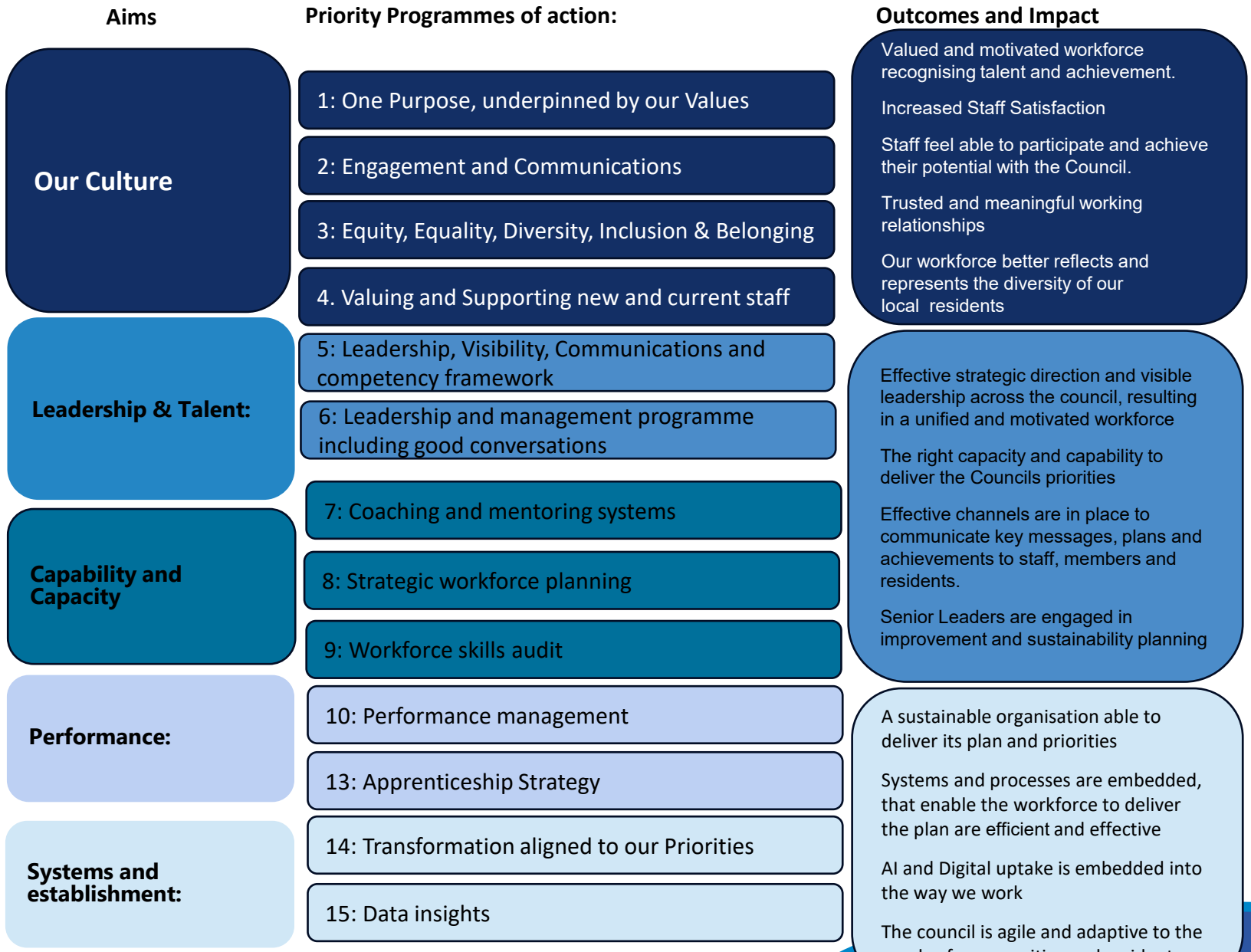


Figure 3: list of improvement priority programmes of activity

Our People Plan Priorities Year One

	Priority programmes of action:	Outcomes and Impact:
Our Culture	1: One Purpose, underpinned by our Values 2: Engagement and Communications 3: Equity, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging 4. Valuing and Supporting new and current staff	- Publish Our People Plan - Embed Shropshire Values and Principles across the organisation including into Service Plans - Development of a Communications and Engagement Plan for the whole organisation – One Story including; 1/4tly Q&A Webinars with Tanya and Heather Weekly to Monthly Senior Leadership Forums Intranet, redesign staff engagement group, clear priorities and messaging for staff and celebration of success • Update and deliver pprioritises developing an organisational wide Equity, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EEDIB) Plan - Develop a meaningful OD&D data dash to report on KPI's and monitor performance - Review the Well-being offer and valuing and supporting staff (see below)
Leadership & Talent:	6: Leadership and management programme including good conversations	- Develop and roll out the role of the Manager Programme - Deliver the Appraisal/ Good conversations Framework - Regular meaningful team meetings across all Service Areas
Capability and Capacity	11: Workforce skills audit	- Develop a Data and Digital skills programme to deliver across the workforce - Roll out AAA: Customer service approach training - Ensure we are supporting our staff through training and ongoing CPD - Celebrating success and recognising and growing talent - Filling immediate capacity gaps identified in CPC/Improvement Plan
Performance:	12: Performance management framework	- Develop and deliver the new Performance Framework, key metrics for good governance and embed across the workforce eg. FOI's, Audits - Celebrate our successes (see above)
Systems and establishment:	14: Transformation aligned to Our Priorities	- Review all transformation programmes and agree priorities and de-prioritisation (see improvement plan)

Aim: Our Culture is vital because it shapes how we (our people) work together, make decisions, and respond to challenges. A positive culture builds trust, encourages innovation, and motivates staff to do their best. When values guide behaviour, teams collaborate more effectively and adapt to change, driving the organisation towards its goals and long-term success.

The focus of this priority is:

- Clear Purpose and Vision
- Strong Core Values
- Open, Strong and Collaborative Communication and Engagement
- Prioritise Organisation Equity, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EEDIB)

Outcomes and Benefits (the things that will tell us we are achieving our priority):

- A workplace where everyone feels valued and motivated
- Increased Staff Satisfaction Rates
- Staff feel able to participate and achieve their potential with the Council.
- Trusted and meaningful working relationships are in place across the Council
- Our workforce better reflects and represents the diversity of our local residents.

The key programmes of action that will deliver this improvement and change are:

Programme/Action	Description and Purpose
One purpose underpinned by our values	One clear purpose and vision will guide everyone towards a common goal. Strong core values will shape our behaviour, ways of working and decisions. We will embed our values into everything we do. This means building good relationships, working together, and aiming for high standards. Leaders will help us grow and support new ideas. We'll encourage open conversations, give regular feedback, and celebrate when things go well. Training and support will help everyone turn our values into a way of being, which will support high levels of employee, customer, partner, and community satisfaction.
Engagement and Communication	Engagement and collaboration is key to delivering our ambitions for a future Council. Our People understand the work we do and they hold the solutions to the challenges we face. We aim to engage with staff throughout our improvement planning through a variety of methods, including surveys, face to face meetings and the development of online communities and 1-1s Good Conversations are a priority as is improving our intranet. Employee engagement will be a regular topic for our leaders. The Council will work closely with trade unions to support staff, ensure their voices are heard, and make sure that the offer to staff is fair and transparent, with clear accountability throughout the process. We'll check our progress regularly with surveys and feedback sessions, listening to everyone's views to keep improving. A clear communications strategy will be central to this work and the success of Our People Plan and Improvement Plan.
Equity, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EEDIB)	Prioritise developing an organisational wide Equity, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EEDIB) Plan that integrates EEDIB across all elements of our system, e.g., recruitment, L&D, engagement, policies and service design. This will provide us with a holistic, meaningful and impactful approach to developing EEDIB within our organisation. As part of our plan we will use data and performance indicators to ensure that there is equity of both opportunity and outcomes for individuals
Valuing and Supporting New and Current Staff	We want our staff to feel positive, supported, and valued at every stage of their time with us. This means giving new joiners a warm welcome, checking in often, recognising great work, encouraging teamwork, and helping everyone develop their careers.. New starters will benefit from a smoother introduction, everyone will have access to tailored training and career pathways, and it'll be easier to connect and communicate across the council. Working across the organisation

Aim: Leadership and Talent

Understanding ourselves well is key to developing our workforce, its leadership and talent. Data here will show us, the size of our workforce and where we have focused our efforts to date and where we want to focus our efforts to ensure the best use of our resources to see the best return on investment. We need leaders who can handle complex challenges and encourage new ideas, and we must support this in a cost-effective way. Our GLR Programme (Getting Leadership Right) began this journey for some, but there is still more to do. Everyone leads in some way, so it's important that all staff have leadership skills. We cannot achieve our goals without this.

The focus of this priority is:

- Leadership that is visible and communicates effectively
- Leadership and Culture
- Leadership and Performance Management including good conversations
- Getting Management Right: The Role of the Manager

Outcomes and Benefits (the things that will tell us we are achieving our aim):

- Senior officers have the capacity and capability to provide the authority with effective strategic direction
- Senior officers and managers consistently demonstrate effective strategic direction and visible leadership across the council, resulting in a unified and motivated workforce
- Managers will feel confident and competent in their roles, will have the tools and knowledge to do the job and the Council will be high performing, healthy organisation.

The key programmes of action that will deliver this improvement and change are:

Action	Description and Purpose
Leadership, Visibility, Communication and competency framework	Leaders will be more present and accessible, setting a clear example and supporting staff at every level. We are committed to open, honest, and regular communication. Leaders will ensure everyone is informed, listened to, and able to share ideas or concerns. This includes the development of our senior leadership forums for visible open conversations.
Leadership Culture	Leaders will shape a positive, inclusive culture where everyone feels valued and respected. We will work together to build trust, encourage new ideas, and celebrate achievements. We plan to reinvigorate our cultural connections and relationships across the workforce as recommended in the Corporate Peer Challenge. We will update our Leadership Programme to fit our new way of working and make sure it supports both leadership and management. The new approach will involve everyone in the organisation. We will use different methods to deliver this, such as improved digital inductions, playlists and experiences in our new Learning Platform, AI technology for coaching, CPD communities, and Getting Management Right skills.
Leadership and Management Programme: Appraisal/Good conversations and Performance	Leaders will set clear expectations, provide regular feedback, and support staff development. We will recognise good performance and help everyone reach their potential. This will be clear through our development of our good conversations approach. By clearly defining what it means to be a manager here. Managers must understand their role and have the right skills to manage people, budgets, and performance. Currently, not all managers have the tools or knowledge they need, especially in our self-service model. We will provide a Getting Management Right (GMR) programme, that defines the role of the Manager and ensure successful managers who support staff and drive, maintain and sustain high performance.

Aim: Capability and Capacity

We want our organisation to be a place where staff genuinely enjoy coming to work, feel happy in their roles, and know exactly where to find support whenever it's needed. By focusing on Our People, we aim to create an environment that encourages wellbeing, collaboration, and personal growth. We understand that the journey toward becoming a sustainable Council begins with our people.

The focus of this priority is:

- Workforce Skills audit
- Training, development and support including CPD
- Review of Health and wellbeing offer

Outcomes and Benefits (the things that will tell us we are achieving our aim):

- Increased Staff Satisfaction Rates
- Increase in numbers utilities digital aspects
- Improved quality and quantity of good conversations and PDs completed
- Increased levels of wellbeing amongst staff
- Increased use of apprenticeship levy

The key programmes of action that will deliver this improvement and change are:

Action	Description and Purpose
Coaching and Mentoring systems	By nurturing resilience and encouraging innovation, we aim to create an environment where everyone can flourish and contribute to a Council fit for the future. Coaching and mentoring systems, including training and support for staff.
Workforce skills audits and CPD planning	We are committed to being an enabling council, empowering our staff through continuous learning and development. By investing in training including CPD for staff to enable maintenance of professional accreditation, in new technologies and digital self-service, we equip our workforce to work efficiently and deliver excellent service to residents. Regular skills audits help us identify strengths and gaps, ensuring targeted training and effective succession planning. This approach supports confident, capable teams and wise use of resources, underpinning our strategic goals. To enable whole workforce change we will procure a Learning Management/Experience Platform fit for our purpose, that will drive the communication, development, learning and culture for the organisation and wider Partnership.
Provide Support to facilitate Health and Wellbeing	We truly value the wellbeing of our staff and want everyone to feel cared for, supported, and included. Creating a happy, healthy workplace is central to our mission as an employer. We're dedicated to providing guidance, practical resources, and a positive culture where everyone can thrive—both in their work and in their lives outside of work. Whether it's through wellbeing programmes, accessible training, or open lines of communication, we want everyone to know they are respected and valued as individuals. We encourage a spirit of teamwork, kindness, and understanding, to make sure every member of staff feels safe, supported, and able to achieve their best. Together, we'll continue building a workplace where health, happiness, and personal growth are just as important as the services we deliver.

Aim: Performance

Our Shropshire Plan will help us focus on the right priorities, stop activities that don't add value, and break old habits and unnecessary processes or ways of working. This will make us more efficient and better aligned with our goals. And we will engage staff in the development of this work. We will also introduce a clear performance management framework, this will link our strategy to service plans, set clear expectations and measurable targets, and give us real-time data on how we're doing. It will help us quickly spot and fix problems, as well as recognise and reward great work.

The focus of this priority is:

- A clear performance framework
- Clear expectations and measurable targets
- Real time data to monitor progress and quicky address issuers and recognise achievements

Outcomes and Benefits (the things that will tell us we are achieving our aim):

- The workforce (service) are managed efficiently and effectively, with clear and credible strategies demonstrating how services will be delivered in the future, with an effective system for performance management.
- A culture of robust performance management and compliance with our values, ways of working, legislation, strategies, policies and procedures throughout the organisation.

The key programmes of action that will deliver this improvement and change are:

Action	Description and Purpose
Performance Management Framework	We will introduce a clear performance management framework. This will link our strategy to service plans, set clear expectations and measurable targets, and give us real-time data on how we're doing. It will help us quickly spot and fix problems, as well as recognise and reward great work. By delivering training to support SMART service planning and delivery aligned to our values, principles and priorities we will drive forwards high standards of performance and excellent outcomes. All services will be able to clearly evidence the progress of plans, to provide assurance on performance, delivery and outcomes. It will be easy for Managers to spot drift and delay in delivery of services or outcomes and address this before it becomes a problem. A balanced performance dashboard that evidences service delivery performance and provides Councillors, stakeholders and residents with clear, robust and meaningful information. With this system, everyone will understand how their work supports our goals, recognise best practice, and share this across the organisation to both celebrate and continuously improve. Leaders will have up-to-date information on our progress. By using data and technology, we will track trends, address issues early, and keep our performance management focused on our main objectives.
Apprenticeship Strategy	A robust apprenticeship strategy ensures that our organisation develops the skills needed for future success. By aligning our skills audit with anticipated organisational needs and demand management, we create targeted opportunities for staff to learn and grow. This approach enables us to build a resilient workforce, address skills gaps proactively, and support sustainable service delivery for the future.

Aim: Systems and Establishment

We are working to make our organisation simpler and easier to run, so we can save money for the long term and deliver our plans more effectively. We know that some changes are needed, so we will look at how we organise our teams and services to make sure our resources are used in the best way and our services have a better impact. A big part of this is bringing in better digital systems, so we do not have to rely so much on manual processes or individual roles. We will use strong governance and good habits, based on our organisation's values, to guide us through these changes. We are committed to being clear and open in our decisions, making sure everyone knows who is responsible for what, and building trust with staff and the community. As we make these changes, we will continue to support our staff, councillors, and residents. We will give you the resources, support, and opportunities you need to adapt and do well during this time, so we can keep serving our community.

The focus of this priority is:

- Strategic Workforce Planning
- Transformation
- AI and digital solutions
- Governance compliance

Outcomes and Benefits (the things that will tell us we are achieving our aim):

- A sustainable organisation able to deliver its plan and priorities.
- Systems and processes are embedded, that enable the workforce to deliver the plan efficiently and effectively.
- Ensuring OD&D have the capacity to deliver

The key programmes of action that will deliver this improvement and change are:

Action	Description and Purpose
Strategic workforce planning	Strategic workforce planning will ensure we know our workforce well, identifying our challenges and our achievements. This will inform our recruitment and retention strategies, we will understand why people come to work for us, why they stay and why they leave. We will know what skills the workforce have and need now and into the future. We will understand the future needs of the Council and its residents, and we will shape our organisation to become sustainable. Ensuring OD&D structures are aligned to the delivery of this plan.
Transformation aligned to Our Shropshire Plan	Review our transformation and change programmes to ensure they are strategically aligned with the priorities of both the Improvement Plan and the Corporate Plan. This ensures that all change initiatives directly support our organisational goals, drive sustainable improvement, and deliver measurable benefits for our workforce and the communities we serve. This includes how we develop our AI and digital solutions to support staff and residents, implemented into systems, to increase efficiencies and create sustainability.
Data Insights	We will regularly review and improve how we work, informed by data insights, to find efficiencies and cut costs, to work more efficiently, and deliver and enable better services. Easier systems will make things simpler for staff and customers, helping everyone feel more satisfied. These changes will also help us quickly adapt to new challenges and needs, managing demand effectively. Strong governance systems will ensure compliance is tracked and monitored and performance addressed, offering assurance against regulatory and statutory requirements.

Shropshire Council

Section 4

Making sure we deliver

Making sure we deliver the Plan

There are three key things we will do to make sure we deliver the Improvement Plan:

1. *Governance and Assurance:* We will put in place governance and assurance arrangements based on agreed principles (see figure 4), including clear accountability, responsibility and transparency. There will be robust and relevant risk management Aand delivery monitoring, provided by a Programme Management Office (PMO) ensuring independence and integrity. These arrangements will ensure that the Plan is delivered and achieves the required progress and impacts.

2. *Supporting delivery:* Significant and sustained investment is required to deliver the scale and pace of change required. We will ensure that the Plan and its programmes are supported through relevant resources and support. New programmes of action will need to be resourced, which may mean reviewing and deciding on where business as usual activity can be reprioritised and capacity redeployed, or assessing and identifying where there are additional resource requirements.

3. *Engagement, Involvement and Communications:* Engagement has taken place at different levels and through different forums throughout the process of developing the Plan

This has ensured understanding of the Plan, the context it is responding to and the aims we are pursuing. It has also ensured the Plan has been developed collaboratively and that priorities have been continuously iterated using internal peer review, challenge and feedback (via our Senior Leaders Forum - SLF).

How will we measure success?

Our People Plan will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it remains fit for purpose in helping us to achieve our organisational goals – especially as we transform through resizing. To help us monitor progress and successes, we will develop a Power BI dashboard based on the outcomes that are most important in designing and developing a Healthy Organisation that is modern, efficient, and sustainable. This dashboard will constantly guide us in our planning and decision-making.

Risk management

Risks and interdependencies between programmes and projects in the plan will be set out and managed for each one, and that portfolio level by the Senior Accountable Officers (SAOs) and Responsible Delivery Leads (RDLs).

There are also overarching risks and dependencies across the whole Improvement Plan which are set out in **Appendix 2**. All risks and dependencies will be reviewed regularly and will change e.g. with new risks being included as and when they are identified. The table of risks is not an exhaustive list, and the risks and mitigations will be kept under review.

Performance Framework

The improvement plan programmes contribute to defined outcomes. Those are underpinned by key performance indicators (KPIs) – listed in the following slides- that will enable progress to be demonstrated. Reporting on delivery will use a combination of delivery milestones and KPIs.

Reporting progress

Our People Plan is a 5-year, living document that will be regularly reviewed and updated through ongoing collaboration and feedback, ensuring it remains relevant to our evolving needs. This may include review and prioritising as required.

A change board will be established with cross organisational representation to drive the delivery of the plan, a sub structure of task and finish groups where necessary will be established under this to drive delivery.

Regular reporting from the Change Board up to Leadership Board and cabinet who will retain oversight.

Staff Engagement will take place for the duration of the Plan. This will provide assurance to staff we are making progress towards the commitments we have made.

Shropshire Council

Appendix 1:
Priority Programmes of Action Summaries

Priority: Our Culture

What We Will Do:

How Will We Achieve this? (Priority number included)	Evidence of success	Start	End
1: One Purpose, underpinned by our Values Develop values / cultural indicators	Staff, Members and Leaders will promote and demonstrate the highest ethical standards and appropriate working behaviours through established shared values and ways of working.	Nov 2025	March 2026
Develop culture development training for managers and members that is on going and embedded and impact monitored through the cultural indicators	A culture of cooperation, respect and trust between departments exists, along with a commitment to transparent decision-making. Shared values enables a respect for a councillor's need to know and enquire and for officers and members to engage and collaborate to achieve needs of both.	Nov 2025	June 2026
Ask, Assist, Act (AAA) Program rolled out across the organisation, outlining our approach to customer service	Roll out AAA across the organisation. Measure and report on customer satisfaction rates across the Council. Increased confidence in recognising and responding to needs. Increased knowledge and navigation of reliable information	Jan 2026	Dec 2026
2: Engagement and Communications Pulse Survey and action plan	Regular pulse surveys, produce an overview of a healthy organisation, which offers assurance of a healthy culture across the organisation.	July 2025	March 2026
Development of the Intranet -initial refresh followed by regular updates and improvements as needed	Staff tell us they are able to find the information they need easily, including policy, process or information required to carry out their roles well.	Sept 2025	March 2026 then Ongoing
3. Equity, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging Updating, prioritisation and delivery of action plan through the dedicated EDI group with a strong lived experience voice	Prioritise developing an organisational wide Equity, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EEDIB) Plan that integrates EEDIB across all elements of our system, e.g., recruitment, L&D, engagement, policies and service design.	Sept 2025	Ongoing
4. Valuing and Supporting new and current staff Celebrating staff, team and whole organisation achievements	A process for recognition of staff achievements is embedded and consistently applied across the organisation. Staff tell us they feel supported, achievements are regularly shared and celebrated.	Nov 2025	April 2026
9: Workforce skills audit Gap analysis between current state and what good looks like	Skills Audit A comprehensive self-assessment exercise against 'good-enough' to provide a solid baseline, a source of continuous improvement and targeted action (see also leadership and talent)	Jan 2026	April 2026
10: Performance management Process for learning lessons from complaints	A learning and improvement mindset e.g. lessons are learnt from complaints, reviews, audits, fed into behaviors and new ways of working	Jan 2026	July 2026
Review of the code of conduct setting the right culture in the organisation	Reduction in complaints Increased satisfaction rates in staff pulse survey Reduction in performance related issues	March 2026	Dec 2026
Performance management framework and training to support implementation aligned to new Shropshire Plan	A culture of robust performance management and compliance with our values, ways of working, legislation, strategies, policies and procedures throughout the organisation.	Dec 2025	July 2026

Aim: Leadership and Talent

What We Will Do:

How Will We Achieve this? (Priority number included)	Evidence of success	Start	End
1: One Purpose, underpinned by our Values Relationship building training for officers and members, with regular updates and check ins.	Effective and timely responses to issues with acceptance of the need to make changes and without a culture of blame.	Oct 2025	Mar 2025
2: Engagement and Communications Central communication channels	Effective channels are in place to communicate key messages, plans and achievements to staff, members and residents. For example, CE newsletter, town hall events, induction to Leadership for staff, webinars and Leadership cascades.	July 2025	April 2026
5: Leadership, Visibility, Communications and competency framework Senior Leadership Forum will meet Monthly and can meet more frequently when required	Senior Leaders will be engaged in the improvement and sustainability planning for the Council; they will be invested in and able to lead their services areas with confidence to meet the outcomes of Our Shropshire Plan.	July 2025	July 2026
6: Leadership and management programme Engage with Senior Leadership Forum and Staff regarding the Performance Management Framework, including Good Conversations	The workforce is engaged and invested in a positive performance culture. Expectations and standards are well understood, and achievements are celebrated.	Jan 2026	Mar 2027
Getting Management Right Programme is delivered	Managers will feel confident and competent in their roles, will have the tools and knowledge to do the job and the Council will be high performing, healthy organisation.	Jan 2026	April 2027
Leadership competency framework and development programme	Senior officers have the capacity and capability to provide the authority with effective strategic direction . Senior officers and managers consistently demonstrate effective strategic direction and visible leadership across the council, resulting in a unified and motivated workforce	April 2026	April 2027
7: Coaching and mentoring systems Coaching and mentoring programme	This is explored and the right programme is put in place	May 2026	May 2027
8: Strategic workforce planning Leadership Board interim structure implemented and communicated	Senior officers have the capacity and capability to provide the authority with effective strategic direction	March 2025	Dec 2026
Our People Plan developed and published	A demonstrable commitment to leadership and member development, including the need to develop specialist training for key roles	Oct 2025	Dec 2026

Aim: Capability & Capacity

What We Will Do:

How will we achieve this? (Priority number included)	Evidence of success	Start	End
4. Valuing and Supporting new and current staff A review of the Health and well-being offer available to staff	Data tells us staff are engaged with our well-being offer and it is meeting their needs	Jan 2026	June 2026
6: Leadership and management programme Good conversations developed, implemented and embedded	Everyone has a workplan, feeding into a team/service plan and an appraisal with a professional development plan (PDP) all feeding into the Shropshire Plan. Staff tell us they feel invested in.	Jan 2026	April 2027
8: Strategic workforce planning Mandatory training review	Compliance of all mandatory and essential training requirements across the organisation.	July 2025	April 2026
Learning and development policy	Staff feel supported to develop and their talent is neutered. Consistent and fair policy application ensures equity.	Oct 2025	Mar 2026
An Apprenticeship Strategy aligned to Our Shropshire Plan	Resources are aligned to the delivery of our Shropshire Plan Apprenticeship first approach adopted throughout the organisation	April 2026	April 2028
Strategic Workforce Planning	The right people, in the right roles with the right resources. Service plans inform the size and shape of the organisation and the resources required to deliver the ambitions of the Council.	March 2025	July 2026
9. Workforce Skills audit	Skills and gaps are well understood and CPD, training and Apprenticeships are aligned to these gaps. Ensuring a highly skilled workforce able to meet the needs of the organisation.	Jan 2026	April 2026
Data and digital skills programme	Staff develop the right skills to deliver Our Shropshire Plan	April 2026	April 2028
4. Valuing and Supporting new and current staff Relaunch the employee volunteer programme	Staff are actively supported to take up volunteering opportunities through the relaunched employee volunteer programme. Evidence of success will include increased participation rates in volunteering, positive feedback from staff, and demonstrable contributions to both the community and voluntary sector.	April 2026	April 2027
4. Valuing and Supporting new and current staff Improving the physical working conditions and environment for our workforce through a review of current premises	Data shared by premises tells us about the utilisation of the buildings by staff across the workforce. Staff pulse survey satisfaction levels improve, showing staff have good access to the resources they require, including meeting space and time to come together with their team and service area and for collaboration. Review in April 2026.	Nov 2025	January 2026

Aim: Performance

What We Will Do:

How Will We Achieve this? (Priority number included)	Evidence of success	Start	End
10: Performance management framework Review and launch a new **employee** performance management framework	The workforce (service) are managed efficiently and effectively, with clear and credible strategies demonstrating how services will be delivered in the future, with an effective system for performance management.	Nov 2026	July 2026
Performance and appraisals training and tools (Good Conversations)	A culture of robust performance management and compliance with our values, ways of working, legislation, strategies, policies and procedures and priorities throughout the organisation.	Jan 2026	April 2027
Council-wide performance dashboard	A balanced performance dashboard that evidences service delivery performance and provides Councillors, stakeholders and residents with clear, robust and meaningful information.	March 2026	July 2027
Training developed and delivered to support the SMART service planning and delivery process aligned to service planning development	Clearly evidenced progress to provide assurance on performance, delivery and outcomes across all service areas.	Nov 2025	July 2026
8: Strategic workforce planning A whole organisation workforce plan will include a learning and development offer that ensures the right opportunities are available for the workforce to excel.	Staff across all service areas report increased access to relevant learning and development opportunities, with high participation rates in training programmes aligned to organisational needs. Skills audits show a measurable reduction in identified skills gaps, and feedback from staff surveys indicates improved confidence and capability in their roles. The workforce plan is regularly reviewed and updated, ensuring that learning and development remains responsive to emerging priorities. As a result, the organisation demonstrates higher staff satisfaction, improved retention, and enhanced service delivery outcomes.	April 2026	March 2027
15: Data insights Data insights dashboard informs future plans and development	Leaders are data informed and plans and strategies are aligned to the needs of residents, communities, partners and staff. The Council is agile and adaptive to the needs of communities and residents.	Dec 25	July 2026

Aim: Systems and Establishment

What We Will Do:

How Will We Achieve this? (Priority number included)	Evidence of success	Start	End
8: Strategic workforce planning Ensure the organisation has the right skills, resources and workforce to deliver its plan. This may mean increases to some areas and reductions in others.	A sustainable organisation able to deliver its plan and priorities.	Dec 25	Dec 2030
10: Performance management Support and accountability for Budget holders to complete Budget monitoring (BMR) accurately and more broadly finance training as identified in the CPC action plan (see improvement plan action)	All BMR's are completed on time, to accurately forecast the financial position	Oct 25	Feb 2026
14: Transformation aligned to Our Priorities Transformation aligned to Our Shropshire Plan	Efficient and effective systems and processes are embedded, that enable the workforce to deliver the Councils ambitions. This includes best value, adoption of AI and Automation and prioritisation of workplans and resources.	Oct 25	Jan 2026
AI and digital solutions are implemented into systems, to increase efficiencies	AI and Digital uptake is embedded into the way we work	Dec 25	Ongoing (through to March 2029)
2. Engagement and Communication Recommission a Learning Platform that is modern, efficient and effective in leading and driving a positive culture, enabling us to realise our ambition to be a modern, efficient, learning organisation.	Staff regularly access learning opportunities and collaborate together inside the learning platform. Staff develop skills, confidence and experience required to be the Council of the future. Pulse survey outcomes tell us staff feel they have the right learning opportunities and tell us the organisational culture reflects our PROUD values and ambition to be a learning organisation.	May 2025	Sept 2026

Shropshire Council

Appendix 2:
Risks

Risk	Mitigation
Capacity and pace of delivery - Failure to deliver the improvement plan in a timely and effective manner due to capacity constraints	• A comprehensive a robust view of the resourcing requirements to deliver the plan, with reprioritisation and allocation taking place. • Clear and consistent leadership setting out the direction, pace, outcomes and expectations of the change required. • Governance and delivery arrangements that remove siloed working • Accountability and responsibility clearly articulated and demonstrated, including through progress and impact reporting
Resourcing the plan - Inability to reallocate and invest in functions to support the delivery of the plan will lead to difficulties in delivering the People Plan	The delivery approach for the People Plan will set out the strategic framework which workforce activity will be delivered within, bringing together the Improvement Plan and the Sustainability Strategy, with the MTFS. A new Corporate Plan is being developed and this will take the priorities of the council, alongside the People Plan, improvement plan and the financial strategy. Specifying and negotiating with MHCLG the amount and use of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) to deliver financial stability through the Improvement Plan and financial sustainability in the medium to longer term.
Understanding and perception of change - Inability to maintain stakeholder confidence leading to reduced support for the people plan	Clear and timely internal and external communications and engagement that describes the process the Council is going through with open and honest descriptions of current progress while setting out the rationale for change and where the council is aiming to be in the future.
Managing interdependencies across the plan - Failure to manage interdependencies across the people plan leading to disruption, duplication or failure in delivering the people plan.	• The need for direct communications between SAOs responsible for the programmes of action has been identified early. • Interdependencies between the programmes have been identified and shared. • Changes in the performance or scope of change programmes will be communicated via the proposed governance structure. • Clear leadership will set out the aims and priorities of the change required. • Strengthened Project Management Office (PMO)

Shropshire Council

Appendix 3:

Key Performance Indicators

Key Performance Metrics

Key Measures	Source	Reporting	Priority
Pulse survey measures staff sentiment and perceptions	Pulse Survey (mandatory metrics)	6 Month Survey	Culture, Leadership and Talent, Capability and Capacity
Reduction in stress-related sickness	Workforce Data	Monthly	Culture
Increase in customer satisfaction score/target to achieve satisfaction of xx % (to be developed)	Customer Satisfaction Data	Monthly	Culture
Monitor and improve Member satisfaction rates (to be developed)	Member satisfaction	Quartey	Culture
Diversity / inclusion data measures	Workforce diversity report	Quarterly	Culture
Staff turnover and retention, including within the first 6 weeks of recruitment	Workforce Data	Quarterly	Culture
Positive levels of engagement across all parts of the organisation	Uptake and input at engagement events including staff engagement forum, focus groups and in working groups Engagement with online surveys, portals and intranet sites	Monthly	Culture, Leadership and Talent, Capability and Capacity
Well-being data: access to resources	Commissioned service reports, to evidence affective staff take up and staff satisfaction with the service	Quarterly	Culture, Capability and Capacity
Engagement Rates on Mandatory Training	Tracking of Training Programmes through the Learning Management System	Quarterly	Capability and Capacity, Sustainability and Performance
% of workforce that are agency staff	Agency workforce data and costs	Quarterly	
Numbers on the digital and data programme	Apprenticeship Levy data		
% of Appraisals and PDPs completed	Audit, Pulse survey, staff engagement	Monthly	Capability and Capacity, Sustainability and Performance
Service plans audit	Quality and quantity compliance	Monthly	
Uptake and completion of Apprenticeships	Apprenticeship Levy data	Quarterly	Leadership and Talent,, Capability and Capacity
Budget monitoring completion rates	MTFS confidently shows actual financial position	Monthly	Systems and Establishment
Number of FOIs and SARs and performance in responding to them	Governance data	Monthly	Performance, Capability and Capacity
Audit outcomes completions	Governance data	Monthly	Performance, Capability and Capacity
% of staff and members completing mandatory training (including budget management)	Learning Platform – Power BO	Monthly	Capacity and Capability, Performance

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Committee and Date

Cabinet
3rd December 2025

Item

Public

Healthy People | Healthy Economy | Healthy Environment | Healthy Organisation

Treasury Management Update Quarter 2 2025/26

Responsible Officer:	James Walton		
email:	James.walton@shropshire.gov.uk	Tel:	01743 258915
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Roger Evans. Finance		

1. Synopsis

The Council currently holds £44.1m in investments and £420m of borrowing. This report shows the return on those investments over quarter 2, the economic outlook for the next 3 years and confirms activities align with the Council approved Treasury Management Strategy and prudential indicators.

2. Executive Summary

2.1. The report outlines the treasury management activities of the Council in the second quarter of 2025/26. It highlights the economic environment in which treasury management decisions have been made and the interest rate forecasts of the Council's Treasury Advisor, MUFG Corporate Markets (MUFG). It also updates Members on the internal treasury team's performance.

2.2. During Quarter 2 the internal treasury team achieved a return of 4.11% on the Council's cash balances, which was marginally lower than the benchmark by 0.08%. The returns amount to net income of £1.346m during the quarter which is included within the Council's outturn position in the Financial Monitoring Report. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) reduced the Bank Rate to 4.00% in August 2025 and held it at this level for its September meeting.

2.3. Under the CIPFA Treasury Management Code, it is best practice to provide quarterly Treasury Management updates.

3. Recommendations

Members are asked to review the position as set out in the report

3.1. Noting the summary of the wider economic environment and the Council's borrowings and investments set out in Appendix A.

3.2. Noting the performance within prudential indicators for quarter 2, 2025/26 (Appendix B)

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

4.1. The assessment and management of risk are key considerations for any Treasury Management approach. Compliance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management, the Council's Treasury Policy Statement and Treasury Management Practices and the Prudential Code for Capital Finance together with the rigorous internal controls will enable the Council to manage the risk associated with Treasury Management activities and the potential for financial loss.

4.2. The Council's Audit Committee is the committee responsible for ensuring effective consideration of the Council's Treasury Management Strategy and policies.

4.3. The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998.

4.4. There are no direct environmental, equalities or climate change consequences arising from this report.

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.

5.2. The Council makes assumptions about the levels of borrowing and investment income over the financial year. Reduced borrowing as a result of capital receipt

generation or delays in delivery of the capital programme will both have a positive impact of the council's cash position. Similarly, higher than benchmarked returns on available cash will also help the Council's financial position. For monitoring purposes, assumptions are made early in year about borrowing and returns based on the strategies agreed by Council in the preceding February. Performance outside of these assumptions results in increased or reduced income for the Council.

5.3. The Quarter 2 performance is slightly below the benchmark and has delivered net income of £1.346m. Further details on the performance against benchmark are detailed in paragraph 8.3.

5.4. As at 30 September 2025 the Council held £44.1 million in investments as detailed in Appendix A and borrowing of £420 million at fixed interest rates. The ability to secure fixed rates helps to manage the uncertainty and risk of changes to interest rates.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

6.1. The Council's Financial Strategy includes proposals to deliver a reduced carbon footprint for the Council therefore the Finance Team is working with the Council to achieve this. There are no direct climate change impacts arising from this report. Shropshire Council's investment portfolio has no direct scope 1, 2 or 3 emissions. It comprises of straightforward cash deposits with financial institutions and other Local Authorities.

7. Background

7.1. The Council defines its treasury management activities as "the management of the authority's borrowing, investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions, the effective control of the risks associated with those activities, and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks". The report informs Members of the treasury activities of the Council between 1 April 2025 and 30 September 2025.

7.2. For wider context and consideration of the global financial outlook, an economic and borrowing update for the second quarter is considered in Appendix D.

8. Additional Information

8.1. The Council receives its treasury advice from MUFG Corporate Markets (MUFG). Their latest interest rate forecasts to 30 September 2028 are shown below. The Bank of England has initiated its easing cycle by lowering interest rates from bank base rate has reduced over the period from 4.50% to 4.00%.

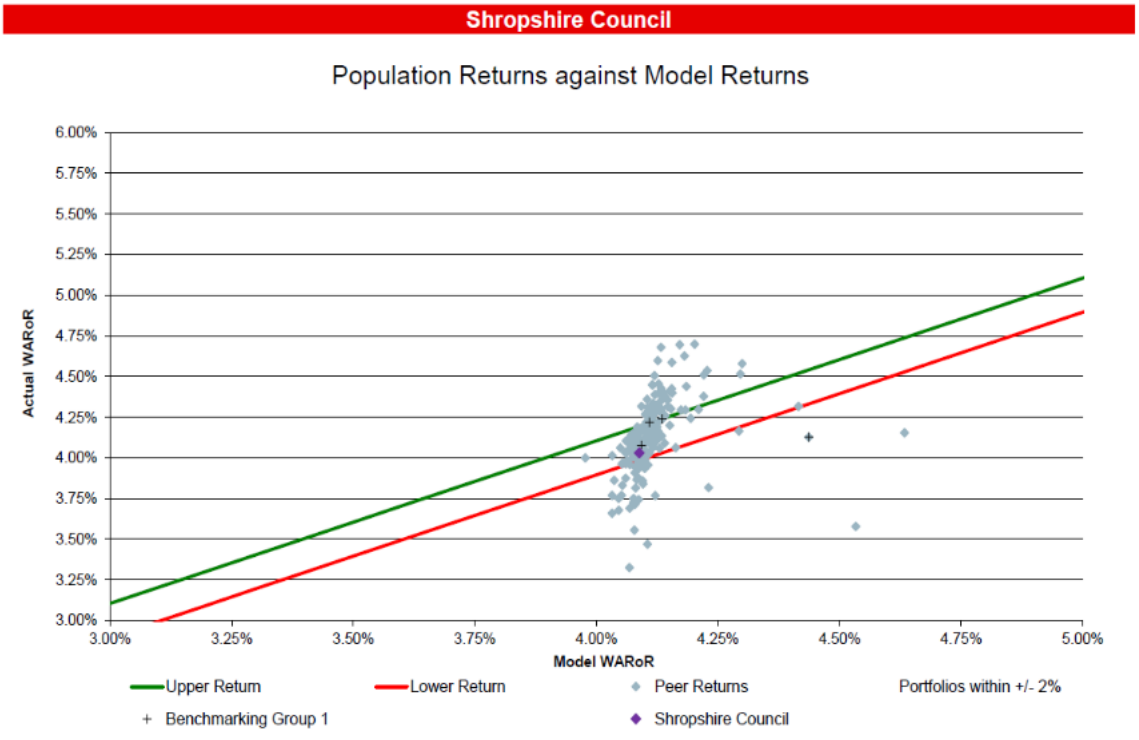
MUFG Corporate Markets Interest Rate View 11.08.25	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26	Mar-27	Jun-27	Sep-27	Dec-27	Mar-28	Jun-28	Sep-28
BANK RATE	4.00	4.00	3.75	3.75	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25
3 month ave earnings	4.00	4.00	3.80	3.80	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30
6 month ave earnings	4.00	3.90	3.70	3.70	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.30	3.30	3.40	3.40	3.40
12 month ave earnings	4.00	3.90	3.70	3.70	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.30	3.40	3.50	3.60	3.60
5 yr PWLB	4.80	4.70	4.50	4.40	4.30	4.30	4.30	4.20	4.20	4.20	4.20	4.10	4.10
10 yr PWLB	5.30	5.20	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.80	4.80	4.70	4.70	4.70	4.70	4.60	4.60
25 yr PWLB	6.10	5.90	5.70	5.70	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.40	5.40	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.20
50 yr PWLB	5.80	5.60	5.40	5.40	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.20	5.20	5.10	5.10	5.00	5.00

8.2. The Council aims to achieve the optimum return on investments commensurate with the proper levels of security and liquidity. In the current economic climate, it is considered appropriate to:

- Keep investments short term (up to 1 year),
- Only invest with highly credit rated financial institutions using MUFG's suggested creditworthiness approach, including sovereign credit rating and Credit Default Swap (CDS) overlay information provided by MUFG.

The Finance Team continue to take a prudent approach keeping investments short term and with the most highly credit rated organisations

8.3. In the second quarter of 2025/26 the internal finance team's return achieved was marginally lower than its benchmark by 0.08%. The gross investment return was 4.11% compared to the benchmark of 4.19%. As cash balances held are lower than in previous years, the Council need to ensure cash balances are highly liquid, resulting in lower interest rates on short term deals. Whilst returns on investment are important, as we strive to achieve the best investment we can, the Council's priority is always to ensure security of funds and ensure we hold sufficient liquid balances. With this in mind, this will often mean that we cannot secure the higher rate investments as these are offered to longer term deals. The Council does receive benchmarking analysis of its investments in relation to its comparative group and throughout the second quarter of 2025/26, its performance on investment were considered in line with the other organisations.



8.4. A full list of investments held as at 30 September 2025, compared to MUFG's counterparty list, and changes to Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's credit ratings are shown within MUFG's Monthly Investment Analysis Review at Appendix 1. None of the approved limits within the Annual Investment Strategy were breached during the second quarter of 2025/26. Officers continue to monitor the credit ratings of institutions on a daily basis. Delegated authority has been put in place to make any amendments to the approved lending list.

8.5. As illustrated above it is unlikely that investment rates in the market will increase above the current level of 4.00%. The average level of funds available for investment purposes in the second quarter of 2025/26 was £64.4million.

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

Council, 27 February 2025 – Treasury Strategy 2025/26

Cabinet, 10 September 2025 – Treasury Management Update Quarter 1 2025/26

Local Member:	N/A

Appendices

A. Shropshire Council Monthly Investment Analysis Review as at 30 September 2025 (provided by MUFG)

B. Prudential Indicators for Quarter 2 2025/26

C. Prudential Borrowing Approvals

D. Economic Background and Borrowing Update

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Shropshire Council

Monthly Investment Analysis Review

September 2025

Monthly Economic Summary

General Economy

The UK Manufacturing PMI fell to 46.2 in September, down from 47.0 in August and below market expectations of 47.1 signalling the steepest contraction in the sector since April. Firms cited weak domestic and export orders, including specific disruptions in the automotive supply chain due to plant stoppages at Jaguar Land Rover. Employment continued to decline whilst factory gate price inflation eased to its lowest level since December 2024, reflecting intense competitive pressures. Despite the contraction, business confidence reached its highest level since February, supported by increased investment and hopes for a rebound in order books. The S&P Global Flash UK Services PMI fell to 51.9 in September from 54.2 in August which was the highest since April 2024, and well below forecasts of 53.5. Strong business and consumer spending was not enough to overcome subdued UK economic conditions and heightened economic uncertainty. Service providers again recorded a particularly steep rise in their operating expenses, which was attributed to elevated wage pressures and efforts by suppliers to pass on higher payroll costs. There were also reports of rising energy bills, food prices and technology costs.

Combining the above left the UK Composite PMI at 51 in September, down from the one-year high of 53.5 in the previous month and missing the market consensus of 53 to reflect the slowest pace of expansion in private sector activity since May. New work at the aggregate level inched higher amid subdued export sales to the US and EU, as firms reported a lack of willingness-to-spend by clients, driving firms to depend on backlogs to sustain output. In the meantime, cost burdens rose sharply in the period due to wage pressures that have risen on more contributions to National Insurance, driving firms to increase their prices charged. Consequently, the employment subcomponent decreased for an eleventh straight month. Separately, the UK Construction PMI rose to 45.5 in August, from an over five-year low of 44.3 in July and slightly above market forecasts of 45. A slower contraction in commercial building helped offset sharper falls in residential and civil engineering work, with housing activity posting its steepest drop since February and civil engineering its worst since October 2020.

The UK economy stalled in July, in line with expectations, after expanding 0.4% in June. Services edged up 0.1% and construction also rose 0.2%. These gains were countered by a 0.9% fall in production with manufacturing down 1.3%. On the year, GDP grew 1.4%, the same pace as in June but slightly below expectations of 1.5%. Elsewhere, the UK's trade deficit widened to £5.3 billion in July, up from £5.01 billion in June and marked the largest gap since February. Exports rose by 2.3% m/m to £76.5 billion, while imports grew by 2.4% to a record high of £81.71 billion. Goods exports increased by 6.6%, supported by a 4.6% rise in shipments to the EU primarily due to a surge in aircraft exports to Germany. On the import side, goods activity advanced by 3.9% to a 13-month high of £50.9 billion, mainly due to increased imports of ships from South Korea and aircraft and cars from Germany. Meanwhile, services imports edged down by 0.1% to £28.8 billion.

The UK recorded a 232k rise in employment in the three months to July, coming above forecasts of 220k largely supported by full-time positions. The employment rate for those aged 16 to 64 edged up by 0.1 percentage points to 75.2%. The number of people holding second jobs also grew, reaching 1.301 million, equivalent to 3.8% of total employment. Meanwhile, total average weekly earnings (including bonuses) rose 4.7% y/y to £727 per week in the three months to July 2025 in line with forecasts. Private sector wage growth eased, and a small slowdown was also seen for the public sector. Adjusted for inflation, total earnings increased 0.5%, the same as in the previous period.

The Consumer Price Index increased 0.3% m/m in August, after a 0.1% rise in July and matching market expectations. The UK's annual inflation rate held steady at 3.8% in August, remaining near the highs last seen in January 2024. Inflation slowed for transport, with prices for air fares falling 3.5% and making the largest downward contribution…reversing the spike higher seen earlier in the summer due to the timing of this year's school holidays. Inflation was also lower for services, recreation and culture, clothing and footwear and steadied for housing and utilities. On the other hand, the largest upward contribution came from motor fuels.

The GfK Consumer Confidence Index slipped to -19 in September from -17 in August, as worries over looming tax hikes weighed on sentiment. All five

borrowing in the UK increased to £18.0 billion in August from £2.8 billion in July, the highest recorded borrowing for August since 2020. This was primarily due to a sharp fall in tax revenue, from £76.7 billion in July to £62.2 billion in August, which is typically at this stage of the fiscal year. Conversely, Government spending increased to £150 billion, with total public sector spending increased by £8.4 billion, driven by higher costs of public services, benefits, and debt interest.

US Economy
The US economy added 54k jobs in August, following an upwardly revised 106k in July and below forecasts of 65k. Meanwhile, the US economy grew at a 3.0% annualised rate in Q2, rebounding from a 0.5% contraction in Q1 which had been the first quarterly decline in three years. The annual inflation rate accelerated to 2.9% in August, the highest since January, after holding at 2.7% in both June and July. Prices rose at a faster pace for food, used cars and trucks, and new vehicles. Also, energy costs increased for the first time in seven months with prices for gasoline and fuel oil decreasing less and natural gas prices remaining elevated at 13.8%. Core consumer prices, which exclude food and energy, rose by 0.3% from the previous month in August of 2025. Finally, food price inflation in the US picked up to 3.2% in August, the steepest since October 2023, from 2.9% in July, driven by an acceleration in food-at-home prices.

EU Economy
The annual inflation rate in the Eurozone rose to 2.2% in September, up from 2.0% in the previous three months, moving slightly above the European Central Bank's 2.0% target. Meanwhile, the annual core inflation rate, which excludes prices of food, energy, and tobacco, was at 2.3% for a fifth consecutive month. The Eurozone economy expanded by 0.1% in Q2 2025. Despite beating market expectations of flat growth, it marked the weakest pace of expansion since late 2023. The slowdown reflects growing caution among businesses and households, as they weigh easing inflation and lower borrowing costs against rising trade uncertainty, particularly due to US tariffs. Among the bloc's major economies, Spain and France outperformed with growth of 0.7% and 0.3%, respectively. The Netherlands posted modest growth of 0.1%, while both Germany and Italy slipped into contraction, each shrinking by 0.1%.

Housing
The Halifax House Price Index in the UK rose 0.3% m/m in September easing from 0.4% in August, leaving the annual rate at 2.2%. The UK Nationwide House Price index grew 0.5% m/m in September, beating forecasts of 0.2%, leaving the annual rate also at 2.2%.

Currency
Sterling depreciated against both the Dollar and the Euro.

September	Start	End	High	Low
GBP/USD	$1.3550	$1.3463	$1.3660	$1.3349
GBP/EUR	€1.1570	€1.1458	€1.1570	€1.1432

Interest Rate Forecasts
MUFG Corporate Markets maintained its current forecast. Capital Economics revised its forecast up 25bps from the end of Q4 2025 to end of Q3 2024

Bank Rate	NOW	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26	Mar-27	Jun-27	Sep-27	Dec-27	Mar-28	Jun-28	Sep-28
MUFG Corporate Markets	**4.00%**	4.00%	4.00%	3.75%	3.75%	3.50%	3.50%	3.50%	3.50%	3.25%	3.25%	3.25%	3.25%	3.25%
Capital Economics	**4.00%**	4.00%	4.00%	3.75%	3.50%	3.25%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	-	-	-

Shropshire Council

Current Investment List

	Borrower	Principal (£)	Interest Rate	Start Date	Maturity Date	Lowest LT / Fund Rating	Historic Risk of Default	Expected Credit Loss (£)
	MMF Aberdeen Standard Investments	15,000,000	4.07%		MMF	AAAm		
	MMF Insight	15,000,000	4.06%		MMF	AAAm		
	National Westminster Bank Plc (RFB)	2,300,000	4.01%	10/09/2025	30/10/2025	A+	0.004%	87
	DMO	2,900,000	3.95%	26/09/2025	02/10/2025	AA-	0.000%	0
	DMO	2,300,000	3.95%	29/09/2025	06/10/2025	AA-	0.000%	0
	DMO	6,600,000	3.95%	30/09/2025	01/10/2025	AA-	0.000%	0
	Total Investments	**£44,100,000**	**4.03%**					£87

Note: An historic risk of default is only provided if a counterparty has a counterparty credit rating and is not provided for an MMF or USDBF, for which the rating agencies provide a fund rating. The portfolio's historic risk of default therefore measures the historic risk of default attached only to those investments for which a counterparty has a counterparty credit rating and also does not include investments which are not rated.

The Historic Risk of Default column is based on the lowest long term rating. If clients are using this % for their Expected Credit Loss calculation under IFRS 9, please be aware that the Code does not recognise a loss allowance where the counterparty is central government or a local authority since relevant statutory provisions prevent default. For these instruments, the Expected Credit Loss will be nil. Please note that we are currently using Historic Default Rates from 1990-2024 for Fitch, 1983-2024 for Moody's and 1981-2024 for S&P.

Where MUFG Corporate Markets have provided a return for a property fund, that return covers the 12 months to June 2025, which are the latest returns currently available.

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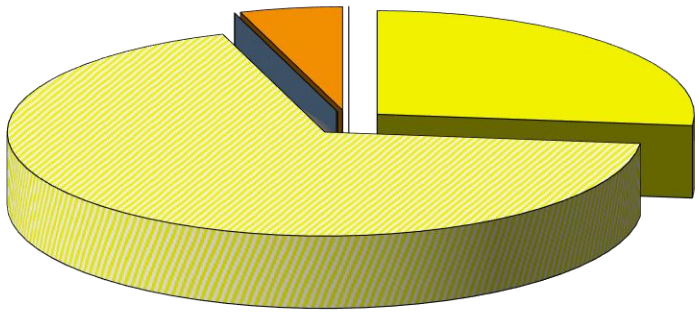
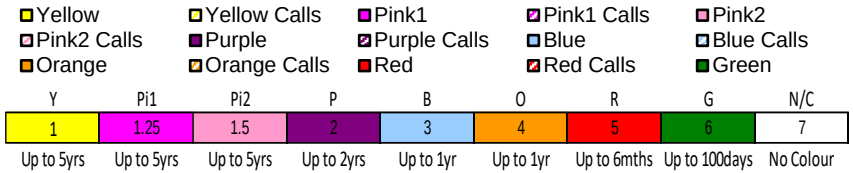
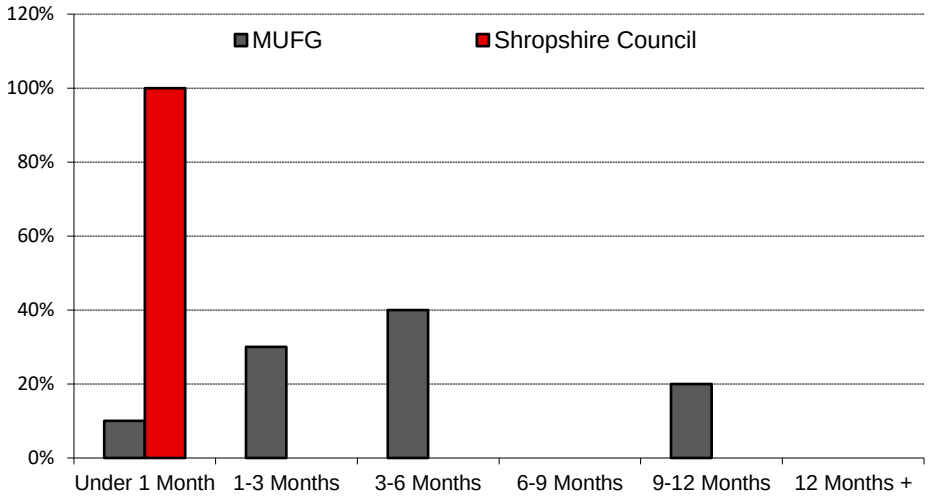
Portfolio Composition by MUFG's Suggested Lending Criteria







Portfolios weighted average risk number = 1.16

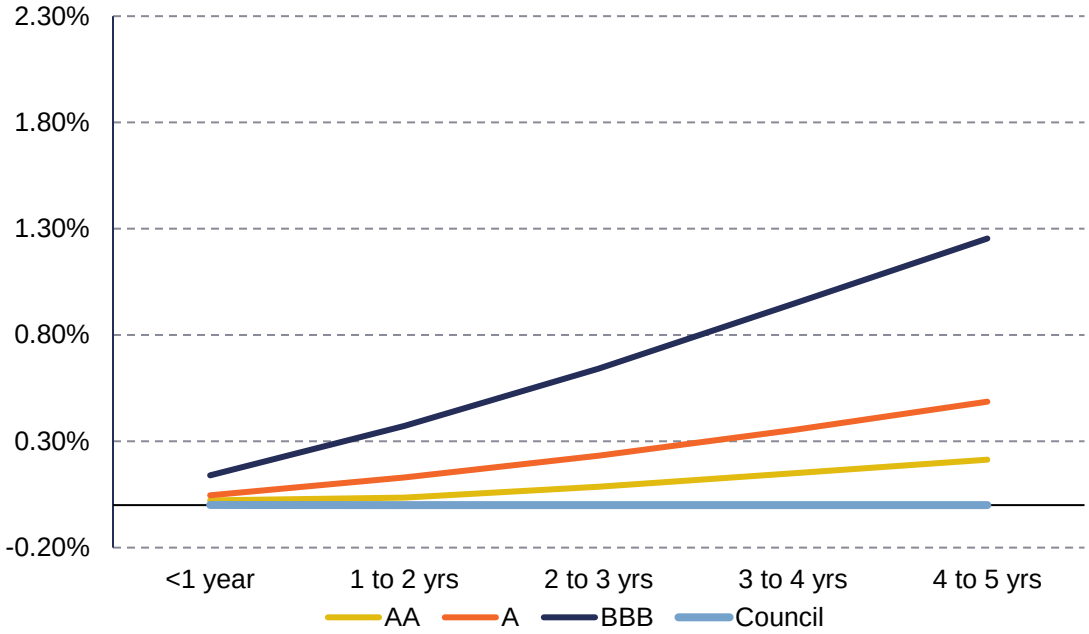
WARoR = Weighted Average Rate of Return
WAM = Weighted Average Time to Maturity

	% of Portfolio	Amount	% of Colour in Calls	Amount of Colour in Calls	% of Call in Portfolio	WARoR	WAM	WAM at Execution	Excluding Calls/MMFs/USDBFs WAM	Excluding Calls/MMFs/USDBFs WAM at Execution
Yellow	94.78%	£41,800,000	71.77%	£30,000,000	68.03%	4.03%	1	1	2	3
Pink1	0.00%	£0	0.00%	£0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0	0	0
Pink2	0.00%	£0	0.00%	£0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0	0	0
Purple	0.00%	£0	0.00%	£0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0	0	0
Blue	0.00%	£0	0.00%	£0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0	0	0
Orange	5.22%	£2,300,000	0.00%	£0	0.00%	4.01%	30	50	30	50
Red	0.00%	£0	0.00%	£0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0	0	0
Green	0.00%	£0	0.00%	£0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0	0	0
No Colour	0.00%	£0	0.00%	£0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0	0	0
	100.00%	**£44,100,000**	**68.03%**	**£30,000,000**	**68.03%**	**4.03%**	**2**	**4**	**7**	**11**

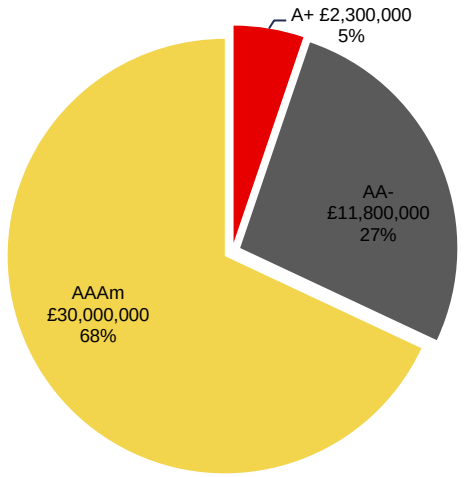
Shropshire Council

Investment Risk and Rating Exposure

Investment Risk Vs. Rating Categories



Rating Exposure



Historic Risk of Default

Rating/Years	<1 year	1 to 2 yrs	2 to 3 yrs	3 to 4 yrs	4 to 5 yrs
AA	0.02%	0.04%	0.09%	0.15%	0.21%
A	0.05%	0.13%	0.23%	0.35%	0.49%
BBB	0.14%	0.37%	0.64%	0.95%	1.25%
Council	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Historic Risk of Default
This is a proxy for the average % risk for each investment based on over 30 years of data provided by Fitch, Moody's and S&P. It simply provides a calculation of the possibility of average default against the historical default rates, adjusted for the time period within each year according to the maturity of the investment.

Chart Relative Risk
This is the authority's risk weightings compared to the average % risk of default for “AA”, “A” and “BBB” rated investments.

Rating Exposures
This pie chart provides a clear view of your investment exposures to particular ratings.

Note: An historic risk of default is only provided if a counterparty has a counterparty credit rating and is not provided for an MMF or USDBF, for which the rating agencies provide a fund rating. The portfolio’s historic risk of default therefore measures the historic risk of default attached only to those investments for which a counterparty has a counterparty credit rating and also does not include investments which are not rated.

Shropshire Council

Monthly Credit Rating Changes
FITCH

Date	Update Number	Institution	Country	Rating Action
15/09/2025	2093	France (Sovereign)	France	The Sovereign Rating was downgraded to 'A+' from 'AA-' and the Outlook on the Sovereign Rating was changed to Stable from Negative.
25/09/2025	2095	Coventry Building Society	United Kingdom	The Outlook on the Long Term Rating was changed to Stable from Negative.

Shropshire Council

Monthly Credit Rating Changes
S&P

Date	Update Number	Institution	Country	Rating Action
26/09/2025	2096	Swedbank AB	Sweden	The Long Term and Short Term Ratings were upgraded to 'AA-' from 'A+' and to 'A-1+' from 'A-1' respectively. The Outlook on the Long Term Rating was also changed to Stable from Positive.

Shropshire Council

Monthly Credit Rating Changes
MOODY'S

Date	Update Number	Institution	Country	Rating Action
16/09/2025	2094	Toronto-Dominion Bank	Canada	The Long Term Rating was upgraded to 'Aa1' from 'Aa2'. The Long Term Rating was also placed on Stable Outlook and removed from Positive Watch.

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APPENDIX B – PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS FOR QUARTER 2

Prudential Indicator	2025/26 Indicator £m	Quarter 1 – Actual £m	Quarter 2 – Actual £m	Quarter 3 – Actual £m	Quarter 4 – Actual £m
Non HRA Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)	455	317	317		
HRA CFR	111	103	103		
Gross borrowing	566	420	420		
Investments	75	39	44		
Net borrowing	491	381	376		
Authorised limit for external debt	748	420	420		
Operational boundary for external debt	660	420	420		
Limit of fixed interest rates (borrowing)	748	420	420		
Limit of variable interest rates (borrowing)	374	0	0		
Internal Team Principal sums invested > 364 days	70	0	0		
Maturity structure of borrowing limits	%	%	%	%	%
Under 12 months	25	19	19		
12 months to 2 years	25	16	16		
2 years to 5 years	50	3	3		
5 years to 10 years	75	21	21		
10 years to 20 years	100	14	14		
20 years to 30 years	100	18	18		
30 years to 40 years	100	4	4		
40 years to 50 years	100	3	3		
50 years and above	100	2	2		

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APPENDIX C -PRUDENTIAL BORROWING APPROVALS

Prudential Borrowing Approvals	Date Approved	Amount Approved	Applied (Spent) 2006/07	Applied (Spent) 2007/08	Applied (Spent) 2008/09	Applied (Spent) 2009/10	Applied (Spent) 2010/11	Applied (Spent) 2011/12	Applied (Spent) 2012/13	Applied (Spent) 2013/14	Applied (Spent) 2014/15	Applied (Spent) 2015/16	Applied (Spent) 2016/17	Applied (Spent) 2017/18	Applied (Spent) 2018/19	Applied (Spent) 2019/20	Applied (Spent) 2020/21	Applied (Spent) 2021/22	Applied (Spent) 2022/23	Applied (Spent) 2023/24	Applied (Spent) 2024/25	Budgeted 2025/26	Budgeted 2026/27	Budgeted 2027/28	Budgeted 2028/29	First year MRP Charged	Asset Life	Final year MRP Charged
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£			
Monkmoor Campus	24/02/2006	3,580,000																										
Capital Receipts Shortfall -Cashflow	24/02/2006	5,000,000																										
Applied:																												
Monkmoor Campus			3,000,000		0																					2007/08	25	2031/32
William Brooks					0		3,580,000																			2011/12	25	2035/36
Tern Valley					2,000,000																					2010/11	35	2044/45
		8,580,000	**3,000,000**	**0**	**2,000,000**	**0**	**3,580,000**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**			
Highways	24/02/2006	2,000,000	2,000,000																							2007/08	20	2026/27
Accommodation Changes	24/02/2006	650,000	410,200	39,800																						2007/08	6	2012/13
Accommodation Changes - Saving	31/03/2007	(200,000)																										
		450,000	**410,200**	**39,800**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**			
The Ptarmigan Building	05/11/2009	3,744,000				3,744,000																				2010/11	25	2034/35
The Mount McKinley Building	05/11/2009	2,782,000				2,782,000																				2011/12	25	2035/36
The Mount McKinley Building	05/11/2009	0					0																			2011/12	5	2015/16
Capital Strategy Schemes - Potential Capital Receipts shortfall	25/02/2010	187,600					0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0											25	
- Desktop Virtualisation						187,600	0																			2010/11	5	2014/15
Carbon Efficiency Schemes/Self Financing	25/02/2010	1,512,442					115,656	1,312,810	83,976	0	0	0	0	0	0	0											2011/12	5	2017/18
Transformation schemes		92,635						92,635	0	0																2012/13	3	2014/15
Renewables - Biomass - Self Financing	14/09/2011	92,996						82,408	98,258	-87,670	0															2014/15	25	2038/39
Solar PV Council Buildings - Self Financing	11/05/2011	56,342						1,283,959	124,584	-1,352,202	0															2013/14	25	2038/39
Depot Redevelopment - Self Financing	23/02/2012	0							0	0	0															2014/15	10	2023/24
Oswestry Leisure Centre Equipment - Self Financing	04/04/2012	124,521						124,521																		2012/13	5	2016/17
Leisure Services - Self Financing	01/08/2012	711,197							711,197																	2013/14	5	2016/17
Mardol House Acqusition	26/02/2015	4,160,000									4,160,000	0														2015/16	25	2039/40
Mardol House Adaptation and Refit	26/02/2015	3,340,000									167,641	3,172,359	0	0	0	0										2016/17	25	2041/42
Oswestry Leisure Centre Equipment - Self Financing	01/08/2012	290,274												274,239		16,035										2018/19	5	2022/23
Car Parking Strategy Implementation	17/01/2018	590,021													588,497	1,524										2020/21	5	2024/25
JPUT - Investment in Units re Shrewsbury Shopping Centres	13/12/2017	55,299,533												52,204,603	-208,569	2,791,967	320,079	191,453								2018/19	45	2042/43
JPUT - SSC No 1 Ltd	13/12/2017	527,319												527,319														
CDL Shareholding	28/02/2019	1															1									2021/22		
Children's Residental Care	28/02/2019	1,999,999														1,381,539	230,765	38,487	316,210	33,000						2020/21	25	2044/45
Pride Hill Shopping Centre Reconfiguration - LEP Match	19/12/2019	1,928,978															434,027	842,293	652,658							AUC	45	2070/71
Pride Hill Shopping Centre Reconfiguration - Feb 22 approval	01/02/2022	2,377,000																	197,614	1,076,307	250,423	838,702				AUC	45	2070/71
Pride Hill Phase 1 Enabling Works	01/02/2022	0																			13,955					AUC	45	2070/71
Multi Agency Hub - Feb 22 approval	01/02/2022	3,146,000																				3,146,000				AUC	45	2070/71
Greenacres Supported Living Development	24/09/2020	-																34,317	41,688	1,979	-77,983					N/A	N/A	N/A

Prudential Borrowing Approvals	Date Approved	Amount Approved	Applied (Spent) 2006/07	Applied (Spent) 2007/08	Applied (Spent) 2008/09	Applied (Spent) 2009/10	Applied (Spent) 2010/11	Applied (Spent) 2011/12	Applied (Spent) 2012/13	Applied (Spent) 2013/14	Applied (Spent) 2014/15	Applied (Spent) 2015/16	Applied (Spent) 2016/17	Applied (Spent) 2017/18	Applied (Spent) 2018/19	Applied (Spent) 2019/20	Applied (Spent) 2020/21	Applied (Spent) 2021/22	Applied (Spent) 2022/23	Applied (Spent) 2023/24	Applied (Spent) 2024/25	Budgeted 2025/26	Budgeted 2026/27	Budgeted 2027/28	Budgeted 2028/29	First year MRP Charged	Asset Life	Final year MRP Charged
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£			
Bishops Castle Business Park	19/09/2019	2,874,695															2,900	1,545,647	1,271,102	55,046						2023/24	25	2044/45
Development)	26/07/2018	3,778,228																	171,509	1,392,326	1,644,315	570,078				2023/24	25	2047/48
Oswestry Castleview - Site Acquisition	19/12/2019	3,256,241														3,256,241										2020/21	25	2044/45
Former Morrisons Site, Oswestry	19/09/2019	3,390,145															3,390,145									2021/22	25	2045/46
Meole Brace Pitch & Putt		5,400,000																11,927	136,349	263,137	244,820	1,543,768	3,200,000			AUC	25	
Maesbury Solar Farm		2,041,173																	19,682	26,876	35,826	1,458,789	500,000			AUC	25	
Commercial Investment Fund	Fin Strat	1,764,234																				52,415	232,340	1,479,479		2021/22	25	2044/45
The Tannery Development Block A - Land Acqusition		657,253																62,500	594,753							2022/23	25	2045/46
The Tannery Development Block A		6,356,606																			5,150	351,456	3,500,000	2,500,000		AUC		
The Tannery Development - Block B & C		7,471,561													3,677,844	3,456,019	311,325	16,614	3,847	5,912						2019/20	25	2045/46
Oswestry Property Acquisition	12/05/2022	3,332,304																	3,332,304							2023/24	25	2047/48
Shrewsbury Property Acquisition		3,837,012																	3,837,012							2023/24	25	2047/48
Biochar Pyrolysis - Project 1		535,000																			50,906	484,094				2026/27	25	2047/48
Biodynamic Carbon (BDC) Limited Share Holding		500																			500					2025/26	25	
Biodynamic Carbon (BDC) Limited Working Capital Investment		9,500																			9,500					2025/26	25	
Biochar Pyrolysis - Project 2		2,751,000																		9,420	227,809	1,213,771	1,300,000			2026/27	25	
Biochar Pyrolysis - Project Framework		4,000																			4,000					2025/26		
Recycling Bin Roll Out Programme		2,029,778																4,395	2,025,384							2022/23	10	2032/33
Highways Investment Programme	Capital Strat Feb 22	22,954,755																3,983,412	18,011,589		786,754	173,000				2022/23	25	2046/47
Oswestry Innovation Park		10,028,332																		4,218,112	3,060,927	713,000	2,036,293			2022/23	25	2046/47
Cambrian Building Oswestry - UKSPF		270,107																		14,900	142,650	112,557				2022/23	25	2046/47
Whitchurch Swimming & Leisure Facility	22/09/2022	13,100,282																	390,954	3,010,525	9,390,291	308,513				2026/27	40	2065/66
Previous NSDC Borrowing		955,595			821,138	134,457																				2009/10	5/25	2065/66
Capital Receipts Released By Additional Borrowing		8,226,507																		8,226,507						2024/25	25?	2048/49
Shrewsbury Sports Village - Swimming Pool	26/09/2024	2,248,000																			440,011	1,807,989				AUC		
Ptarmigan Building FRA & Refurbishment Works		415,245																			387,660	27,585				2025/26	10	2035/36
Transformation Programme 2024-25 Expenditure Funded Through Borrowing Under EFS Approval		26,819,527																			26,819,527					2025/26	25?	
		228,500,436	**5,410,200**	**39,800**	**2,821,138**	**6,848,057**	**3,695,656**	**2,896,333**	**1,018,015**	**-1,439,872**	**4,327,641**	**3,172,359**	**0**	**53,006,161**	**4,057,772**	**10,903,324**	**4,689,243**	**6,731,044**	**31,002,652**	**18,334,046**	**43,437,041**	**12,801,716**	**10,768,633**	**3,979,479**	**0**			

Appendix D

Economic Background and Borrowing Update

Economic Background

The second quarter of 2025/26 saw:

- The economy flatlined in July, with higher taxes for businesses restraining growth.
- The 3m/yy rate of average earnings growth excluding bonuses has fallen from 5.5% to 4.8% in July.
- CPI inflation has ebbed and flowed but finished September at 3.8%, whilst core inflation eased to 3.6%.
- The Bank of England cut interest rates from 4.25% to 4.00% in August.
- The 10-year gilt yield fluctuated between 4.4% and 4.8%, ending the half year at 4.70%.

From a GDP perspective, the 0.0% m/m change in real GDP in July will have caused some concern, with the hikes in taxes for businesses that took place in April this year undoubtedly playing a part in restraining growth. The weak overseas environment is also likely to have contributed to the 1.3% m/m fall in manufacturing output in July. That was the second large fall in three months and left the 3m/3m rate at a 20-month low of -1.1%. Looking ahead, ongoing speculation about further tax rises in the Autumn Budget on 26 November will remain a drag on GDP growth for a while yet.

Sticking with future economic sentiment, the composite Purchasing Manager Index for the UK fell from 53.5 in August to 51.0 in September. The decline was mostly driven by a fall in the services PMI, which declined from 54.2 to 51.9. The manufacturing PMI output balance also fell, from 49.3 to 45.4. That was due to both weak overseas demand (the new exports orders balance fell for the fourth month in a row) and the cyber-attack-induced shutdown at Jaguar Land Rover since 1 September reducing car production across the automotive supply chain. The PMIs suggest tepid growth is the best that can be expected when the Q3 GDP numbers are released.

With regard to retail sales, the 0.5% m/m rise in volumes in August was the third such rise in a row and was driven by gains in all the major categories except fuel sales, which fell by 2.0% m/m. Sales may have been supported by the warmer-than-usual weather. If sales were just flat in September, then in Q3 sales volumes would be up 0.7% q/q compared to the 0.2% q/q gain in Q2.

With the November Budget edging nearer, the public finances position looks weak. Public net sector borrowing of £18.0bn in August means that after five months of the financial year, borrowing is already £11.4bn higher than the OBR forecast at the Spring Statement in March. The overshoot in the Chancellor's chosen fiscal mandate of the current budget is even greater with a cumulative deficit of £15.3bn. All this was due to both current receipts in August being lower than the OBR forecast (by £1.8bn) and current expenditure being higher (by £1.0bn).

A looser labour market is driving softer wage pressures. The 3m/yy rate of average earnings growth excluding bonuses has fallen from 5.5% in April to 4.8% in July. The rate for the private sector slipped from 5.5% to 4.7%, putting it on track to be in line with the Bank of England's Q3 forecast (4.6% for September).

More recently, though, inflation pressures have resurfaced, although the recent upward march in CPI inflation did pause for breath in August, with CPI inflation staying at 3.8%. Core inflation eased once more too, from 3.8% to 3.6%, and services inflation dipped from 5.0% to 4.7%.

The FTSE 100 has enjoyed a 4% rise in July, its strongest monthly gain since January and outperforming the S&P 500. Strong corporate earnings and progress in trade talks (US-EU, UK-India) lifted share prices and the index hit a record 9,321 in mid-August, driven by hopes of peace in Ukraine. September proved more volatile and the FTSE 100 closed Q3 at 9,350, 7% higher than at the end of Q1 and 14% higher since the start of 2025. Future performance will likely be impacted by the extent to which investors' global risk appetite remains intact, Fed rate cuts, resilience in the US economy, and AI optimism. A weaker pound will also boost the index as it inflates overseas earnings.

A summary overview of the future path of Bank Rate

There were two Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meetings in the second quarter of the financial year. In August, the Bank Rate was reduced from 4.25% to 4.00%. However, a 5-4 split vote for a rate cut to 4% laid bare the different views within the Monetary Policy Committee, with the accompanying commentary noting the decision was "finely balanced" and reiterating that future rate cuts would be undertaken "gradually and carefully". Ultimately, Governor Bailey was the casting vote for a rate cut but with the CPI measure of inflation expected to reach at least 4% later this year, the MPC will be wary of making any further rate cuts until inflation begins its slow downwards trajectory back towards 2%. This was demonstrated at the September meeting, where the rate of 4.00% was maintained with a vote of 7-2.

Borrowing

It is a statutory duty for the Council to determine and keep under review the "Affordable Borrowing Limits". The Council's approved Treasury and Prudential Indicators (affordability limits) are included in the approved Treasury Management Strategy. A list of the approved limits is shown in Appendix B. The Prudential Indicators were not breached during the second quarter of 2025/26 and have not been previously breached. The schedule at Appendix C details the Prudential Borrowing approved and utilised to date.

No new external borrowing has currently been undertaken to date in 2025/26.

The Council had not undertaken any new borrowing for a number of years until 2024/25, and has been utilising cash balances to internally "borrow" for prudential borrowing schemes. This has enabled the Council to benefit from increased interest costs compared to the returns that could be generated on the cash balances. This

approach has been effective during a period where the Council has held significant cash balances.

Cash balances have now reduced as a result of reduced levels of reserves being held and loans continuing to reach their maturity dates. Therefore, it has been necessary over the last 18 months to secure additional borrowing to reduce the under-borrowed position.

Gilt yields and PWLB certainty rates have remained relatively volatile throughout the six months under review, but the general trend has been for medium and longer dated parts of the curve to shift higher whilst the 5-year part of the curve finished September close to where it begun in April.

The table below shows the high/low/average PWLB rates for the first six months of the financial year.

	1 Year	5 Year	10 Year	25 Year	50 Year
01/04/2025	4.82%	4.94%	5.38%	5.95%	5.63%
30/09/2025	4.58%	4.95%	5.53%	6.23%	5.98%
Low	4.36%	4.62%	5.17%	5.78%	5.46%
Low date	04/08/2025	02/05/2025	02/05/2025	04/04/2025	04/04/2025
High	4.84%	4.99%	5.62%	6.41%	6.14%
High date	02/04/2025	21/05/2025	03/09/2025	03/09/2025	03/09/2025
Average	4.55%	4.82%	5.40%	6.11%	5.83%
Spread	0.48%	0.37%	0.45%	0.63%	0.68%

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Committee and Date	Item
Audit and Governance Committee 27th November 2025	
Cabinet 3rd December 2025	Public
Council 11th December 2025	

Treasury Strategy 2025/26 Mid-Year Review

Responsible Officer:	James Walton	
email:	james.walton@shropshire.gov.uk	
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Roger Evans, Finance	

1. Synopsis

As at 30 September 2025 the Council held £44.1m in investments and had £420m of borrowing. The report confirms compliance with Treasury and Prudential limits agreed by Full Council.

2. Executive Summary

2.1. This mid-year Treasury Strategy report has been prepared in compliance with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management 2017 and covers the following:

- An economic update for the first six months of 2025/26
- A review of the Treasury Strategy 2025/26 and Annual Investment Strategy
- A review of the Council's investment portfolio for 2025/26
- A review of the Council's borrowing strategy for 2025/26
- A review of any debt rescheduling taken
- A review of compliance with Treasury and Prudential limits for 2025/26

3. Recommendations

Members of the Audit Committee and Cabinet are asked to:

3.1. Agree the Treasury Strategy activity as set out in the report.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

4.1. The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998.

4.2. There are no direct environmental, equalities or climate change consequences arising from this report.

4.3. The main risk relating to undertaking Treasury Management activities is a potential financial loss and this is considered in the table below:

Risk	***Mitigation***
Potential financial loss arising from undertaking Treasury Management activities	All Treasury Management practices are in compliance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management, the Council's Treasury Policy Statement, and the Prudential Code for Capital Finance, together with rigorous internal controls.
	Council's Audit Committee is the committee responsible for ensuring effective consideration of the Council's Treasury Management Strategy and policies

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.

5.2. The Council makes assumptions about the levels of borrowing and investment income over the financial year. Reduced borrowing as a result of capital receipt

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generation or delays in delivery of the capital programme will both have a positive impact of the council's cash position. Similarly, higher than benchmarked returns on available cash will also help the Council's financial position. For monitoring purposes, assumptions are made early in year about borrowing and returns based on the strategies agreed by Council in the preceding February. Performance outside of these assumptions results in increased or reduced income for the Council.

5.3. The 2025/26 six-month performance is marginally below benchmark but has delivered net income of £1.346m.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

6.1. The Council's Financial Strategy includes proposals to deliver a reduced carbon footprint for the Council therefore the Treasury Team is working with the Council to achieve this. There are no direct climate change impacts arising from this report. Shropshire Council's investment portfolio has no level 1, 2 or 3 emissions. It comprises of straightforward cash deposits with financial institutions and other Local Authorities.

7. Background

7.1. The Council defines its treasury management activities as "the management of the authority's borrowing, investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions, the effective control of the risks associated with the activities, and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks." Broadly, cash received by the Council raised during the year will meet its cash expenditure. Treasury Management operations ensure this cash flow is planned and managed. Temporary surplus balances are invested in low-risk counterparties (providing security), ensuring cash availability (liquidity), and only considering investment return (yield) last.

7.2. Cash flow management covers in-year (revenue) costs as well as the funding of the Council's long term (capital) plans. Capital plans provide a guide to the future borrowing need of the Council and may involve arranging long or short-term borrowing. Occasionally existing debt may be restructured as opportunities allow.

7.3. In December 2017, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, (CIPFA), issued revised Prudential and Treasury Management Codes. As from 2019/20, all local authorities are required to prepare a Capital Strategy which is intended to provide the following: -

- A high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services
- An overview of how associated risk is managed
- The implications for future financial sustainability

7.4. A report setting out the Council's Capital Strategy was taken to full Council in February 2024. This report informs Members of the treasury activities of the Council for the first six months of the financial year.

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7.5. To secure specialist advice on long-term borrowing and investment, the Council works with MUFG Corporate Markets (MUFG), who provide the detailed analysis set out in this report.

8. Economic Update and Forecast

8.1. Since the Council's Treasury and Capital strategies were agreed in February 2025, there has been further change in terms of the economic environment. The Bank of England has initiated its easing cycle by lowering interest rates from bank base rate has reduced over the period from 4.50% to 4.00%. A detailed commentary can be found in Appendix D.

8.2. MUFG forecast interest rates over the next 36 months. Their latest interest rate forecasts are shown below.

MUFG Corporate Markets Interest Rate View 11.08.25													
	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26	Mar-27	Jun-27	Sep-27	Dec-27	Mar-28	Jun-28	Sep-28
BANK RATE	4.00	4.00	3.75	3.75	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25
3 month ave earnings	4.00	4.00	3.80	3.80	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30
6 month ave earnings	4.00	3.90	3.70	3.70	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.30	3.30	3.40	3.40	3.40
12 month ave earnings	4.00	3.90	3.70	3.70	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.30	3.40	3.50	3.60	3.60
5 yr PWLB	4.80	4.70	4.50	4.40	4.30	4.30	4.30	4.20	4.20	4.20	4.20	4.10	4.10
10 yr PWLB	5.30	5.20	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.80	4.80	4.70	4.70	4.70	4.70	4.60	4.60
25 yr PWLB	6.10	5.90	5.70	5.70	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.40	5.40	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.20
50 yr PWLB	5.80	5.60	5.40	5.40	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.20	5.20	5.10	5.10	5.00	5.00

9. Treasury Strategy Update

9.1. The Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) for 2025/26 was approved by Full Council on 27 February 2025. There are no policy changes, or any changes required to the prudential and treasury indicators previously approved. The details in this report update the position in the light of the updated economic position.

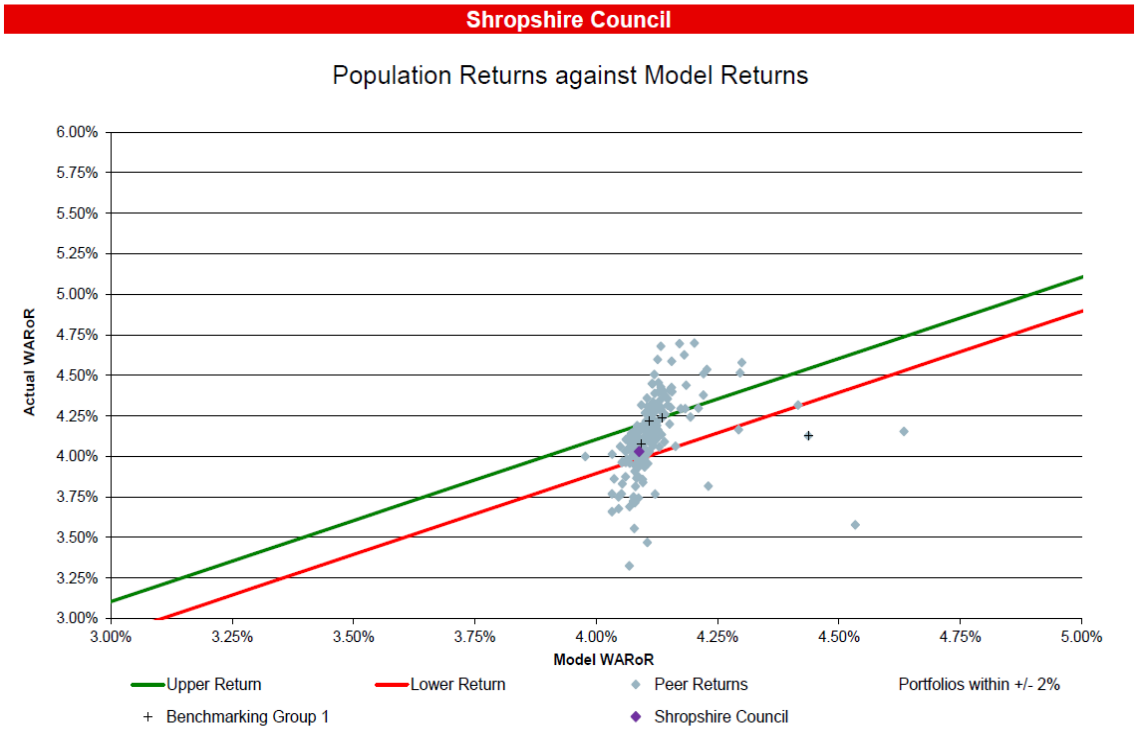
10. Annual Investment Strategy

10.1. .The Council's Annual Investment Strategy, which is incorporated in the TMS, outlines the Council's investment priorities as the security and liquidity of its capital. In the current economic climate, it is considered appropriate to keep investments short term to cover cash flow needs, but also to seek out value available in periods up to 12 months with high credit quality financial institutions, using the MUFG suggested creditworthiness approach, including a minimum sovereign credit rating and Credit Default Swap (CDS) overlay information.

10.2. The average level of funds available for investment purposes during the first half of the financial year was £64.430m. These funds were available on a temporary basis, and the level of funds available was mainly dependent on the timing of precept payments, receipt of grants and progress on the capital programme.

10.3. In the first six months of 2025/26 the internal finance team's return achieved was marginally lower than its benchmark by 0.07%. The gross investment return was 4.18% compared to the benchmark of 4.25%. As cash balances held are lower than in previous years, the Council need to ensure cash balances are highly liquid,

resulting in lower interest rates on short term deals. Whilst returns on investment are important, as we strive to achieve the best investment we can, the Council's priority is always to ensure security of funds and ensure we hold sufficient liquid balances. With this in mind, this will often mean that we cannot secure the higher rate investments as these are offered to longer term deals. The Council does receive benchmarking analysis of its investments in relation to its comparative group and throughout the second quarter of 2025/26, its performance on investment were considered in line with the other organisations.



10.4. A full list of investments held as at 30 September 2025, compared to MUFG's counterparty list, and changes to Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's credit ratings are shown within MUFG's Monthly Investment Analysis Review at Appendix 1. None of the approved limits within the Annual Investment Strategy were breached during the first half of 2025/26. Officers continue to monitor the credit ratings of institutions on a daily basis. Delegated authority has been put in place to make any amendments to the approved lending list.

10.5. Recent investment rates available in the market have decreased due to the central bank rate reducing to 4.00% in August 2025.

10.6. The interest receivable budget is expected to deliver, as a minimum, net income of £1.346m in the first six months of the year. Projections on income will be reviewed monthly. The current estimates are based on assumptions of the value of investment balances.

11. Borrowing

11.1. Details of the Council's borrowing activity can be found within Appendix D.

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

Treasury Strategy 2025/26 – Council, 27 February 2025

Financial Strategy 2025/26 – 2029/30 – Council, 27 February 2025

Local Member: N/A

Appendices

Appendix A – Investment Report as at 30 September 2025

Appendix B – Prudential Limits

Appendix C – Prudential Borrowing Schedule

Appendix D – Economic Background and Borrowing Update

Shropshire Council

Monthly Investment Analysis Review

September 2025

Monthly Economic Summary

General Economy

The UK Manufacturing PMI fell to 46.2 in September, down from 47.0 in August and below market expectations of 47.1 signalling the steepest contraction in the sector since April. Firms cited weak domestic and export orders, including specific disruptions in the automotive supply chain due to plant stoppages at Jaguar Land Rover. Employment continued to decline whilst factory gate price inflation eased to its lowest level since December 2024, reflecting intense competitive pressures. Despite the contraction, business confidence reached its highest level since February, supported by increased investment and hopes for a rebound in order books. The S&P Global Flash UK Services PMI fell to 51.9 in September from 54.2 in August which was the highest since April 2024, and well below forecasts of 53.5. Strong business and consumer spending was not enough to overcome subdued UK economic conditions and heightened economic uncertainty. Service providers again recorded a particularly steep rise in their operating expenses, which was attributed to elevated wage pressures and efforts by suppliers to pass on higher payroll costs. There were also reports of rising energy bills, food prices and technology costs.

Combining the above left the UK Composite PMI at 51 in September, down from the one-year high of 53.5 in the previous month and missing the market consensus of 53 to reflect the slowest pace of expansion in private sector activity since May. New work at the aggregate level inched higher amid subdued export sales to the US and EU, as firms reported a lack of willingness-to-spend by clients, driving firms to depend on backlogs to sustain output. In the meantime, cost burdens rose sharply in the period due to wage pressures that have risen on more contributions to National Insurance, driving firms to increase their prices charged. Consequently, the employment subcomponent decreased for an eleventh straight month. Separately, the UK Construction PMI rose to 45.5 in August, from an over five-year low of 44.3 in July and slightly above market forecasts of 45. A slower contraction in commercial building helped offset sharper falls in residential and civil engineering work, with housing activity posting its steepest drop since February and civil engineering its worst since October 2020.

The UK economy stalled in July, in line with expectations, after expanding 0.4% in June. Services edged up 0.1% and construction also rose 0.2%. These gains were countered by a 0.9% fall in production with manufacturing down 1.3%. On the year, GDP grew 1.4%, the same pace as in June but slightly below expectations of 1.5%. Elsewhere, the UK's trade deficit widened to £5.3 billion in July, up from £5.01 billion in June and marked the largest gap since February. Exports rose by 2.3% m/m to £76.5 billion, while imports grew by 2.4% to a record high of £81.71 billion. Goods exports increased by 6.6%, supported by a 4.6% rise in shipments to the EU primarily due to a surge in aircraft exports to Germany. On the import side, goods activity advanced by 3.9% to a 13-month high of £50.9 billion, mainly due to increased imports of ships from South Korea and aircraft and cars from Germany. Meanwhile, services imports edged down by 0.1% to £28.8 billion.

The UK recorded a 232k rise in employment in the three months to July, coming above forecasts of 220k largely supported by full-time positions. The employment rate for those aged 16 to 64 edged up by 0.1 percentage points to 75.2%. The number of people holding second jobs also grew, reaching 1.301 million, equivalent to 3.8% of total employment. Meanwhile, total average weekly earnings (including bonuses) rose 4.7% y/y to £727 per week in the three months to July 2025 in line with forecasts. Private sector wage growth eased, and a small slowdown was also seen for the public sector. Adjusted for inflation, total earnings increased 0.5%, the same as in the previous period.

The Consumer Price Index increased 0.3% m/m in August, after a 0.1% rise in July and matching market expectations. The UK's annual inflation rate held steady at 3.8% in August, remaining near the highs last seen in January 2024. Inflation slowed for transport, with prices for air fares falling 3.5% and making the largest downward contribution…reversing the spike higher seen earlier in the summer due to the timing of this year's school holidays. Inflation was also lower for services, recreation and culture, clothing and footwear and steadied for housing and utilities. On the other hand, the largest upward contribution came from motor fuels.

The GfK Consumer Confidence Index slipped to -19 in September from -17 in August, as worries over looming tax hikes weighed on sentiment. All five

borrowing in the UK increased to £18.0 billion in August from £2.8 billion in July, the highest recorded borrowing for August since 2020. This was primarily due to a sharp fall in tax revenue, from £76.7 billion in July to £62.2 billion in August, which is typically at this stage of the fiscal year. Conversely, Government spending increased to £150 billion, with total public sector spending increased by £8.4 billion, driven by higher costs of public services, benefits, and debt interest.

US Economy
The US economy added 54k jobs in August, following an upwardly revised 106k in July and below forecasts of 65k. Meanwhile, the US economy grew at a 3.0% annualised rate in Q2, rebounding from a 0.5% contraction in Q1 which had been the first quarterly decline in three years. The annual inflation rate accelerated to 2.9% in August, the highest since January, after holding at 2.7% in both June and July. Prices rose at a faster pace for food, used cars and trucks, and new vehicles. Also, energy costs increased for the first time in seven months with prices for gasoline and fuel oil decreasing less and natural gas prices remaining elevated at 13.8%. Core consumer prices, which exclude food and energy, rose by 0.3% from the previous month in August of 2025. Finally, food price inflation in the US picked up to 3.2% in August, the steepest since October 2023, from 2.9% in July, driven by an acceleration in food-at-home prices.

EU Economy
The annual inflation rate in the Eurozone rose to 2.2% in September, up from 2.0% in the previous three months, moving slightly above the European Central Bank's 2.0% target. Meanwhile, the annual core inflation rate, which excludes prices of food, energy, and tobacco, was at 2.3% for a fifth consecutive month. The Eurozone economy expanded by 0.1% in Q2 2025. Despite beating market expectations of flat growth, it marked the weakest pace of expansion since late 2023. The slowdown reflects growing caution among businesses and households, as they weigh easing inflation and lower borrowing costs against rising trade uncertainty, particularly due to US tariffs. Among the bloc's major economies, Spain and France outperformed with growth of 0.7% and 0.3%, respectively. The Netherlands posted modest growth of 0.1%, while both Germany and Italy slipped into contraction, each shrinking by 0.1%.

Housing
The Halifax House Price Index in the UK rose 0.3% m/m in September easing from 0.4% in August, leaving the annual rate at 2.2%. The UK Nationwide House Price index grew 0.5% m/m in September, beating forecasts of 0.2%, leaving the annual rate also at 2.2%.

Currency
Sterling depreciated against both the Dollar and the Euro.

September	Start	End	High	Low
GBP/USD	$1.3550	$1.3463	$1.3660	$1.3349
GBP/EUR	€1.1570	€1.1458	€1.1570	€1.1432

Interest Rate Forecasts
MUFG Corporate Markets maintained its current forecast. Capital Economics revised its forecast up 25bps from the end of Q4 2025 to end of Q3 2024

Bank Rate	NOW	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26	Mar-27	Jun-27	Sep-27	Dec-27	Mar-28	Jun-28	Sep-28
MUFG Corporate Markets	**4.00%**	4.00%	4.00%	3.75%	3.75%	3.50%	3.50%	3.50%	3.50%	3.25%	3.25%	3.25%	3.25%	3.25%
Capital Economics	**4.00%**	4.00%	4.00%	3.75%	3.50%	3.25%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	-	-	-

Shropshire Council

Current Investment List

Borrower	Principal (£)	Interest Rate	Start Date	Maturity Date	Lowest LT / Fund Rating	Historic Risk of Default	Expected Credit Loss (£)
MMF Aberdeen Standard Investments	15,000,000	4.07%		MMF	AAAm		
MMF Insight	15,000,000	4.06%		MMF	AAAm		
National Westminster Bank Plc (RFB)	2,300,000	4.01%	10/09/2025	30/10/2025	A+	0.004%	87
DMO	2,900,000	3.95%	26/09/2025	02/10/2025	AA-	0.000%	0
DMO	2,300,000	3.95%	29/09/2025	06/10/2025	AA-	0.000%	0
DMO	6,600,000	3.95%	30/09/2025	01/10/2025	AA-	0.000%	0
Total Investments	**£44,100,000**	**4.03%**					£87

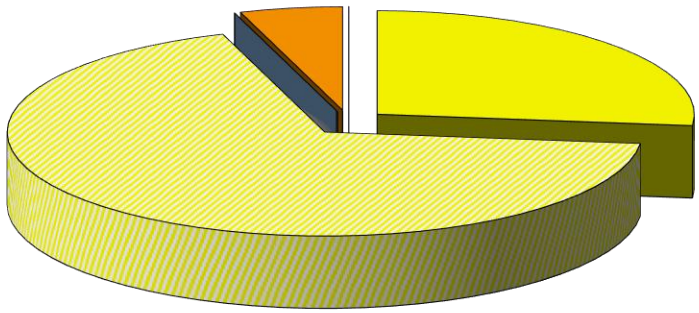
Note: An historic risk of default is only provided if a counterparty has a counterparty credit rating and is not provided for an MMF or USDBF, for which the rating agencies provide a fund rating. The portfolio's historic risk of default therefore measures the historic risk of default attached only to those investments for which a counterparty has a counterparty credit rating and also does not include investments which are not rated.

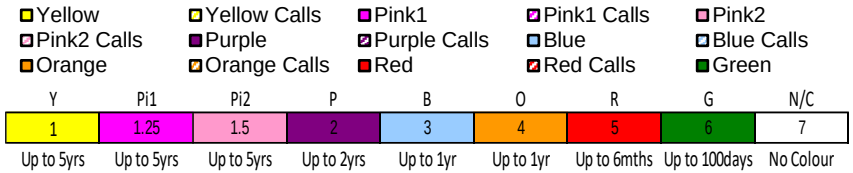
The Historic Risk of Default column is based on the lowest long term rating. If clients are using this % for their Expected Credit Loss calculation under IFRS 9, please be aware that the Code does not recognise a loss allowance where the counterparty is central government or a local authority since relevant statutory provisions prevent default. For these instruments, the Expected Credit Loss will be nil. Please note that we are currently using Historic Default Rates from 1990-2024 for Fitch, 1983-2024 for Moody's and 1981-2024 for S&P.

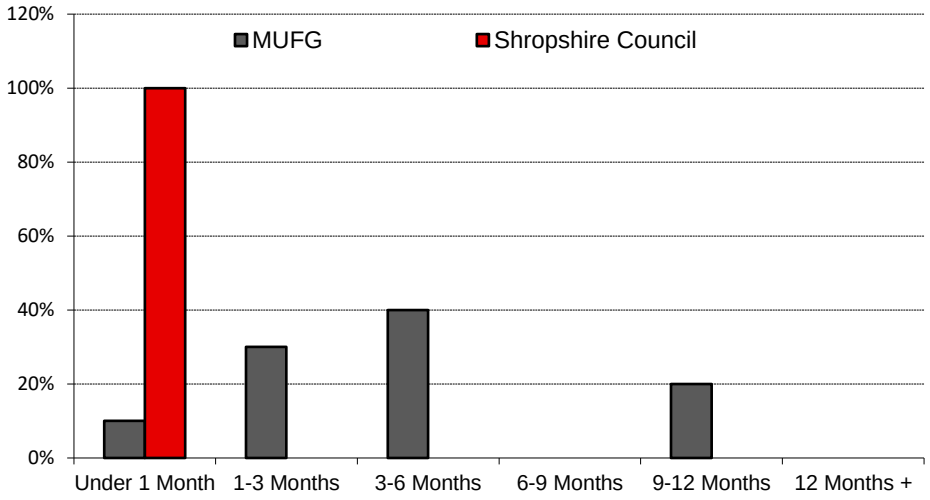
Where MUFG Corporate Markets have provided a return for a property fund, that return covers the 12 months to June 2025, which are the latest returns currently available.

Shropshire Council

Portfolio Composition by MUFG's Suggested Lending Criteria







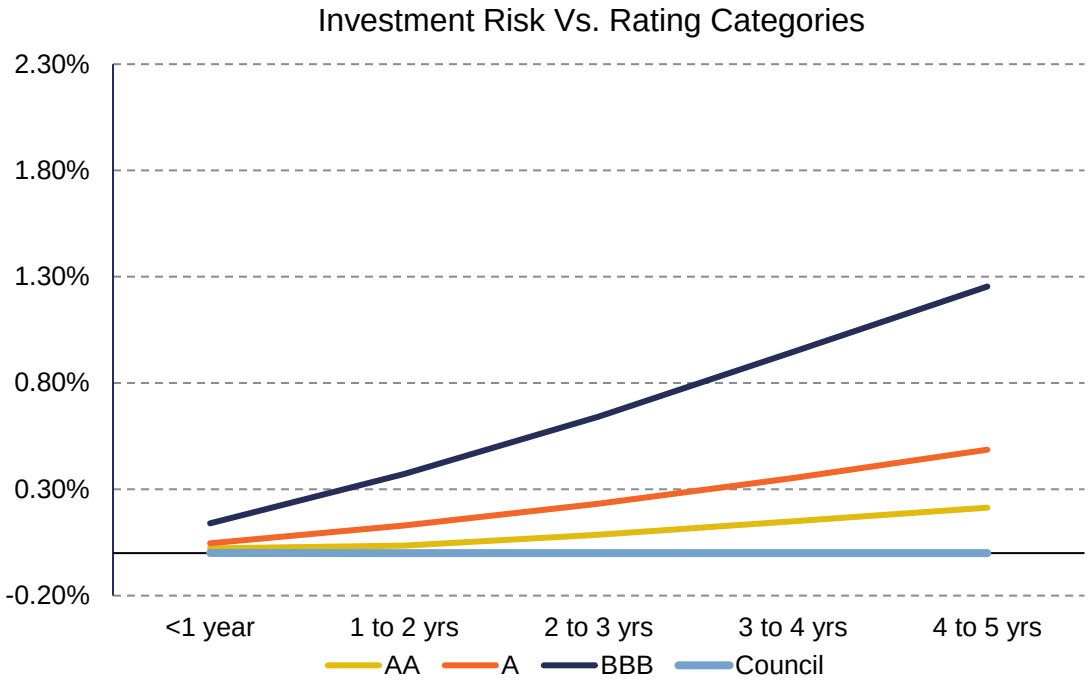
Portfolios weighted average risk number = 1.16

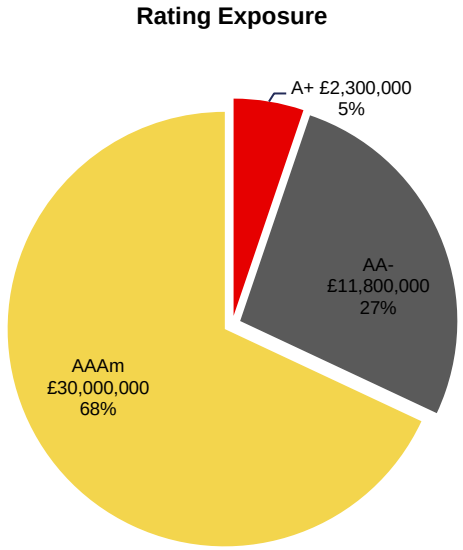
WARoR = Weighted Average Rate of Return
WAM = Weighted Average Time to Maturity

	% of Portfolio	Amount	% of Colour in Calls	Amount of Colour in Calls	% of Call in Portfolio	WARoR	WAM	WAM at Execution	Excluding Calls/MMFs/USDBFs WAM	Excluding Calls/MMFs/USDBFs WAM at Execution
Yellow	94.78%	£41,800,000	71.77%	£30,000,000	68.03%	4.03%	1	1	2	3
Pink1	0.00%	£0	0.00%	£0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0	0	0
Pink2	0.00%	£0	0.00%	£0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0	0	0
Purple	0.00%	£0	0.00%	£0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0	0	0
Blue	0.00%	£0	0.00%	£0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0	0	0
Orange	5.22%	£2,300,000	0.00%	£0	0.00%	4.01%	30	50	30	50
Red	0.00%	£0	0.00%	£0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0	0	0
Green	0.00%	£0	0.00%	£0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0	0	0
No Colour	0.00%	£0	0.00%	£0	0.00%	0.00%	0	0	0	0
	100.00%	**£44,100,000**	**68.03%**	**£30,000,000**	**68.03%**	**4.03%**	**2**	**4**	**7**	**11**

Shropshire Council

Investment Risk and Rating Exposure





Historic Risk of Default

Rating/Years	<1 year	1 to 2 yrs	2 to 3 yrs	3 to 4 yrs	4 to 5 yrs
AA	0.02%	0.04%	0.09%	0.15%	0.21%
A	0.05%	0.13%	0.23%	0.35%	0.49%
BBB	0.14%	0.37%	0.64%	0.95%	1.25%
Council	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Historic Risk of Default
This is a proxy for the average % risk for each investment based on over 30 years of data provided by Fitch, Moody's and S&P. It simply provides a calculation of the possibility of average default against the historical default rates, adjusted for the time period within each year according to the maturity of the investment.

Chart Relative Risk
This is the authority's risk weightings compared to the average % risk of default for “AA”, “A” and “BBB” rated investments.

Rating Exposures
This pie chart provides a clear view of your investment exposures to particular ratings.

Note: An historic risk of default is only provided if a counterparty has a counterparty credit rating and is not provided for an MMF or USDBF, for which the rating agencies provide a fund rating. The portfolio’s historic risk of default therefore measures the historic risk of default attached only to those investments for which a counterparty has a counterparty credit rating and also does not include investments which are not rated.

Shropshire Council

Monthly Credit Rating Changes
FITCH

Date	Update Number	Institution	Country	Rating Action
15/09/2025	2093	France (Sovereign)	France	The Sovereign Rating was downgraded to 'A+' from 'AA-' and the Outlook on the Sovereign Rating was changed to Stable from Negative.
25/09/2025	2095	Coventry Building Society	United Kingdom	The Outlook on the Long Term Rating was changed to Stable from Negative.

Shropshire Council

Monthly Credit Rating Changes
S&P

Date	Update Number	Institution	Country	Rating Action
26/09/2025	2096	Swedbank AB	Sweden	The Long Term and Short Term Ratings were upgraded to 'AA-' from 'A+' and to 'A-1+' from 'A-1' respectively. The Outlook on the Long Term Rating was also changed to Stable from Positive.

Shropshire Council

Monthly Credit Rating Changes
MOODY'S

Date	Update Number	Institution	Country	Rating Action
16/09/2025	2094	Toronto-Dominion Bank	Canada	The Long Term Rating was upgraded to 'Aa1' from 'Aa2'. The Long Term Rating was also placed on Stable Outlook and removed from Positive Watch.

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MUFG Corporate Markets | 19th Floor | 51 Lime Street | London | EC3M 7DQ.

APPENDIX B – PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS FOR QUARTER 2

Prudential Indicator	2025/26 Indicator £m	Quarter 1 – Actual £m	Quarter 2 – Actual £m	Quarter 3 – Actual £m	Quarter 4 – Actual £m
Non HRA Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)	455	317	317		
HRA CFR	111	103	103		
Gross borrowing	566	420	420		
Investments	75	39	44		
Net borrowing	491	381	376		
Authorised limit for external debt	748	420	420		
Operational boundary for external debt	660	420	420		
Limit of fixed interest rates (borrowing)	748	420	420		
Limit of variable interest rates (borrowing)	374	0	0		
Internal Team Principal sums invested > 364 days	70	0	0		
Maturity structure of borrowing limits	%	%	%	%	%
Under 12 months	25	19	19		
12 months to 2 years	25	16	16		
2 years to 5 years	50	3	3		
5 years to 10 years	75	21	21		
10 years to 20 years	100	14	14		
20 years to 30 years	100	18	18		
30 years to 40 years	100	4	4		
40 years to 50 years	100	3	3		
50 years and above	100	2	2		

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APPENDIX C -PRUDENTIAL BORROWING APPROVALS

Prudential Borrowing Approvals	Date Approved	Amount Approved	Applied (Spent) 2006/07	Applied (Spent) 2007/08	Applied (Spent) 2008/09	Applied (Spent) 2009/10	Applied (Spent) 2010/11	Applied (Spent) 2011/12	Applied (Spent) 2012/13	Applied (Spent) 2013/14	Applied (Spent) 2014/15	Applied (Spent) 2015/16	Applied (Spent) 2016/17	Applied (Spent) 2017/18	Applied (Spent) 2018/19	Applied (Spent) 2019/20	Applied (Spent) 2020/21	Applied (Spent) 2021/22	Applied (Spent) 2022/23	Applied (Spent) 2023/24	Applied (Spent) 2024/25	Budgeted 2025/26	Budgeted 2026/27	Budgeted 2027/28	Budgeted 2028/29	First year MRP Charged	Asset Life	Final year MRP Charged
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£			
Monkmoor Campus	24/02/2006	3,580,000																										
Capital Receipts Shortfall -Cashflow	24/02/2006	5,000,000																										
Applied:																												
Monkmoor Campus			3,000,000		0																					2007/08	25	2031/32
William Brooks					0		3,580,000																			2011/12	25	2035/36
Tern Valley					2,000,000																					2010/11	35	2044/45
		8,580,000	**3,000,000**	**0**	**2,000,000**	**0**	**3,580,000**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**			
Highways	24/02/2006	2,000,000	2,000,000																							2007/08	20	2026/27
Accommodation Changes	24/02/2006	650,000	410,200	39,800																						2007/08	6	2012/13
Accommodation Changes - Saving	31/03/2007	(200,000)																										
		450,000	**410,200**	**39,800**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**			
The Ptarmigan Building	05/11/2009	3,744,000				3,744,000																				2010/11	25	2034/35
The Mount McKinley Building	05/11/2009	2,782,000				2,782,000																				2011/12	25	2035/36
The Mount McKinley Building	05/11/2009	0					0																			2011/12	5	2015/16
Capital Strategy Schemes - Potential Capital Receipts shortfall	25/02/2010	187,600					0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0											25	
- Desktop Virtualisation						187,600	0																			2010/11	5	2014/15
Carbon Efficiency Schemes/Self Financing	25/02/2010	1,512,442					115,656	1,312,810	83,976	0	0	0	0	0	0	0											2011/12	5	2017/18
Transformation schemes		92,635						92,635	0	0																2012/13	3	2014/15
Renewables - Biomass - Self Financing	14/09/2011	92,996						82,408	98,258	-87,670	0															2014/15	25	2038/39
Solar PV Council Buildings - Self Financing	11/05/2011	56,342						1,283,959	124,584	-1,352,202	0															2013/14	25	2038/39
Depot Redevelopment - Self Financing	23/02/2012	0							0	0	0															2014/15	10	2023/24
Oswestry Leisure Centre Equipment - Self Financing	04/04/2012	124,521						124,521																		2012/13	5	2016/17
Leisure Services - Self Financing	01/08/2012	711,197							711,197																	2013/14	5	2016/17
Mardol House Acqusition	26/02/2015	4,160,000									4,160,000	0														2015/16	25	2039/40
Mardol House Adaptation and Refit	26/02/2015	3,340,000									167,641	3,172,359	0	0	0	0										2016/17	25	2041/42
Oswestry Leisure Centre Equipment - Self Financing	01/08/2012	290,274												274,239		16,035										2018/19	5	2022/23
Car Parking Strategy Implementation	17/01/2018	590,021													588,497	1,524										2020/21	5	2024/25
JPUT - Investment in Units re Shrewsbury Shopping Centres	13/12/2017	55,299,533												52,204,603	-208,569	2,791,967	320,079	191,453								2018/19	45	2042/43
JPUT - SSC No 1 Ltd	13/12/2017	527,319												527,319														
CDL Shareholding	28/02/2019	1															1									2021/22		
Children's Residental Care	28/02/2019	1,999,999														1,381,539	230,765	38,487	316,210	33,000						2020/21	25	2044/45
Pride Hill Shopping Centre Reconfiguration - LEP Match	19/12/2019	1,928,978															434,027	842,293	652,658							AUC	45	2070/71
Pride Hill Shopping Centre Reconfiguration - Feb 22 approval	01/02/2022	2,377,000																	197,614	1,076,307	250,423	838,702				AUC	45	2070/71
Pride Hill Phase 1 Enabling Works	01/02/2022	0																			13,955					AUC	45	2070/71
Multi Agency Hub - Feb 22 approval	01/02/2022	3,146,000																				3,146,000				AUC	45	2070/71
Greenacres Supported Living Development	24/09/2020	-																34,317	41,688	1,979	-77,983					N/A	N/A	N/A

Prudential Borrowing Approvals	Date Approved	Amount Approved	Applied (Spent) 2006/07	Applied (Spent) 2007/08	Applied (Spent) 2008/09	Applied (Spent) 2009/10	Applied (Spent) 2010/11	Applied (Spent) 2011/12	Applied (Spent) 2012/13	Applied (Spent) 2013/14	Applied (Spent) 2014/15	Applied (Spent) 2015/16	Applied (Spent) 2016/17	Applied (Spent) 2017/18	Applied (Spent) 2018/19	Applied (Spent) 2019/20	Applied (Spent) 2020/21	Applied (Spent) 2021/22	Applied (Spent) 2022/23	Applied (Spent) 2023/24	Applied (Spent) 2024/25	Budgeted 2025/26	Budgeted 2026/27	Budgeted 2027/28	Budgeted 2028/29	First year MRP Charged	Asset Life	Final year MRP Charged
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£			
Bishops Castle Business Park	19/09/2019	2,874,695															2,900	1,545,647	1,271,102	55,046						2023/24	25	2044/45
Development)	26/07/2018	3,778,228																	171,509	1,392,326	1,644,315	570,078				2023/24	25	2047/48
Oswestry Castleview - Site Acquisition	19/12/2019	3,256,241														3,256,241										2020/21	25	2044/45
Former Morrisons Site, Oswestry	19/09/2019	3,390,145															3,390,145									2021/22	25	2045/46
Meole Brace Pitch & Putt		5,400,000																11,927	136,349	263,137	244,820	1,543,768	3,200,000			AUC	25	
Maesbury Solar Farm		2,041,173																	19,682	26,876	35,826	1,458,789	500,000			AUC	25	
Commercial Investment Fund	Fin Strat	1,764,234																				52,415	232,340	1,479,479		2021/22	25	2044/45
The Tannery Development Block A - Land Acqusition		657,253																62,500	594,753							2022/23	25	2045/46
The Tannery Development Block A		6,356,606																			5,150	351,456	3,500,000	2,500,000		AUC		
The Tannery Development - Block B & C		7,471,561													3,677,844	3,456,019	311,325	16,614	3,847	5,912						2019/20	25	2045/46
Oswestry Property Acquisition	12/05/2022	3,332,304																	3,332,304							2023/24	25	2047/48
Shrewsbury Property Acquisition		3,837,012																	3,837,012							2023/24	25	2047/48
Biochar Pyrolysis - Project 1		535,000																			50,906	484,094				2026/27	25	2047/48
Biodynamic Carbon (BDC) Limited Share Holding		500																			500					2025/26	25	
Biodynamic Carbon (BDC) Limited Working Capital Investment		9,500																			9,500					2025/26	25	
Biochar Pyrolysis - Project 2		2,751,000																		9,420	227,809	1,213,771	1,300,000			2026/27	25	
Biochar Pyrolysis - Project Framework		4,000																			4,000					2025/26		
Recycling Bin Roll Out Programme		2,029,778																4,395	2,025,384							2022/23	10	2032/33
Highways Investment Programme	Capital Strat Feb 22	22,954,755																3,983,412	18,011,589		786,754	173,000				2022/23	25	2046/47
Oswestry Innovation Park		10,028,332																		4,218,112	3,060,927	713,000	2,036,293			2022/23	25	2046/47
Cambrian Building Oswestry - UKSPF		270,107																		14,900	142,650	112,557				2022/23	25	2046/47
Whitchurch Swimming & Leisure Facility	22/09/2022	13,100,282																	390,954	3,010,525	9,390,291	308,513				2026/27	40	2065/66
Previous NSDC Borrowing		955,595			821,138	134,457																				2009/10	5/25	2065/66
Capital Receipts Released By Additional Borrowing		8,226,507																		8,226,507						2024/25	25?	2048/49
Shrewsbury Sports Village - Swimming Pool	26/09/2024	2,248,000																			440,011	1,807,989				AUC		
Ptarmigan Building FRA & Refurbishment Works		415,245																			387,660	27,585				2025/26	10	2035/36
Transformation Programme 2024-25 Expenditure Funded Through Borrowing Under EFS Approval		26,819,527																			26,819,527					2025/26	25?	
		228,500,436	**5,410,200**	**39,800**	**2,821,138**	**6,848,057**	**3,695,656**	**2,896,333**	**1,018,015**	**-1,439,872**	**4,327,641**	**3,172,359**	**0**	**53,006,161**	**4,057,772**	**10,903,324**	**4,689,243**	**6,731,044**	**31,002,652**	**18,334,046**	**43,437,041**	**12,801,716**	**10,768,633**	**3,979,479**	**0**			

Appendix D

Economic Background and Borrowing Update

Economic Background

The first half of 2025/26 saw:

- A 0.3% pick up in GDP for the period April to June 2025. More recently, the economy flatlined in July, with higher taxes for businesses restraining growth.
- The 3m/yy rate of average earnings growth excluding bonuses has fallen from 5.5% to 4.8% in July.
- CPI inflation has ebbed and flowed but finished September at 3.8%, whilst core inflation eased to 3.6%.
- The Bank of England cut interest rates from 4.50% to 4.25% in May, and then to 4% in August.
- The 10-year gilt yield fluctuated between 4.4% and 4.8%, ending the half year at 4.70%.

From a GDP perspective, the financial year got off to a bumpy start with the 0.3% m/m fall in real GDP in April as front-running of US tariffs in Q1 (when GDP grew 0.7% on the quarter) weighed on activity. Despite the underlying reasons for the drop, it was still the first fall since October 2024 and the largest fall since October 2023. However, the economy surprised to the upside in May and June so that quarterly growth ended up 0.3% q/q. Nonetheless, the 0.0% m/m change in real GDP in July will have caused some concern, with the hikes in taxes for businesses that took place in April this year undoubtedly playing a part in restraining growth.

With regard to retail sales, the 0.5% m/m rise in volumes in August was the third such rise in a row and was driven by gains in all the major categories except fuel sales, which fell by 2.0% m/m. Sales may have been supported by the warmer-than-usual weather. If sales were just flat in September, then in Q3 sales volumes would be up 0.7% q/q compared to the 0.2% q/q gain in Q2.

With the November Budget edging nearer, the public finances position looks weak. Public net sector borrowing of £18.0bn in August means that after five months of the financial year, borrowing is already £11.4bn higher than the OBR forecast at the Spring Statement in March. The overshoot in the Chancellor's chosen fiscal mandate of the current budget is even greater with a cumulative deficit of £15.3bn. All this was due to both current receipts in August being lower than the OBR forecast (by £1.8bn) and current expenditure being higher (by £1.0bn). Over the first five months of the financial year, current receipts have fallen short by a total of £6.1bn (partly due to lower-than-expected self-assessment income tax) and current expenditure has overshot by a total of £3.7bn (partly due to social benefits and departmental spending). Furthermore, what very much matters now is the OBR forecasts and their impact on the current budget in 2029/30, which is when the Chancellor's fiscal mandate bites.

A looser labour market is driving softer wage pressures. The 3m/yy rate of average earnings growth excluding bonuses has fallen from 5.5% in April to 4.8% in July. The rate for the private sector slipped from 5.5% to 4.7%, putting it on track to be in line with the Bank of England's Q3 forecast (4.6% for September).

CPI inflation fell slightly from 3.5% in April to 3.4% in May, and services inflation dropped from 5.4% to 4.7%, whilst core inflation also softened from 3.8% to 3.5%. More recently, though, inflation pressures have resurfaced, although the recent upward march in CPI inflation did pause for breath in August, with CPI inflation staying at 3.8%. Core inflation eased once more too, from 3.8% to 3.6%, and services inflation dipped from 5.0% to 4.7%. So, we finish the half year in a similar position to where we started, although with food inflation rising to an 18-month high of 5.1% and households' expectations for inflation standing at a six year high, a further loosening in the labour market and weaker wage growth may be a requisite to UK inflation coming in below 2.0% by 2027.

The FTSE 100 fell sharply following the "Liberation Day" tariff announcement, dropping by more than 10% in the first week of April - from 8,634 on 1 April to 7,702 on 7 April. However, the de-escalation of the trade war coupled with strong corporate earnings led to a rapid rebound starting in late April. As a result, the FTSE 100 closed Q2 at 8,761, around 2% higher than its value at the end of Q1 and more than 7% above its level at the start of 2025. Since then, the FTSE 100 has enjoyed a further 4% rise in July, its strongest monthly gain since January and outperforming the S&P 500. Strong corporate earnings and progress in trade talks (US-EU, UK-India) lifted share prices and the index hit a record 9,321 in mid-August, driven by hopes of peace in Ukraine. September proved more volatile and the FTSE 100 closed Q3 at 9,350, 7% higher than at the end of Q1 and 14% higher since the start of 2025. Future performance will likely be impacted by the extent to which investors' global risk appetite remains intact, Fed rate cuts, resilience in the US economy, and AI optimism. A weaker pound will also boost the index as it inflates overseas earnings.

A summary overview of the future path of Bank Rate

There were four Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meetings in the first half of the financial year. In May, the Committee cut Bank Rate from 4.50% to 4.25%, while in June policy was left unchanged. In June's vote, three MPC members voted for an immediate cut to 4.00%, citing loosening labour market conditions. The other six members were more cautious, as they highlighted the need to monitor for "signs of weak demand", "supply-side constraints" and higher "inflation expectations", mainly from rising food prices. By repeating the well-used phrase "gradual and careful", the MPC continued to suggest that rates would be reduced further.

In August, a further rate cut was implemented. However, a 5-4 split vote for a rate cut to 4% laid bare the different views within the Monetary Policy Committee, with the accompanying commentary noting the decision was "finely balanced" and reiterating that future rate cuts would be undertaken "gradually and carefully". Ultimately, Governor Bailey was the casting vote for a rate cut but with the CPI measure of inflation expected to reach at least 4% later this year, the MPC will be wary of making any further rate cuts until inflation begins its slow downwards trajectory back towards 2%.

Borrowing
The Authority's capital financing requirement (CFR) for 2025/26 is £487m. The CFR denotes the Authority's underlying need to borrow for capital purposes. If the CFR is positive the Authority may borrow from the PWLB or the market (external borrowing), or from internal balances on a temporary basis (internal borrowing). The balance of external and internal borrowing is generally driven by market conditions.

It is a statutory duty for the Council to determine and keep under review the "Affordable Borrowing Limits". The Council's approved Treasury and Prudential Indicators (affordability limits) are included in the approved Treasury Management Strategy. A list of the approved limits is shown in Appendix B. The Prudential Indicators were not breached during the first half of 2025/26 and have not been previously breached. The schedule at Appendix C details the Prudential Borrowing approved and utilised to date.

No new external borrowing has currently been undertaken to date in 2025/26.

The Council had not undertaken any new borrowing for a number of years until 2024/25, and has been utilising cash balances to internally "borrow" for prudential borrowing schemes. This has enabled the Council to benefit from increased interest costs compared to the returns that could be generated on the cash balances. This approach has been effective during a period where the Council has held significant cash balances.

Cash balances have now reduced as a result of reduced levels of reserves being held and loans continuing to reach their maturity dates. Therefore, it has been necessary over the last 18 months to secure additional borrowing to reduce the under-borrowed position.

Gilt yields and PWLB certainty rates have remained relatively volatile throughout the six months under review, but the general trend has been for medium and longer dated parts of the curve to shift higher whilst the 5-year part of the curve finished September close to where it begun in April.

The table below shows the high/low/average PWLB rates for the first six months of the financial year.

	1 Year	5 Year	10 Year	25 Year	50 Year
01/04/2025	4.82%	4.94%	5.38%	5.95%	5.63%
30/09/2025	4.58%	4.95%	5.53%	6.23%	5.98%
Low	4.36%	4.62%	5.17%	5.78%	5.46%
Low date	04/08/2025	02/05/2025	02/05/2025	04/04/2025	04/04/2025
High	4.84%	4.99%	5.62%	6.41%	6.14%
High date	02/04/2025	21/05/2025	03/09/2025	03/09/2025	03/09/2025
Average	4.55%	4.82%	5.40%	6.11%	5.83%
Spread	0.48%	0.37%	0.45%	0.63%	0.68%

Debt Rescheduling

Debt repayment and rescheduling opportunities have increased over the course of the past six months and will be considered if giving rise to long-term savings. However, no debt repayments or rescheduling have been undertaken to date in the current financial year.

Committee and Date Transformation & Improvement Scrutiny 1st December 2025 Cabinet 3rd December 2025	Item Public

Fees and Charges Pricing Policy

Responsible Officer:	James Walton
email:	james.walton@shropshire.gov.uk
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Roger Evans, Finance

1. Synopsis

A new corporate fees and charges policy will help ensure effective and consistent management of discretionary service charges across the Council, supporting financial stability and sustainability aligned to Council priorities.

2. Executive Summary

2.1. To ensure the Council's financial stability and onward journey to sustainability it is necessary for a corporate approach to be taken towards the effective management of fees and charges for the Council's chargeable services. The report introduces a corporate fees and charges policy, applicable to all discretionary services where a charge can be made. This will help ensure the Council maximises opportunities to generate income where appropriate and in turn enables financial resources to be utilised more effectively, to support service delivery and ultimately the Council's priorities.

2.2. This policy will be subject to annual review to ensure it continues to reflect the needs and aspirations of the Council. The setting of fees and charges will be incorporated into the annual Medium Term Financial Strategy and budget setting timetable and a further report with details of the 2026/27 fees and charges amounts will be presented to Council in February 2026.

2.3. The overall aim of the fees and charges policy is to ensure that fees and charges are set within a framework of value for public money for all our residents and businesses. It allows the council to have a properly considered, consistent and informed approach to all the fees and charges it levies for its discretionary services. This will in turn support the Council's journey towards financial sustainability and the delivery of the Council's priorities.

2.4. The policy introduces a consistent, organisation-wide framework for setting, reviewing, and managing all council fees and charges for discretionary services. Its core objective is to move towards Full Cost Recovery as the default position for discretionary services, thereby enhancing the financial sustainability of services in the context of the declared financial emergency (Sept 2025).

2.5. The Council does not have full discretion for all fees and charges as some are set nationally, whilst others are governed by certain restrictions, for example inflationary increases only. The Council does, however, have powers to charge for some services under various legislation dating back many years e.g. 1949 Prevention of Damage by Pests Act. The Local Government Act 2003 provides clarity over charging powers and is clear that a local authority can charge for discretionary services based on recovering the full costs of providing the service but that it should not make a profit year on year. The same Act also covers a local authority's power to trade whereby a profit/surplus can be made if trading is carried out through a company. This report concentrates on charging for discretionary services. A key point to note is that charges should be set at the right level to balance the subsidy between service user and taxpayer.

2.6. The policy includes consistent principles:

1. **Cost Recovery as Default** – Users of discretionary services should normally pay the full cost of the service, unless a subsidy is approved for policy reasons.
2. **Transparency** – Charges and the reasons behind them should be clear to service users and decision-makers.
3. **Affordability and Accessibility** – Fees must not create unnecessary barriers, and concessions should be targeted to those who most need them.
4. **Consistency** – Similar services should be charged on the same basis across the Council.
5. **Regular Review** – All discretionary fees and charges should be reviewed at least annually, with changes linked to the budget cycle.
6. **Market Awareness** – Benchmarking against other councils and providers to ensure charges are competitive and justifiable.
7. **Legal Compliance** – All charges must be in line with statutory powers and restrictions.
8. **Value for Money** – Fees and charges should contribute to efficient, sustainable services.

Contact: james.walton@shropshire.gov.uk

These principles ensure that fees are:

- Fair and transparent for service users
- Aligned with our corporate priorities and statutory duties
- Set at a level that supports the financial sustainability of services
- Applied consistently across the organisation

2.7. The setting of fees and charges will be incorporated into the annual Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and budget setting timetable in line with the annual process. Incorporating these reviews into the service/financial planning process will also permit consideration of cross-cutting issues and impacts in the context of wider policy objectives. This policy will form the basis of the Council's fees and charges calculations for consideration each year, prior to the formal approval of the MTFS at full Council in February. Table 1 below shows the total fees & charges income included within the original 2025/26 budgets of £103.86m and the split between discretionary and non-discretionary amounts.

	2025/26		
	Total	**Discretionary**	**Non-Discretionary**
Total Fees and Charges	£103.86m	£55.12m	£48.74m
% split		53.07%	46.93 %

Table 1: 2025/26 Total Fees and Charges as approved in February 2025.

2.8. As can be seen from the table above, there is a slightly higher proportion of income raised from discretionary fees and charges, totalling £55.12m. Table 2 below shows the main services areas making up most of this discretionary total.

Service Area	£m
Shire Services	5.93
Work Placement	3.29
Corporate Landlord	10.02
Car Parking	7.00
Theatre Services	6.34
Waste Management	5.90
Finance & Technology	1.75
Registrars & Coroners	1.05
Other*	13.85
Total Discretionary Income	**55.12**

Table 2: Breakdown of 2025/26 discretionary fees and charges income

*** A further breakdown can be found in Appendix 1 Fees & Charges 2025/26 Council February 27th 2025**

2.9. The policy attached at Appendix 1 details the principles and process for the calculation of fees and charges. Officer responsibilities are also set out for Service Directors and Service Managers, alongside the governance requirements.

2.10. The standard assumption is that all fees and charges will be increased in line with CPI (a national inflation index that excludes mortgage costs) although some prices are subject to other indexation or must reflect changes to the underlying cost base that may be above or below this average inflation. In setting the level of fees and charges, the Council will have regard to the following principles:

- The level of fee set by statute
- Recovery costs and overheads
- Comparison with commercial offers
- Benchmarking with other councils
- Impact on behavioural change, including avoiding perverse incentives
- Considerations around pricing strategies and elasticity (for example, by setting fees too high, demand for the service may reduce. Equally setting fees too low may create unsustainable service demand)

2.11. The Council will also have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) placed upon us by the Equality Act 2010

3. Recommendations

3.1. It is recommended that Cabinet Members:

a. Consider the Fees and Charges Policy attached at Appendix 1
b. Recommend to Council the approval and adoption of the Fees and Charges Policy for 2026/27 and incorporation into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and budget setting process in February 2026.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

4.1. The introduction of the fees and charges policy provides an opportunity to maximise income generation for the Council where applicable and ensure a consistent and transparent approach.

4.2. User demand for services may be affected by pricing, it will be necessary therefore to monitor service usage closely to ensure appropriate action, in line with this policy is taken where necessary to address any adverse effect.

4.3. Given that there are likely equality and health and wellbeing impacts arising from the introduction of this policy an ESHIA has been carried out at this stocktake point. This is attached in the appendices.

4.4. At this stage the impacts are considered to be neutral to low negative for people in the protected characteristic groupings of age and disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010. The Council also considered impacts are likely to be neutral to low negative in regard to people in our additional local grouping of social inclusion, given access to service challenges across our large rural county. These impacts will be kept under review along with reference to good practice elsewhere and ongoing engagement across services.

Contact: james.walton@shropshire.gov.uk

4.5. Risk table:

Risk	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation Strategy
R1: Public/Political Backlash: *Increased visibility of fees, particularly those moving to full cost recovery, could lead to adverse public reaction and political challenge at a sensitive time during the financial emergency.*	High	Medium	Implement clear communication strategies (**Transparency Principle**), providing at least one month's notice, and clearly articulating the policy reasons (subsidies) for services that remain below full cost recovery.
R2: Legal Challenge (Ultra Vires Charging): *The Council is legally restricted to recovering only the cost of providing a discretionary service. Errors in cost calculation (e.g., including non-allowable costs or making a profit) could lead to a Judicial Review, requiring refunds and generating adverse publicity.*	High	Low	**Mandatory use of the Cost Recovery Calculator**, which is signed off by the relevant Finance Business Partner, to ensure only legally recoverable direct, indirect, and overhead costs are included in the charge.
R3: Non-Compliance Across Services: *Services may lack the time or expertise to use the Cost Recovery Calculator or fail to complete the mandatory annual review, leading to inconsistent pricing and unrecovered costs.*	Medium	Medium	Finance/PMO team to provide ongoing training and support on the costing tool and review process. Auditing of compliance to be integrated into the budget preparation timeline to ensure accountability.
R4: Reduced Accessibility/Demand Impact: *Moving services to full cost recovery or increasing fees too quickly could create unnecessary barriers, particularly for vulnerable groups, leading to a reduction in service demand.*	High	Medium	**Carry out ESHIAs where proportionate** in regard to fee changes. Concessions/subsidies will be targeted and budgeted to account for impact upon people in protected characteristic groupings.
R5: Impact on Rural Communities/Market Failure: *Implementing uniform fees may disproportionately affect isolated and/or rural areas of Shropshire, where lack of local alternatives or increased travel costs makes the Council service the only viable option, potentially risking an implicit market failure.*	Medium	Medium	Where appropriate, the policy allows for differential charging based on geographic location or specific community need to maintain accessibility, subject to a robust assessment by the Service Manager and review by the Portfolio Holder.

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.

5.2. The adoption of the Fees and Charges Pricing Policy is fundamental to mitigating the Council's critical financial risk and forms an essential part of the medium-term financial strategy.

5.3. The policy will drive a rigorous, evidence-based approach to income generation across the entire organisation. Specifically, it has the following financial implications:

5.3.1. **Protecting the Budget:** By mandating an annual review and the use of the Full Cost Recovery Principle as a default, the Council will systematically ensure that discretionary services do not leak budget through unintentional subsidies or failure to capture real operating costs (direct, indirect, and overheads).

5.3.2. **Maximising Revenue Potential:** The unified framework enables Services to confidently and compliantly set charges that maximize revenue potential, helping to close the budget gap and support the overall financial sustainability of the Council.

5.3.3. **Governance and Audit:** The policy enhances financial governance by standardising the consultation, approval, and publication of charges, reducing risks associated with non-compliant or arbitrary fee setting.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

The Fees and Charges Pricing Policy is a corporate governance document focused on financial principles, processes, and legislative compliance.

6.1 Expected Outcome: No Effect.

6.2 Energy and fuel consumption, Renewable energy generation, Carbon offsetting or mitigation: There is no direct effect on these areas, as the policy itself is purely procedural and financial. Any changes to fees and charges that do have a physical or operational impact (e.g., changes to parking fees, waste charges) will require a separate, mandatory climate change appraisal summary to be completed at the point of service charge implementation, as required by the Council's standard reporting procedures.

6.3 Climate change adaptation: The policy indirectly supports the ability to fund future adaptation strategies by ensuring the Council's financial resources are maximized and protected.

7. Background

7.1. The Council currently faces critical financial challenges, making the maximisation of legitimate and compliant income streams a non-negotiable component of its financial recovery plan.

7.2. Historically, the approach to setting and reviewing fees and charges has been highly decentralised, leading to inconsistency. This has resulted in an added pressure on the Council's budget.

7.3. The Fees and Charges Pricing Policy has been developed to introduce clear guidance and a consistent standard for services to follow, requiring mandatory annual reviews and the application of full cost recovery principles unless an explicit, policy-driven decision is made to subsidise. The policy, which supersedes all previous guidance, has been subject to review by the Transformation & Improvement Scrutiny Committee prior to this Cabinet submission.

8. Additional Information

Statutory and Discretionary Charges Legislation

8.1. Statutory services are those services that an authority is mandated to or has a duty to provide, fees and charges in respect of these services are either set by Government or based on full cost recovery.

8.2. The Local Government Act 2003 provides a general power to charge for discretionary services (services that an authority has the power, but is not obliged to, provide). Additions or enhancements to mandatory services above the standard that an authority has a duty to provide may be provided as discretionary services.

8.3. The Council may generate income from the public through charging and trading for services that exceed the statutory requirements or are added value optional services, such as pre-application planning advice.

8.4. In general terms, the Council may not make a profit on its charging activities or subsidise other services and cannot charge for services that customers do not choose to use. A profit may be defined as a surplus received in excess of the full cost of delivering the service. Full cost includes all direct costs, such as pay and materials, and also indirect costs including overheads such as finance, accommodation, HR and IT.

8.5. In accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and 'general powers of competence' contained within it, the Council may trade in any eligible service permitted by the Council's constitution. If, however, the Council wants to make a profit it must conduct this commercial activity via a separate company. Any such company must comply with competition law and standard trading legislation; however, services can be traded within the public sector environment, without resorting to a company.

9. Conclusions

The Council faces critical financial pressures which necessitate the immediate and rigorous application of best practice in income generation. The Fees and Charges Pricing Policy provides a consistent framework to address historical inconsistencies and ensure transparency on the basis for fees and charges. Its adoption will embed the principle of Full Cost Recovery as the default, ensure

legal compliance across all service areas, and provide the transparency necessary for effective financial planning and decision-making. Approval of this policy is therefore essential to strengthen the Council's financial sustainability and mitigate its overarching financial risks.

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

Fees and Charges report 2025/26 Council February 27th 2025

Local Member:

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Fees and Charges Policy

Appendix 2 – ESHIA re-pricing

Fees and Charges Pricing Policy

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1. Introduction

Shropshire Council delivers a wide range of services to our residents, communities, and businesses. Many of these services are free at the point of delivery, but some attract a fee or charge.

This policy sets out a consistent approach for setting, reviewing, and managing fees and charges across the Council. Its purpose is to ensure that charges are:

Fair and transparent for service users

Aligned with our corporate priorities and statutory duties

Set at a level that supports the financial sustainability of services

Applied consistently across the organisation

Shropshire Council is at an early stage in its journey to financial sustainability. This policy is therefore designed to be practical, supportive, and easy to use, giving services the tools and guidance they need to make good decisions about charging.

www.shropshire.gov.uk
General Enquiries: 0345 678 9000

By setting appropriate levels of fees and charges for services the Council can help:

- Improve financial resilience
- Improve transparency of charges and their basis
- Reduce subsidisation of service delivery through Council Tax or government funding
- Fund service improvements and innovation
- Manage demand for non-essential services
- Target subsidy where needed

By careful consideration of fees and charges the Council can also avoid:

- Affordability and access concerns for people and households we regard as vulnerable
- Market sensitivity risk
- Legal and reputation risk through non-compliance
- Administrative complexity and inefficiency
- Cross subsidisation of service costs

To achieve this the Council must:

- Adopt a commercially minded culture while retaining public service values
- Have strong accountability from staff for all fees and charges
- Encourage benchmarking, consultation and adaptability
- Embed continuous improvement and learning

2. Purpose and Scope

2.1. Purpose

To provide a clear framework for:

Setting new fees and charges

Reviewing existing charges

Deciding when and how subsidies or concessions are applied

Ensuring charges are affordable, fair, and legally compliant

2.2. Scope

This policy applies to:

Discretionary services where the Council has the power to set a fee or charge locally

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Statutory services where local discretion exists on the level of charge

All additional services provided beyond statutory requirements

This policy does not apply to:

Commercial trading undertaken through Council-owned companies
Contracted services to other public bodies under the Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970
Rental income
Services charged under the Care Act 2014 (covered by separate policy)
Car parking charges

3. Key Principles

1. **Cost Recovery as Default** – Users of discretionary services should normally pay the full cost of the service, unless a subsidy is approved for policy reasons.
2. **Transparency** – Charges and the reasons behind them should be clear to service users and decision-makers.
3. **Affordability and Accessibility** – Fees must not create unnecessary barriers, and concessions should be targeted to those who most need them.
4. **Consistency** – Similar services should be charged on the same basis across the Council.
5. **Regular Review** – All discretionary fees and charges should be reviewed at least annually, with changes linked to the budget cycle.
6. **Market Awareness** – Benchmarking against other councils and providers to ensure charges are competitive and justifiable.
7. **Legal Compliance** – All charges must be in line with statutory powers and restrictions.
8. **Value for Money** – Fees and charges should contribute to efficient, sustainable services.

4. Charging Categories

Reference	Category	Policy Objective	Typical Application
1	Full Cost Recovery	Cover all direct and indirect costs of the service.	Most discretionary services.
2	Full Cost Recovery with Concessionary Discounts	Ensure priority groups can access services while still recovering costs from other users.	Leisure, cultural, or wellbeing services.

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General Enquiries: 0345 678 9000

3	Subsidised	Provide wider access for all users with a partial contribution from general funds.	Community engagement or early intervention services.
4	Nominal Charge	Make a service widely available while discouraging misuse.	Token fees for equipment hire.
5	Statutory	Charges set by law or central government.	Some Licensing, certain planning fees.

5. Setting and Reviewing Fees

5.1 Process

Identify Costs – Use available tools such as the Council's Cost Recovery Calculator to capture direct, departmental, corporate, and financial costs.**Select Charging Category** – Decide which of the five categories listed in Section 4 the charge will fall into. This will be largely based on the policy objectives to be met as set within the service area.

Benchmark – Compare with other local authorities, market providers or other considerations to ensure the fee level is appropriate

I**mpact Assessment** – Carry out an ESHIA at timely stocktake points.

Approval – Ensure the appropriate authorisation is in place (for example Cabinet, Full Council, or delegated officer powers).

5.2 Review Frequency

There must be an annual review, as a minimum and in line with the agreed timetable.

In-year reviews should happen where costs or market conditions change significantly.

6. Concessions and Subsidies

Concessions should:

Align with verifiable and approved corporate priorities

Have clear, consistent qualifying criteria applied appropriately and effectively

Be affordable and budgeted for at a service level

Be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain effective

Be fully documented and, if necessary, approved as appropriate

www.shropshire.gov.uk
General Enquiries: 0345 678 9000

7. Exemptions

All services provided by the Council will be charged for unless prevented by statute, or where their use would have likely negative consequences in terms of the Council's compliance with the public sector equality duty, or under exceptional circumstances agreed exempt by the relevant Service Director, in consultation with the S151 Officer.

All concessions and exemptions must be supported by an Equality Impact Assessment

8. Governance and Responsibilities

Full Council approve the Fees and Charges Report annually. This report should include all fees and charges in place across the authority.

Cabinet or Full Council (as deemed necessary in consultation with the s151 Officer) will approve significant changes and new charging policies outside of the annual report.

Service Directors will ensure services comply with this policy.

Service Managers or other officers through a formal delegation, will maintain fee schedules, complete cost and impact assessments, undertake benchmarking and review annually.

The Finance Team/PMO Team will provide costing tools, training, and monitoring.

9. Delegation

Delegated authority to set and review fees and charges is essential for the effective management of the council's income streams. This policy grants delegated powers to specific officers, as outlined in the council's constitution, to ensure a transparent and efficient process for pricing decisions.

Part 8 of the Council's Constitution sets out the delegated authority to amend fees and charges within the year.

Any changes to the levels of fees and charges including the introduction of new charges resulting in a budget adjustment must be approved in line with the Council's Virement rules.

10. Consultation and Communication

The council, via the relevant service area, will consult service users where legally required or where significant impact is anticipated.

www.shropshire.gov.uk
General Enquiries: 0345 678 9000

The Council will maintain a fees and charges schedule and publish all fees and charges on the Council's website and provide at least one month's notice before implementation where possible.

11. Collection and Administration

The Council will:

Collect charges in advance wherever practical.

Keep processes simple and user-friendly.

Follow debt recovery procedures promptly where required.

12. Legislative Framework

This policy operates within the powers granted by:

Local Government Act 2003 (Section 93)

Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970

Localism Act 2011

Provision of Services Regulations 2009

This policy demonstrates compliance with the public sector equality duty placed upon us by operates within the powers granted by:

Equality Act 2010

Shropshire Council
Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA)
Stage One Screening Record 2025

A. Summary Sheet on Accountability and Actions

Name of proposed service change
Fees and Charges Pricing Policy

Name of the officer carrying out the screening
Lisa Henchey

Decision, review, and monitoring

Decision	**Yes**	**No**
Initial (Stage One) ESHIA Only?	X	
Proceed to Stage Two Full ESHIA or HIA (part two) Report?		X

If completion of a Stage One screening assessment is an appropriate and proportionate action at this stage, please use the boxes above, and complete both part A and part B of of this template. If a Full or Stage Two report is required, please move on to full report stage once you have completed this initial screening assessment as a record of the considerations which you have given to this matter.

Actions to mitigate likely negative impact or enhance positive impact of the service change in terms of equality and social inclusion considerations

The proposal is for a corporate fees and charges policy, applicable to all discretionary services where a charge can be made. This will help ensure the Council maximises opportunities to generate income where appropriate and in turn enables financial resources to be utilised more effectively, to support service delivery and ultimately the Council's priorities.

Policy includes charging categories to mitigate overall potential negative impact:

Charging Categories

Reference	**Category**	**Policy Objective**	**Typical Application**
1	Full Cost Recovery	Cover all direct and indirect costs of the service.	Most discretionary services.
2	Full Cost Recovery with Concessionary Discounts	Ensure priority groups can access services while still recovering costs from other users.	Leisure, cultural, or wellbeing services.
3	Subsidised	Provide wider access for all users with a partial contribution from general funds.	Community engagement or early

			intervention services.
4	Nominal Charge	Make a service widely available while discouraging misuse.	Token fees for equipment hire.
5	Statutory	Charges set by law or central government.	Some Licensing, certain planning fees.

At this initial stocktake stage the impacts are considered to be neutral to low negative for people in the Protected Characteristic groupings of age and disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010. The Council also considered impacts are likely to be neutral to low negative in regard to people in our additional local grouping of social inclusion, given access to service challenges across our large rural county, and for those who are in our further local categories of young people leaving care, and veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families.

Actions to mitigate likely negative impact or enhance positive impact of the service change in terms of health and wellbeing considerations

At this stage, as there are likely to be neutral to low negative impacts for people in the groupings of Age and Disability, with intersectionality between these and other groupings including those for whom there are difficulties in accessing services due to what may be a range of factors, this will in itself indicate likely neutral to low negative impact in terms of health and well being as well.

In mitigation, the policy includes provision to offer and manage concessions and exemptions where appropriate:

Concessions and Subsidies

Concessions should:

- Align with verifiable and approved corporate priorities
- Have clear, consistent qualifying criteria applied appropriately and effectively
- Be affordable and budgeted for at a service level
- Be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain effective
- Be fully documented and, if necessary, approved as appropriate

Actions to review and monitor the impact of the service change in terms of equality, social inclusion, and health considerations

This policy will be subject to annual review to ensure it continues to reflect the needs and aspirations of the Council. The setting of fees and charges will be incorporated into the annual Medium Term Financial Strategy and budget setting timetable and a further report with details of the 2026/27 fees and charges amounts will be presented to Council in February 2026.

The overall aim of the fees and charges policy is to ensure that fees and charges are set within a framework of value for public money for all our residents and businesses. It allows the council to have a properly considered, consistent and informed approach to all the fees and charges it levies for its discretionary services. This will in turn support the Council's journey towards financial sustainability and the delivery of the Council's priorities.

The proposed process will include benchmarking, with comparisons with other local authorities, market providers or other considerations to ensure the fee level is appropriate. This will help to ensure that our own approach is equitable and continues to be grounded in evidence of need, including for people that we consider to be vulnerable by virtue of their household circumstances or individual circumstances as well as the Protected Characteristic groupings to which they belong. Whilst the groupings most affected are likely to be those of Age and Disability, plus our additional local groupings, this will itself be kept under review as changes may occur for other groupings too.

One internal source that will be used for this is the Cost-of-Living Dashboard would be useful data to reference - https://app.powerbi.com/groups/596d8f5a-713c-444a-acca-cd4da3025c4d/reports/c32e03fc-dc96-4cbd-b21e-64de58c8aada?tenant=b6c13011-372d-438b-bc82-67e4c7966e89&experience=power-bi

Associated ESHIAs

There are no directly associated ESHIAs, albeit others have been carried out in relation to fees and charges and related. Further ESHIAs may be carried out where appropriate and proportionate to do so, in relation to the introduction of new fees/what may be considered to be significant change in existing fees.

Actions to mitigate likely negative impact, enhance positive impact, and review and monitor the overall impacts with regard to climate change impacts and with regard to economic and societal impacts

Climate change impacts

The Fees and Charges Pricing Policy is a corporate governance document focused on financial principles, processes, and legislative compliance.

1. Expected Outcome: No negative impact.

2. Energy and fuel consumption, Renewable energy generation, Carbon offsetting or mitigation: There is no direct effect on these areas, as the policy itself is purely procedural and financial. Any changes to fees and charges that do have a physical or operational impact (e.g., changes to parking fees, waste charges) will require a separate, mandatory climate change appraisal summary to be completed at the point of service charge implementation, as required by the Council's standard reporting procedures.

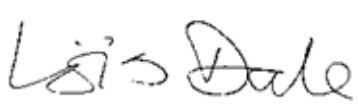
3. Climate change adaptation: The policy indirectly supports the ability to fund future adaptation strategies by ensuring the Council's financial resources are maximized and protected.

Economic and Societal Impacts

The risk has been identified of a negative impact on Rural Communities, as implementing uniform fees may disproportionately affect isolated and/or rural areas of Shropshire, where lack of local alternatives or increased travel costs makes the Council service the only viable option, potentially risking an implicit market failure.

Where appropriate, the policy allows for differential charging based on geographic location or specific community need to maintain accessibility, subject to a robust assessment by the Service Manager and review by the Portfolio Holder.

Scrutiny at Stage One screening stage

People involved	**Signatures**	**Date**
Lead officer for the proposed service change **Lisa Henchey** **Portfolio Manager** **Income and Commercial**	TO ADD	17/11/2025
Officer carrying out the screening (if different)		
*Any external support*** **Mrs Lois Dale** **Senior Insights and Research** **EDI Specialist**		18/11/2025

This refers to other officers within the service area
****This refers to support external to the service but within the Council.***

Sign off at Stage One screening stage

Name	Signatures	Date
Lead officer's name **Lisa Henchey** **Portfolio Manager** **Income and Commercial**	TO ADD	17/11/2025
Service manager's name **Mannie Ketley** **Finance Director**	MK	18/11/2025

This may either be the Head of Service or the lead officer

B. Detailed Screening Assessment

Aims of the service change and description
Shropshire Council delivers a wide range of services to our residents, communities, and businesses. Many of these services are free at the point of delivery, but some attract a fee or charge. This policy sets out a consistent approach for setting, reviewing, and managing fees and charges across the Council. Its purpose is to ensure that charges are: • **Fair and transparent for service users** • **Aligned with our corporate priorities and statutory duties** • **Set at a level that supports the financial sustainability of services** • **Applied consistently across the organisation** **Policy Key Principles** 1. **Cost Recovery as Default** – Users of discretionary services should normally pay the full cost of the service, unless a subsidy is approved for policy reasons. 2. **Transparency** – Charges and the reasons behind them should be clear to service users and decision-makers. 3. **Affordability and Accessibility** – Fees must not create unnecessary barriers, and concessions should be targeted at those considered to be in the most need of them. 4. **Consistency** – Similar services should be charged on the same basis across the Council. 5. **Regular Review** – All discretionary fees and charges should be reviewed at least annually, with changes linked to the budget cycle.

6. **Market Awareness** – Benchmarking against other councils and providers to ensure charges are competitive and justifiable.
7. **Legal Compliance** – All charges must be in line with statutory powers and restrictions.
8. **Value for Money** – Fees and charges should contribute to efficient, sustainable services.

Shropshire Council is at an early stage in its journey to financial sustainability. This policy is therefore designed to be practical, supportive, and easy to use, giving services the tools and guidance they need to make good decisions about charging.
By setting appropriate levels of fees and charges for services the Council can help:

- Improve financial resilience
- Improve transparency of charges and their basis
- Reduce subsidisation of service delivery through Council Tax or government funding
- Fund service improvements and innovation
- Manage demand for non-essential services
- Target subsidy where needed

By careful consideration of fees and charges the Council can also avoid:

- Affordability and access concerns for those considered to be vulnerable
- Market sensitivity risk
- Legal and reputation risk through non-compliance
- Administrative complexity and inefficiency
- Cross subsidisation of service costs

To achieve this the Council must:

- Adopt a commercially minded culture while retaining public service values
- Have strong accountability from staff for all fees and charges
- Encourage benchmarking, consultation and adaptability
- Embed continuous improvement and learning

Intended audiences and target groups for the service change

The potential audience is all those who live in Shropshire, and potentially all those who visit and work in the county as well.

Evidence used for screening of the service change

Best Value Statutory Guidance
Statutory guidance issued under the Local Government Act 1999, which requires local authorities to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the

way their functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.**Best value standards and intervention: a statutory guide for best value authorities**

CIPFA TISonline Charging

Overview of current charging policy and practice in UK local government, covering the strategic use of charges, exemptions, and Value for Money across various services.CIPFA TISonline Charging

Charging for Adult Social Care in England: Reform and Routes Forward

This CIPFA report critiques the current system, calling for equitable, sustainable reform and proposing key principles for local authority financial planning in social care.CIPFA Report: Charging for Adult Social Care in England

Deciding prices in public services markets: principles for value for money

NAO insight paper outlining eight principles for government bodies, including local authorities, to follow when setting prices in markets for public services to ensure long-term value and market health.NAO Insight: Deciding prices in public services markets

Specific consultation and engagement with intended audiences and target groups for the service change
Consultation and Communication The intention is that the council, via the relevant service area, will consult service users where legally required or where an impact is anticipated in regard to equality, social inclusion and health and well being. The Council will maintain a fees and charges schedule and publish all fees and charges on the Council's website and provide at least one month's notice before implementation where possible.

Initial equality impact assessment by grouping (Initial health impact assessment is included below this table)

Please rate the impact that you perceive the service change is likely to have on a group, through stating this in the relevant column.
Please state if it is anticipated to be neutral (no impact) and add any extra notes that you think might be helpful for readers.

Protected Characteristic groupings and other groupings locally identified in Shropshire	**High negative impact** *Stage Two ESHIA required*	**High positive impact** *Stage One ESHIA required*	**Medium positive or negative impact** *Stage One ESHIA required*	**Low positive, negative, or neutral impact (please specify)** *Stage One ESHIA required*
Age				Neutral to low negative

(please include children, young people, young people leaving care, people of working age, older people. Some people may belong to more than one group e.g., a child or young person for whom there are safeguarding concerns e.g., an older person with a disability)				
Disability (please include cancer; HIV/AIDS; learning disabilities; mental health conditions and syndromes; multiple sclerosis; neurodiverse conditions such as autism; hidden disabilities such as Crohn's disease; physical and/or sensory disabilities or impairments)				Neutral to low negative
Gender re-assignment (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				Neutral
Marriage and Civil Partnership (please include associated aspects: caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				Neutral
Pregnancy and Maternity (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				Neutral
Race (please include ethnicity, nationality, culture, language, Gypsy, Roma, Traveller)				Neutral
Religion or Belief (please include Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Nonconformists; Rastafarianism; Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism, Veganism, Zoroastrianism, and any others)				Neutral
Sex (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				Neutral
Sexual Orientation (please include associated aspects: safety; caring responsibility; potential for bullying and harassment)				Neutral

Other: Social Inclusion (please include families and friends with caring responsibilities; households in poverty or on low incomes; people for whom there are safeguarding concerns; people you consider to be vulnerable; people with health inequalities; refugees and asylum seekers; rural communities)				Neutral to low negative
Other: Veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families				Neutral to low negative
Other: Young people leaving care				Neutral to low negative

Initial health and wellbeing impact assessment by category

Please rate the impact that you perceive the service change is likely to have with regard to health and wellbeing, through stating this in the relevant column.
Please state if it is anticipated to be neutral (no impact) and add any extra notes that you think might be helpful for readers.

Health and wellbeing: individuals and communities in Shropshire	**High negative impact** *Part Two HIA required*	**High positive impact**	**Medium positive or negative impact**	**Low positive negative or neutral impact (please specify)**
Will the proposal have a *direct impact* on an individual's health, mental health and wellbeing? For example, would it cause ill health, affecting social inclusion, independence and participation? .				Neutral to low negative
Will the proposal *indirectly impact* an individual's ability to improve their own health and wellbeing? For example, will it affect their ability to be physically active, choose healthy food, reduce drinking and smoking? .				Neutral to low negative

Will the policy have a *direct impact* on the community - social, economic and environmental living conditions that would impact health? For example, would it affect housing, transport, child development, education, employment opportunities, availability of green space or climate change mitigation? .				Neutral to low negative
Will there be a likely change in *demand* for or access to health and social care services? For example: Primary Care, Hospital Care, Community Services, Mental Health, Local Authority services including Social Services? .				Neutral to low negative

Guidance Notes

1. Legal Context

It is a legal requirement for local authorities to assess the equality and human rights impact of changes proposed or made to services. It is up to us as an authority to decide what form our equality impact assessment may take. By way of illustration, some local authorities focus more overtly upon human rights; some include safeguarding.
It is about what is considered to be needed in a local authority's area, in line with local factors such as demography and strategic objectives as well as with the national legislative imperatives.

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

These are: eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advancing equality of opportunity; and fostering good relations.

These screening assessments for any proposed service change go to Cabinet as part of the committee report, or occasionally direct to Full Council, unless they are ones to do with Licensing, in which case they go to Strategic Licensing Committee.

Service areas would ordinarily carry out a screening assessment, or Stage One equality impact assessment. This enables energies to be focussed on review and monitoring and ongoing evidence collection about the positive or negative impacts of a service change upon groupings in the community, and for any adjustments to be considered and made accordingly.

These screening assessments are recommended to be undertaken at timely points in the development and implementation of the proposed service change.

For example, a Stage One ESHIA would be a recommended course of action before a consultation. This would draw upon the evidence available at that time, and identify the target audiences, and assess at that initial stage what the likely impact of the service change could be across the national Protected Characteristic groupings and our additional local categories. This ESHIA would set out intended actions to engage with the groupings, particularly those who are historically less likely to engage in public consultation eg young people, as otherwise we would not know their specific needs.

A second Stage One ESHIA would then be carried out after the consultation, to say what the feedback was, to set out changes proposed as a result of the feedback, and to say where responses were low and what the plans are to engage with groupings who did not really respond. This ESHIA would also draw more upon actions to review impacts in order to mitigate the negative and accentuate the positive.

Meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty through carrying out these ESHIAs is very much about using them as an opportunity to demonstrate ongoing engagement across groupings and to thus visibly show we are taking what is called ‘due regard’ of the needs of people in Protected Characteristic groupings.

If the screening indicates that there are likely to be high negative impacts for groupings within the community, the service area would need to take advice on whether or not to carry out a full report, or Stage Two assessment. This is resource intensive but will enable more evidence to be collected that will help the service area to reach an informed opinion.

In practice, Stage Two or Full Screening Assessments have only been recommended twice since 2014, as the ongoing mitigation of negative equality impacts should serve to keep them below the threshold for triggering a Full Screening Assessment. The expectation is that Full Screening Assessments in regard to Health Impacts may occasionally need to be undertaken, but this would be very much the exception rather than the rule.

2. Council Wide and Service Area Policy and Practice on Equality, Social Inclusion and Health

This involves taking an equality and social inclusion approach in planning changes to services, policies, or procedures, including those that may be required by Government. The decisions that you make when you are planning a service change need to be recorded, to demonstrate that you have thought about the possible

equality impacts on communities and to show openness and transparency in your decision-making processes.

This is where Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessments (ESHIAs) come in. Where you carry out an ESHIA in your service area~~,~~ this provides an opportunity to show:

- What evidence you have drawn upon to help you to recommend a strategy or policy or a course of action to Cabinet or to Strategic Licensing Committee.
- What target groups and audiences you have worked with to date.
- What actions you will take in order to mitigate any likely negative impact upon a group or groupings, and enhance any likely positive effects for a group or groupings; and
- What actions you are planning to monitor and review the impact of your planned service change.

The formal template is there not only to help the service area but also to act as a stand-alone for a member of the public to read. The approach helps to identify whether or not any new or significant changes to services, including policies, procedures, functions, or projects, may have an adverse impact on a particular group of people, and whether the human rights of individuals may be affected.

There are nine Protected Characteristic groupings defined in the Equality Act 2010. The full list of groupings is: Age; Disability; Gender Reassignment; Marriage and Civil Partnership; Pregnancy and Maternity; Race; Religion or Belief; Sex; and Sexual Orientation.

There is also intersectionality between these. Eg a young person with a disability would be in the groupings of Age and Disability, and if they described themselves as having a faith they would then also be in the grouping of Religion or Belief. We demonstrate equal treatment to people who are in these groups and to people who are not, through having what is termed 'due regard' to their needs and views when developing and implementing policy and strategy and when commissioning, procuring, arranging, or delivering services.

For the individuals and groupings who may be affected, ask yourself what impact do you think is likely and what actions will you currently anticipate taking, to mitigate or enhance likely impact of the service change? If you are reducing a service, for example, there may be further use you could make of awareness raising through social media and other channels to reach more people who may be affected.

Social inclusion is then a wider additional local category we use in Shropshire, in order to help us to go beyond the equality legislation in also considering impacts for individuals and households with regard to the circumstances in which they may find themselves across their life stages. This could be households on low incomes, or households facing challenges in accessing services, such as households in rural areas, and veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families, or people that we might consider to be vulnerable, such as young people leaving care or refugee families.

Please note that the armed forces are now a grouping to whom we are required to give due regard under recent Armed Forces legislation, although in practice we have been doing so for a number of years now.

We are now also identifying care leavers as a distinct separate local grouping due to their circumstances as vulnerable individuals.

When you are not carrying out an ESHIA, you still need to demonstrate and record that you have considered equality in your decision-making processes. It is up to you what format you choose. You could use a checklist, an explanatory note, or a document setting out our expectations of standards of behaviour, for contractors to read and sign. It may well not be something that is in the public domain like an ESHIA, but you should still be ready for it to be made available.

Both the approaches sit with a manager, and the manager has to make the call, and record the decision made on behalf of the Council.

Carry out an ESHIA:

- If you are building or reconfiguring a building.
- If you are planning to reduce or remove or reconfigure a service.
- If you are consulting on a policy or a strategy.
- If you are bringing in a change to a process or procedure that involves other stakeholders and the wider community as well as particular groupings

Carry out and record your equality and social inclusion approach:

- If you are setting out how you expect a contractor to behave with regard to equality, where you are commissioning a service or product from them.
- If you are setting out the standards of behaviour that we expect from people who work with vulnerable groupings, such as taxi drivers that we license.
- If you are planning consultation and engagement activity, where we need to collect equality data in ways that will be proportionate and non-intrusive as well as meaningful for the purposes of the consultation itself.
- If you are looking at services provided by others that help the community, where we need to demonstrate a community leadership approach

3. **Council wide and service area policy and practice on health and wellbeing**

This is a relatively new area to record within our overall assessments of impacts, for which we are asking service area leads to consider health and wellbeing impacts, and to look at these in the context of direct and indirect impacts for individuals and for communities.

A better understanding across the Council of these impacts will also better enable the Public Health colleagues to prioritise activities to reduce health inequalities in ways that are evidence based and that link effectively with equality impact considerations and climate change mitigation.

Health in All Policies – Health Impact Assessment

Health in All Policies is an upstream approach for health and wellbeing promotion and prevention, and to reduce health inequalities. The Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is the supporting mechanism

- Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is the technical name for a process that considers the wider effects of local policies, strategies and initiatives and how they, in turn, may affect people's health and wellbeing.
- Health Impact Assessment is a means of assessing both the positive and negative health impacts of a policy. It is also a means of developing good evidence-based policy and strategy using a structured process to review the impact.
- A Health Impact Assessment seeks to determine how to maximise health benefits and reduce health inequalities. It identifies any unintended health consequences. These consequences may support policy and strategy or may lead to suggestions for improvements.
- An agreed framework will set out a clear pathway through which a policy or strategy can be assessed and impacts with outcomes identified. It also sets out the support mechanisms for maximising health benefits.

The embedding of a Health in All Policies approach will support Shropshire Council through evidence-based practice and a whole systems approach, in achieving our corporate and partnership strategic priorities. This will assist the Council and partners in promoting, enabling and sustaining the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities whilst reducing health inequalities.

<u>Individuals</u>

Will the proposal have a *direct impact* on health, mental health and wellbeing?

For example, would it cause ill health, affecting social inclusion, independence and participation?

Will the proposal directly affect an individual's ability to improve their own health and wellbeing?

This could include the following: their ability to be physically active e.g., being able to use a cycle route; to access food more easily; to change lifestyle in ways that are of positive impact for their health.

An example of this could be that you may be involved in proposals for the establishment of safer walking and cycling routes (e.g., green highways), and changes to public transport that could encourage people away from car usage. and

increase the number of journeys that they make on public transport, by foot or on bicycle or scooter. This could improve lives.

Will the proposal *indirectly impact* an individual's ability to improve their own health and wellbeing?

This could include the following: their ability to access local facilities e.g., to access food more easily, or to access a means of mobility to local services and amenities? (e.g. change to bus route)

Similarly to the above, an example of this could be that you may be involved in proposals for the establishment of safer walking and cycling routes (e.g. pedestrianisation of town centres), and changes to public transport that could encourage people away from car usage, and increase the number of journeys that they make on public transport, by foot or on bicycle or scooter. This could improve their health and well being.

Communities

Will the proposal directly or indirectly affect the physical health, mental health, and wellbeing of the wider community**?**

A *direct impact* could include either the causing of ill health, affecting social inclusion, independence and participation, or the promotion of better health.

An example of this could be that safer walking and cycling routes could help the wider community, as more people across groupings may be encouraged to walk more, and as there will be reductions in emission leading to better air quality.

An *indirect impact* could mean that a service change could indirectly affect living and working conditions and therefore the health and well being of the wider community.

An example of this could be: an increase in the availability of warm homes would improve the quality of the housing offer in Shropshire and reduce the costs for households of having a warm home in Shropshire. Often a health promoting approach also supports our agenda to reduce the level of Carbon Dioxide emissions and to reduce the impact of climate change.

Please record whether at this stage you consider the proposed service change to have a direct or an indirect impact upon communities.

Demand

Will there be a change in demand for or access to health, local authority and social care services?

For example: Primary Care, Hospital Care, Community Services, Mental Health and Social Services?

An example of this could be: a new housing development in an area would affect demand for primary care and local authority facilities and services in that location and surrounding areas. If the housing development does not factor in consideration of availability of green space and safety within the public realm, further down the line there could be an increased demand upon health and social care services as a result of the lack of opportunities for physical recreation, and reluctance of some groupings to venture outside if they do not perceive it to be safe.

For further advice: please contact
Lois Dale via email lois.dale@shropshire.gov.uk, or
Phil Northfield via email Phillip.Northfield@shropshire.gov.uk

Committee and Date

Cabinet
3rd December 2025

Item

Public

Healthy People | Healthy Economy | Healthy Environment | Healthy Organisation

Setting the Council Tax Taxbase 2026/27

Responsible Officer:	James Walton, Executive Director (Section 151)
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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Roger Evans, Finance

1. Synopsis

This report presents the Council Tax Taxbase for 2026/27. The report outlines the Council Tax discount policies, Council Tax Support Scheme and the Collection Rate and the impact of these on the taxbase.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 In order to determine the appropriate Council Tax levels for Shropshire Council, it is necessary to determine the Council Tax taxbase for the area. The budget requirements of the various precepting authorities are divided by this figure to arrive at the Band D Council Tax.

2.2 This report sets out the Council Tax taxbase for 2026/27 and the policies used to determine the taxbase.

2.3 For 2026/27 the Council Tax taxbase will be 121,852.37 Band D equivalents, this is an increase of 0.39% from 2025/26.

2.4 The policies and assumptions used in determining the taxbase are:

A. The minor amendments to the Council Tax Support scheme have no impact on the taxbase determination

B. Continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy to not award a discount in respect of vacant dwellings undergoing major repair, i.e. former Class A exempt properties

C. Continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy in respect of vacant dwellings, i.e. former Class C exempt properties, of 100% for one month

D. Continuation of the "six week rule" in respect of vacant dwellings, i.e. former Class C exempt properties

E. Continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy in respect of properties which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than one year

F. Continuation of the discretionary Council Tax policy to levy a Council Tax premium of 100% in respect of second homes (other than those that retain a 50% discount through regulation as a result of job related protection)

G. Estimated Collection rate of 98.0% for 2026/27

3. Recommendations

Cabinet members are asked to agree and recommend to full Council:

3.1 To approve, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Shropshire Council as it's Council Tax taxbase for the year 2026/27, as detailed in Appendix A, totalling 121,852.37 Band D equivalents.

3.2 To note the changes to the Council's localised Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme in 2026/27. The scheme is attached at Appendix B.

3.3 To note the Council Tax Support Scheme amendments detailed in Appendix B have no impact on the taxbase determination.

3.4 To note the exclusion of 7,950.74 Band D equivalents from the taxbase calculation as a result of localised Council Tax Support.

3.5 To note continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy to not award a discount in respect of vacant dwellings undergoing major repair, i.e. former Class A exempt properties.

3.6 To note continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy in respect of vacant dwellings, i.e. former Class C exempt properties, of 100% for one month i.e. effectively reinstating the exemption and the resulting exclusion of 243.34 band D equivalents from the taxbase calculation.

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3.7 To note continuation of the "six week rule" in respect of vacant dwellings, i.e. former Class C exempt properties.

3.8 To note continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy to levy a Council Tax premium of 100% in relation to dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than one year (but less than five years) and the resulting inclusion of an additional 859.89 Band D equivalents in the taxbase calculation.

3.9 To note continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy to levy a Council Tax premium of 200% in relation to dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than five years (but less than ten years) and the resulting inclusion of an additional 194.22 Band D equivalents in the taxbase calculation.

3.10 To note continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy to levy a Council Tax premium of 300% in relation to dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than ten years and the resulting inclusion of an additional 202.66 Band D equivalents in the taxbase calculation.

3.11 To note the continuation of the discretionary Council Tax discount policy to levy a Council Tax premium of 100% in relation to second homes (other than those that retain a 50% discount through regulation as a result of job related protection) and the resulting inclusion of an additional 1,390.00 Band D equivalents in the taxbase calculation.

3.12 To approve a collection rate for the year 2026/27 of 98.0%.

3.13 That the Council Tax Support policy and other similar Council Tax and Business Rate policies are reviewed and consulted upon, where necessary, over 2026 with a view to implementing any revisions by Financial Year 2027/28 at the latest.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

4.1 Expression of Council Tax Support in terms of Band D equivalents results in a higher potential for inaccuracies in the determination process as Council Tax Support is a significantly more volatile discount element.

4.2 Details of the potential risk in relation to establishing a collection rate allowance is detailed within this report in Section 8.

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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.

5.2 The Council Tax taxbase figure impacts on the Council Tax that will be levied by the Council for 2026/27.

5.3 The implication of the Council's localised Council Tax Support scheme are detailed in Appendix B.

5.4 The financial implications of the discounts and premiums to be applied in 2026/27 are detailed in Appendix C.

5.5 The implications regarding the determined collection rate are detailed in Section 8.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

6.1 The Setting the Council Tax Taxbase 2026/27 report and recommendations have no direct effect on climate change.

7. Background

7.1 Shropshire Council has responsibility for determining the Council Tax taxbase for the Council's geographical area.

7.2 The taxbase for Council Tax must be set between 1 December 2025 and 31 January 2026 in relation to 2026/27 as prescribed by the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012.

7.3 The Council is also required to inform the major precepting authorities, West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner and Shropshire & Wrekin Fire Authority, of the taxbase to enable the calculation of Council Tax for the following year. Each town and parish

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council is also notified of its own Council Tax taxbase. A detailed build of the taxbase analysed by both parish and town council and Environment Agency region is shown in Appendix A.

7.4 The purpose of this report, therefore, is to determine and approve the Council Tax taxbase for Shropshire Council for 2026/27.

8. Additional Information

Taxbase Calculation

8.1 Based on the valuation list, the Council Tax taxbase is the number of properties in the area falling within each council tax property valuation band, modified to take account of the adjustments set out below. Taxbase is expressed as a Band D equivalent.

8.2 An analysis of Council Tax bands within Shropshire Council is detailed below:

Property Band	House Value	Ratio to Band D	Analysis of Dwellings on the Valuation List (%)	% Increase / (Decrease) over 2024/25
A	Under £40,000	6/9	18.0	0.5
B	40,001 - 52,000	7/9	25.5	0.6
C	52,001 - 68,000	8/9	20.9	0.9
D	68,001 - 88,000	9/9	14.5	0.6
E	88,001 - 120,000	11/9	11.6	1.0
F	120,001 - 160,000	13/9	6.1	0.8
G	160,001 - 320,000	15/9	3.2	0.3
H	Over 320,000	18/9	0.2	0.0

8.3 There are 152,932 properties in the valuation list for the Shropshire Council area. This compares with a figure of 151,872 in the list at the same time last year. There has been an increase of 1,060 properties overall, which equates to 0.70%.

8.4 The methodology followed for calculating the taxbase is as follows:

8.5 Ascertain the number of properties in each Council Tax band (A to H) shown in the valuation list as at 10 September 2025.

8.6 Adjust for estimated changes in the number of properties through new build, demolitions and exemptions

8.7 The number of discounts and disabled relief allowances which apply as at 6 October 2025.

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8.8 Convert the number of properties in each Council Tax band to Band D equivalents by using the ratio of each band to Band D and so arrive at the total number of Band D equivalents for the Council.

8.9 Adjust the total number of Band D equivalents by the estimated Council Tax collection rate for the year.

8.10 These calculations are undertaken for each property band in each parish.

Collection Rate

8.11 In determining the taxbase, an allowance must be made to provide for changes to the taxbase during the year (e.g. due to new properties, appeals against banding, additional discounts, Council Tax Support award changes, etc.) as well as losses on collection arising from non-payment. This is achieved by estimating a Council Tax collection rate for the year and must be common for the whole of Shropshire.

8.12 A collection rate of 98.2% was assumed for the 2025/26 financial year and it is recommended that a collection rate of 98.0% should be assumed for the purpose of determining the Council Tax taxbase in 2026/27.

8.13 Actual in year collection rates in 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25 were 98.2%, 97.8% and 97.7% respectively.

8.14 If the actual rate exceeds 98.0% a surplus is generated, which is shared between the Unitary Council, West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner and Shropshire & Wrekin Fire Authority, pro rata to their demand on the Collection Fund for the relevant year. Conversely, any shortfall in the collection rate results in a deficit, which is shared in a similar manner. The surplus or deficit is considered in setting the Council Tax in the following year.

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

Local Member: **ALL**

Appendices

Appendix A: 2026/27 Parish and Town Council Tax Taxbase Summary for Shropshire Council.

Appendix B: Shropshire Council's Localised Council Tax Support Scheme

Appendix C: Discretionary Discount Policies

2026/27 Parish and Town Council Council Tax Taxbase Summary for Shropshire Council **APPENDIX A**

Parish / Town Council	Council Tax Taxbase (Band D Equivalents)
Abdon & Heath	117.06
Acton Burnell, Frodesley, Pitchford, Ruckley & Langley	268.43
Acton Scott	42.61
Adderley	196.96
Alberbury with Cardeston	418.10
Albrighton and Donington	2,319.97
All Stretton, Smethcott & Woolstaston	183.27
Alveley & Romsley	910.20
Ashford Bowdler	38.25
Ashford Carbonel	204.02
Astley	212.62
Astley Abbotts	248.39
Aston Bottrell, Burwarton & Cleobury North	114.49
Atcham	102.06
Badger	65.53
Barrow	278.54
Baschurch	1,347.04
Bayston Hill	1,841.39
Beckbury	149.69
Bedstone & Bucknell	346.71
Berrington	469.51
Bettws-Y-Crwyn	94.12
Bicton	386.81
Billingsley, Deuxhill, Glazeley & Middleton Scriven	170.26
Bishops Castle Town	714.14
Bitterley	356.24
Bomere Heath & District	890.58
Boningale	147.72
Boraston	80.96
Bridgnorth Town	4,698.83
Bromfield	120.45
Broseley Town	1,631.26
Buildwas	175.26
Burford	459.03
Cardington	224.57
Caynham	549.35
Chelmarsh	230.62
Cheswardine	407.59
Chetton	163.04
Childs Ercall	313.89
Chirbury with Brompton	360.42
Church Preen, Hughley & Kenley	131.54
Church Pulverbatch	172.74
Church Stretton & Little Stretton Town	2,247.02
Claverley	958.45
Clee St. Margaret	74.25
Cleobury Mortimer	1,220.06
Clive	251.27
Clun Town with Chapel Lawn	545.92
Clunbury	257.75

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2026/27 Parish and Town Council Council Tax Taxbase Summary for Shropshire Council **APPENDIX A**

Parish / Town Council	Council Tax Taxbase (Band D Equivalents)
Clungunford	149.85
Cockshutt-cum-Petton	324.57
Condover	966.40
Coreley	140.62
Cound	218.23
Craven Arms Town	839.83
Cressage, Harley & Sheinton	424.59
Culmington	176.79
Diddlebury	299.14
Ditton Priors	409.42
Eardington	251.01
Easthope, Shipton & Stanton Long	216.76
Eaton-Under-Heywood & Hope Bowdler	197.15
Edgton	50.64
Ellesmere Rural	995.02
Ellesmere Town	1623.04
Farlow	200.05
Ford	340.33
Great Hanwood	425.84
Great Ness & Little Ness	564.91
Greete	49.51
Grinshill	113.84
Hadnall	379.28
Highley	1154.73
Hinstock	561.38
Hodnet	633.26
Hope Bagot	34.11
Hopesay	272.26
Hopton Cangeford & Stoke St. Milborough	170.99
Hopton Castle	42.04
Hopton Wafers	325.41
Hordley	101.99
Ightfield	220.63
Kemberton	122.38
Kinlet	457.38
Kinnerley	530.14
Knockin	145.48
Leebotwood & Longnor	201.35
Leighton & Eaton Constantine	204.11
Llanfairwaterdine	109.89
Llanyblodwel	277.63
Llanymynech & Pant	691.28
Longden	550.31
Loppington	292.59
Ludford	493.9
Ludlow Town	3716.8
Lydbury North	236.41
Lydham & More	142.51
Mainstone & Colebatch	90.18

2026/27 Parish and Town Council Council Tax Taxbase Summary for Shropshire Council **APPENDIX A**

Parish / Town Council	Council Tax Taxbase (Band D Equivalents)
Market Drayton Town	4,350.60
Melverley	54.79
Milson & Neen Sollars	126.45
Minsterley	653.40
Montford	256.15
Moreton Corbett & Lee Brockhurst	149.51
Moreton Say	230.32
Morville, Acton Round, Aston Eyre, Monkhopton & Upton Cressett	403.46
Much Wenlock Town	1,280.08
Munslow	192.50
Myddle & Broughton	630.24
Myndtown, Norbury, Ratlinghope & Wentnor	275.21
Nash	150.83
Neen Savage	157.20
Neenton	65.36
Newcastle	137.73
Norton-In-Hales	344.72
Onibury	136.56
Oswestry Rural	1,714.05
Oswestry Town	5,522.18
Pontesbury	1,413.35
Prees	1,231.47
Quatt Malvern	106.28
Richards Castle	146.30
Rushbury	288.13
Ruyton-XI-Towns	474.73
Ryton & Grindle	80.76
Selattyn & Gobowen	1,446.23
Shawbury	908.21
Sheriffhales	343.36
Shifnal Town	3,591.39
Shrewsbury Town	27,713.12
Sibdon Carwood	49.24
St. Martins	1,054.85
Stanton Lacy	171.62
Stanton-Upon-Hine Heath	254.88
Stockton	137.40
Stoke-Upon-Tern	538.80
Stottesdon & Sidbury	352.20
Stowe	52.86
Sutton Maddock	111.02
Sutton-Upon-Tern	422.27
Tasley	410.73
Tong	124.64
Uffington	109.03
Upton Magna	156.69
Welshampton & Lyneal	392.71
Wem Rural	702.20
Wem Town	2,054.87
West Felton	613.92

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2026/27 Parish and Town Council Council Tax Taxbase Summary for Shropshire Council **APPENDIX A**

Parish / Town Council	**Council Tax Taxbase (Band D Equivalents)**
Westbury	524.39
Weston Rhyn	937.41
Weston-Under-Redcastle	123.64
Wheathill	84.06
Whitchurch Rural	692.38
Whitchurch Town	3,694.50
Whittington	1,035.56
Whitton	58.67
Whixall	336.38
Wistanstow	335.65
Withington	107.29
Woore	620.63
Worfield & Rudge	949.64
Worthen with Shelve	856.42
Wroxeter & Uppington	166.21
Shropshire Council Total	**121,852.37**
Environment Agency - Severn Trent Region	114,272.72
Environment Agency - Welsh Region	4,813.10
Environment Agency - North West Region	2,766.55
Shropshire Council Total	**121,852.37**

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APPENDIX B

Council Tax Support

1.1. The 2010 Spending Review announced the localisation of council tax support and The Welfare Reform Act 2012 abolished Council Tax Benefit from 31 March 2013 and required that Local Government created a localised Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme effective from 1 April 2013, accommodating a reduction in funding of 10%.

1.2. Shropshire Council's localised CTS scheme was approved in December 2018. Several small amendments have been made to the main Council Tax Support Scheme to take effect from 1st April 2026. These amendments are detailed in the scheme summary included in section 1.7 below.

1.3. From 2013, therefore, council tax support has taken the form of reductions within the council tax system, replacing national council tax benefit. Making reductions as part of the council tax system reduces a billing authority's Council Tax taxbase. Billing and major precepting authorities receive funding (Council Tax Support Grant) which reduce their council tax requirement and, depending on the design of the local council tax scheme, can help offset the council tax revenue foregone through reductions.

1.4. An estimate of the effect of the local Council Tax Support Scheme on the Council Tax taxbase has been determined for Shropshire. It is estimated that the Council Tax Support Scheme will reduce the Council Tax taxbase by 7,950.74 Band D equivalents.

1.5. As Council Tax Support entitlement will vary throughout the year and this will affect the taxbase it is more likely that the amount of Council Tax collected in 2026/27 will vary from the estimate.

1.6. A link to the full scheme for 2025/26 is below.

https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/media/ucbdasz1/council-tax-reduction-scheme-2025-2026.pdf

1.7 The CTS scheme summary is provided on the following pages.

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SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL – BENEFITS SERVICE

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT (CTS)

Introduction

The current Council Tax Benefit scheme is a means tested benefit that helps people with a low income to pay their Council Tax.

From April 2013 this will be abolished and all local authorities will provide a new scheme called 'Council Tax Support'. The funding that is provided for this scheme will be reduced by 10% and therefore it is likely that some people will have to pay more towards their Council Tax bill.

The changes will not affect pensioners even though they will move into the new scheme. The Government have confirmed that all pensioners will be protected and receive the same amount of benefit they do now under the current Council Tax Benefit Scheme.

Each local authority will be able to provide Council Tax support in a different way depending on local needs, funding available and how it can be administered. Each Council is expected to devise a new scheme and then put this to public consultation by the end of 2012.

Our new scheme was devised and published on the Shropshire Council website for customers, stakeholders and other agencies to comment on. Public consultation closed on the 14th December and the new scheme was formally adopted by the Council on 16th January 2013.

Anyone of working age will now be subject to the new scheme from April 2013. The differences that you will see in the new Council Tax Support Scheme are: -

- Removal of second adult rebate
- Reduction of the capital limit from £16,000 to £10,000
- Removal of earnings disregards
- Removal of child benefit disregard
- Increase in non-dependant deductions

Please note the following amendments are for the calculation of Council Tax Support only and do not affect Housing Benefit calculations.

Removal of Second Adult Rebate

Second Adult Rebate (2AR) is awarded to a customer based on the circumstances of a second adult living in the property. Under the new scheme this has been abolished and will no longer be effective from 01.04.13.

Reduction of the capital limit

For working age people the capital limit will reduce to £10,000 from 01.04.13. This will mean that if a customer's savings amounts to more than £10,000, they will not be entitled to CTS. The lower capital limit of £6,000 remains the same.

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Tariff income calculations remain as is i.e. from the total amount if capital £6,000 is deducted, the remainder is then dived by 250 if the result is not an exact multiple of £1 the result is rounded up to the next whole £1

All other capital rules including static savings, land and property, shares, etc remain the same.

Removal of Earnings disregards

All income disregards for working age people will cease from the 01.04.13.

Removal of Child Benefit disregards

Child benefit will no longer be disregarded from the calculation of CTS from the 01.04.03.

Increase in non-dependant earned income deductions (working age only)

From 01.04.13 non dep deductions will increase to the following: -

£5 for anyone earning under £100,
£10 for anyone earning between £100 and £150
£20 for anyone earning over £150 per week

This deduction will only be made from their earned income. It won't affect any other income they receive.

Non-dependant earned income deductions (pension age only)

Gross income less than £186.00	=	£3.65
Gross income £186.00 to £321.99	=	£7.25
Gross income £322.00 to £400.99	=	£9.15
Gross income £401.00 or above	=	£10.95

Unearned income will attract the following disregards (working age and pension age):

Others aged 18 or over incl. JSAC & ESAC	=	£3.65
In receipt of Pension Credit, IS, JSA (IB), ESA(IR)	=	nil

(This disregard will be up-rated annually in line with figures provided annually by DCLG)

A new minimum earnings threshold will be introduced with effect from 01/04/15 to reflect the current arrangements in the Housing Benefit scheme.

This minimum earnings threshold will help to determine whether a European Economic Area (EEA) national's previous or current work can be treated as genuine and effective for the purposes of deciding whether they have a right to reside in the UK as a worker or self-employed person.

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The minimum earnings threshold has been set at the level at which workers start to pay National Insurance Contributions (NICs), currently £153 a week in the 2014/15 tax year. If an EEA national can prove that they have been earning at least this amount for a period of 3 months immediately before they claim CTS their work can be treated as genuine and effective and they will have a right to reside as a worker or self-employed person.

If they do not satisfy the minimum earnings threshold criteria, a further assessment will be undertaken against a broader range of criteria (such as hours worked, pattern of work, nature of employment contract etc.) to determine whether their employment is genuine and effective.

Ultimately, if an EEA national's income does not meet the minimum earnings threshold or the additional criteria to be classified as genuine and effective employment they will not be eligible for CTS.

Special Educations Needs Allowance – to be disregarded in full with effect from 01/09/14

War Pensions / Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Guaranteed Income Payments – to be disregarded in full with effect from 01/04/13 (and to be consistent with Housing Benefit)

From 01/04/15 the CTR scheme will include changes to the habitual residency test to reflect changes to the Housing Benefit (HB) regulations.

The amendments to the CTS scheme removes access to CTS for EEA jobseekers who make a new claim for CTS on or after 1 April 2015. EEA nationals who are self-employed, are workers or who are unemployed but retain their worker status have the same rights to CTS as a UK national and their situation remains unchanged.

EEA jobseekers who are entitled to CTS and JSA(IB) on 31 March 2015 will be protected until they have a break in their claim for CTS or JSA. If their JSA ends because they have started work, then as long as we can be satisfied that their employment is genuine and effective they will be able to access in-work CTS as either a worker or a self-employed person. Claimants receiving in-work CTS beyond 1 April will continue to be able to access CTS, if they become entitled to JSA(IB) on or after that date, but only if they retain their worker status. If they are a jobseeker then their CTS entitlement ends from the Monday following the cessation of work.

Changes with effect from 1 April 2018 to bring the scheme in line with Housing Benefit changes

- **2 child cap**

The Government has announced that they will limit benefit support by only taking into account a maximum of two dependent children per family. It affects all claims where new children are born after April 2017. This will applies in Housing Benefit to families that make a new claim from April 2017

- **Loss of the family premium**

The Government removed the family premium for new claims within the assessment of Housing Benefit with effect from May 2016

- **Bereavement Support Payments to be disregarded in full**

This was introduced into Housing Benefit with effect from April 2017

- **Any payments from the 'We love Manchester Fund' and the 'London Emergency Trust' to be disregarded in full**

- **Maximum backdate period of 1 month**

- **Absence from home limited to 4 weeks when outside GB**

The temporary absence rules for Housing Benefit were amended in 2015 reducing the allowable period of temporary absence outside Great Britain from 13 weeks to 4 weeks.

The limit applies to new periods of absence only. Exceptions are when an absence is in relation to

- Death of a partner, child or close relative
- Receiving medical treatment
- A person who has fled their home due to fear of violence
- A member of Her Majesty's forces posted overseas

- **Beneficial changes in circumstances to be reported within one month of the change in order for the claim to be updated from the date of change, otherwise changes will take effect from the Monday following date notified.**

- **All working aged claimants who receive Council Tax Support (unless they are a pensioner or classed as vulnerable) will pay 20% of their council tax liability, (after appropriate discounts have been awarded)**

An example of this change is as follows:

1) Current scheme (which allows for 100% reduction)
The customer's liability is £20.00 per week. As they are in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance they are entitled to full Council tax reduction making their council tax balance for the year £0.00
2) Proposed new scheme (20% minimum payment)
The customer liability is £20.00. Before any calculation takes place 20% of this amount is reduced from the liability to be used. This means that any calculation will be carried out on a figure of £16.00. Again the customer is on Jobseekers Allowance and so they are entitled to a full award. This will mean their council tax balance for the year will be £208.00 (£4.00 x 52).

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- **De Minimis change amount of £10.00 per week for claimants in receipt of Universal Credit**

- **Apply a minimum award of £1.50**

- **Claimant or partner who meet the specific criteria of severe disablement contained within the policy will be protected from any percentage reduction in council tax support. Claimant or partner in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance will be protected from any percentage reduction in council tax support. This will also apply to customers who meet the criteria for receiving a war compensation related benefit or pension. Specifically this includes**

Criteria to be awarded for the severe disability premium:

- The customer has to be in receipt of
  1) Attendance allowance or
  2) Higher or middle rate care component of disability living allowance or
  3) The daily living allowance rate of personal independence payments
- They must not have a resident non-dependant
- No person is entitled to, and in receipt of, carers allowance in respect of caring for the customer and;
- If the customer has a partner they must also meet all above criteria

Criteria to be awarded the support component of employment and support allowance

It is accepted that some people's difficulties or disabilities are such that not only is the person not expected to look for work but are also not expected to undertake an work related activities or plan for starting work due to the severity of their difficulties

Criteria to qualify for the war pension's exemption

The customer and/or partner has to be in receipt of either:

- War pension
- War disablement pension
- War service attributable pension
- War widows pension
- War mobility supplement

Changes with effect from 1 April 2019

Severe Disability Premium does not exist in Universal Credit. From 1 April 2019 claimants or couples that have moved into Universal Credit but meet the above criteria for the severe disablement premium will be exempt from the percentage reduction.

Employment and support allowance does not form part of Universal Credit. Instead there is a limited capability for work and limited capability for work related activity element in Universal Credit which is similar to that used for identifying the work related activity group and support group of Employment Support Allowance. From 1 April 2019 claimants

or partners in receipt of the limited capability for work related activity element in Universal Credit that is the equivalent to the support element of employment and support allowance will be exempt from the percentage reduction.

Changes with effect from 1 April 2020

- We have defined a council tax reversal as an amount of Council Tax Support to which the claimant was not entitled, and we have clarified what action the Council will take depending on whether the reversal is caused by claimant error, or official error.

- We have clarified that where a reversal is due to claimant error the total sum of the reversal shall be fully chargeable and recoverable as part of the claimant's council tax liability

- We have clarified that where the reversal arose due to official error, that where the claimant or their representative could reasonably have been expected at the time to realise that the assessment had been made in error, the total sum of the reversal shall be fully chargeable and recoverable as part of the claimant's council tax liability. Otherwise, the amount of the reversal will not be chargeable and recoverable as part of the claimant's council tax liability

- In the event of a council tax reversal, the Council will consider any underlying award that the claimant should have been entitled to provided evidence is received from the claimant within 1 month of the claimant being notified of the reversal, or where an appeal against a recoverable reversal is made

- We have clarified the definition of pensioner in accordance with new benefit rules for mixed age couples and eligibility for Local Council Tax Reduction Schemes

- Any payment made by the Home Office under the Windrush Compensation Scheme or the Windrush Exceptional Payment Scheme will be disregarded as capital

Changes with effect from 1 April 2022

CTRS scheme reg 74 (a)

Insert

(aa) who is a person on universal credit, except where the award of universal credit to that person includes an amount in respect of a liability to make payments in respect of the accommodation they occupy as their home, in accordance with section 11 of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 (housing costs);

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Note: This is to align the CTRS scheme with a statutory amendment to the qualifying criteria for Housing Benefit, this amendment should prevent circumstances where an applicant is excluded from CTRS whilst being eligible for HB or UCHE

CTRS scheme part 13 (106)
Insert

(14) Where there is a change of circumstances which results in a change to the maximum council tax reduction for the purposes of calculating eligibility for a reduction under PART 7 (28), from the first day of the benefit week after the date on which the change first occurred.

Note: This will insert an 80%/100% cap on maximum council tax reduction and aligns the circumstances of claimants in receipt of UC with those in receipt of Passported Benefits to ensure that a claimant's maximum CTRS is calculated appropriate to their status and that vulnerable households are not disadvantaged.

Changes with effect from 1 April 2023

Added to schedules 9 and 10 capital to be disregarded, both pens and WA (and also income other than earnings for good measure)

(7) any payment made under or by the approved blood scheme, or the Scottish Infected Blood Support Scheme as established or approved by the Secretary of State, or trust established with funds provided by the Secretary of State

(8) any payment made under or by a trust, established for the purpose of giving relief and assistance to disabled persons whose disabilities were caused by the fact that during their mother's pregnancy she had taken a preparation containing the drug known as Thalidomide, and which is approved by the Secretary of State.

Add to interpretation

""approved blood scheme" means a scheme established or approved by the Secretary of State, or trust established with funds provided by the Secretary of State, for the purpose of providing compensation in respect of a person having been infected from contaminated blood products;";

Amended

105 6

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From

Where the change of circumstances is the death of an applicant's partner or their separation, it takes effect on the day the death or separation occurs.

To

Where the change of circumstances is the death of an applicant's partner or their separation, it takes effect on the day the death or separation occurs.

(a) Where the applicant was included as "the partner" of the deceased (or ex-partners) Council Tax Support entitlement at date of death or separation, The Council Tax Liability created following the death of an applicant's partner or their separation falls to be treated as "first liable" within Reg 105 (2) of this scheme

Changes with effect from 1 April 2024

Added to schedule 10 capital to be disregarded (and also income other than earnings for good measure). In order to mirror changes to housing benefit regulations.

Any payment made under the post office compensation scheme (horizon compensation)

Amend regulation 109(d)

From: (d) in a case where—

i (i) an applicant or his partner is a person on income support, an income-based jobseeker's allowance or an income-related employment and support allowance or has an award of universal credit,

ii (ii) the applicant becomes liable for the first time to pay council tax in respect of the dwelling which he occupies as his home, and

iii (iii) the application to the authority is received at the designated office within one month of the date of the change, the date on which the change takes place; (e) in a case where—

iv (i) the applicant is the former partner of a person who was, at the date of his death or their separation, entitled to a reduction under this scheme, and

v (ii) where the applicant makes an application for a reduction under this scheme within one month of the date of the death or the separation, the date of the death or separation;

To: (d) in a case where—

vi (i) the applicant becomes liable for the first time to pay council tax in respect of the dwelling which he occupies as his home, and

vii (ii) the application to the authority is received at the designated office within one month of the date of the change, the date on which the change takes place; (e) in a case where—

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viii (i) the applicant is the former partner of a person who was, at the date of his death or their separation, entitled to a reduction under this scheme, and

ix (ii) where the applicant makes an application for a reduction under this scheme within one month of the date of the death or the separation, the date of the death or separation;

This allows for the customer to have a calendar month to apply for council tax support once a new liability has been created for all claims, not just those on means tested benefit. Currently those not on means tested benefit has have to apply within the benefit week.

Amendments from 01st April 2025

The scheme will be amended to include the legislation that has been brought in to disregard the following as capital in the calculation of their council tax support:

- **Grenfell tower payments**
- **The horizon compensation payments**
- **Vaccine damage payments**
- **Payments for the victims of the oversees terrorism compensation payments**

In regulation 2(1) (interpretation)—

(a)for the definition of “Grenfell Tower support payment” substitute—

““Grenfell Tower support payment” means a payment made for the purpose of providing compensation or support in respect of the fire on 14th June 2017 at Grenfell Tower;”;
(b)after the definition of “historical child abuse payment” insert—

““the Horizon system” means any version of the computer system used by the Post Office known as Horizon, Horizon Legacy, Horizon Online or HNG-X;”;
(c)after the definition of “polygamous marriage” insert—

““the Post Office” means Post Office Limited (registered number 02154540);“Post Office compensation payment” means a payment made by the Post Office or the Secretary of State for the purpose of providing compensation or support which is—
(a)
in connection with the failings of the Horizon system; or

(b)
otherwise payable following the judgment in Bates and Others v Post Office Ltd ((No. 3) “Common Issues”)(1);”;

(d)in the definition of “qualifying person”—

(i)for “or a Windrush payment” substitute “, a Windrush payment, a Post Office compensation payment or a vaccine damage payment”;

(ii)after “the National Emergencies Trust” insert “, the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Compensation Scheme”;

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(e)after the definition of “universal credit” insert—

““vaccine damage payment” means a payment made under the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979(2);“the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Compensation Scheme” means the scheme of that name established by the Ministry of Justice in 2012 under section 47 of the Crime and Security Act 2010(3);”.

In paragraph (5) of regulation 12 (persons treated as not being in Great Britain), before sub-paragraph (a) insert—

“(zd)a person who was residing in Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights or Lebanon immediately before 7th October 2023, left Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights or Lebanon in connection with the Hamas terrorist attack in Israel on 7th October 2023 or the violence which rapidly escalated in the region following the attack and—

(i)has been granted leave in accordance with immigration rules made under section 3(2) of the Immigration Act 1971(1),

(ii)has a right of abode in the United Kingdom within the meaning given in section 2 of that Act(2), or

(iii)does not require leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom in accordance with section 3ZA of that Act;

(ze)a person who was residing in Sudan before 15th April 2023, left Sudan in connection with the violence which rapidly escalated on 15th April 2023 in Khartoum and across Sudan and—

(i)has been granted leave in accordance with immigration rules made under section 3(2) of the Immigration Act 1971,

(ii)has a right of abode in the United Kingdom within the meaning given in section 2 of that Act, or

(iii)does not require leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom in accordance with section 3ZA of that Act;”.

(1) Schedule 1 (pensioners: matters that must be included in an authority’s scheme) is amended as follows.

(f)in sub-paragraph (9)—

(i)in paragraph (b) after “the National Emergencies Trust” insert “, the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Compensation Scheme”;

(ii)after paragraph (bc) insert—

“(bd)any Post Office compensation payment;

(be)any vaccine damage payment;”;

(g)in sub-paragraph (10), after paragraph (ac) insert—

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“(ad)any Post Office compensation payment;

(ae)any vaccine damage payment;

(af)any payment out of the estate of a person to that person’s son, daughter, step-son or step-daughter, which derives from a payment to meet the recommendation of the Infected Blood Inquiry in its interim report published on 29th July 2022(1) made under or by the Scottish Infected Blood Support Scheme or an approved blood scheme ;”.

In Schedule 6 (capital to be disregarded)—

(a)in paragraph 16—

(i)in sub-paragraph (1) after “the National Emergencies Trust” insert “, the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Compensation Scheme”;

(ii)after sub-paragraph (1D) insert—

“(1E) Any Post Office compensation payment.

(1F) Any vaccine damage payment.

(1G) Any payment out of the estate of a person, which derives from a payment to meet the recommendation of the Infected Blood Inquiry in its interim report published on 29th July 2022 made under or by the Scottish Infected Blood Support Scheme or an approved blood support scheme to the estate of the person, where the payment is made to the person’s son, daughter, step-son or step-daughter.”;

(iii)in each of sub-paragraphs (2), (3), (5), (6) and (7) for “or a Windrush payment” substitute “, a Windrush payment, a Post Office compensation payment or a vaccine damage payment”;

(b)in paragraph 21(2)—

(i)in sub-paragraph (w) omit “or”;

(ii)after sub-paragraph (x) insert—

“or
(y)bereavement support payment under section 30 of the Pensions Act 2014(1).”;

(c)after paragraph 22 insert—

“22A. Any payment of a widowed parent’s allowance made pursuant to section 39A of the SSCBA (widowed parent’s allowance)—

(a)to the survivor of a cohabiting partnership (within the meaning in section 39A(7) of the SSCBA) who is entitled to a widowed parent’s allowance for a period before 9th February 2023(2), and

(b)in respect of any period of time during the period ending with the day before the survivor makes the claim for a widowed parent’s allowance,

but only for a period of 52 weeks beginning with the date of receipt of the payment or 1st April 2024, whichever is later.

22B.—(1) A payment of bereavement support payment in respect of the rate set out in regulation 3(2) or (5) of the Bereavement Support Payment Regulations 2017 (rate of bereavement support payment)(3), but only for the period of 52 weeks from the date of receipt of the payment.

(2) Where bereavement support payment under section 30 of the Pensions Act 2014 is paid to the survivor of a cohabiting partnership (within the meaning of section 30(6B) of that Act) in respect of a death occurring before 9th February 2023, any amount of that payment which is—

(a)in respect of the rate set out in regulation 3(1) of the Bereavement Support Payment Regulations 2017, and

(b)paid as a lump sum for more than one monthly recurrence of the day of the month on which their cohabiting partner died,

but only for a period of 52 weeks beginning with the date of receipt of the payment or 1st April 2024, whichever is later.".

Amendments from 01/04/2026

We are changing the regulation to simplify when entitlement can start following a death or separation. Reg 107 will be amended as follows:

original:
(6) Where the change of circumstances is the death of an applicant's partner or their separation, it takes effect on the day the death or separation occurs.
(a) Where the applicant was included as "the partner" of the deceased (or ex-partners) Council Tax Support entitlement at date of death or separation, The Council Tax Liability created following the death of an applicant's partner or their separation falls to be treated as "first liable" within Reg 105 (2) of this scheme.

Amended:
(6) Where the change of circumstances is the death of an applicant's partner or their separation, it takes effect on the day the death or separation occurs.
(a) The Council Tax Liability created following the death of an applicant's partner or their separation falls to be treated as "first liable" within Reg 105 (2) of this scheme.

Amendments are also being made to reg 110 to allow for more scope for delays in claiming if it is deemed reasonable for them to have taken longer than a month. We will be adding/amending the parts currently coloured red:

110. Date on which an application is made

(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (7), the date on which an application is made is— (a)in a case where—

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(i)an award of state pension credit which comprises a guarantee credit has been made to the applicant or his partner, and

(ii)the application is made within one month of the date on which the claim for that state pension credit which comprises a guarantee credit was received at the appropriate DWP office, or such longer period as the relevant authority considers reasonable, the first day of entitlement to state pension credit which comprises a guarantee credit arising from that claim,;

(b)in a case where—

(i)an applicant or his partner is a person in receipt of a guarantee credit,

(ii)the applicant becomes liable for the first time to pay council tax in respect of the dwelling which he occupies as his home, and

(iii)the application to the authority is received at the designated office within one month of the date of the change, or such longer period as the relevant authority considers reasonable, the date on which the change takes place;

(c)in a case where—

(i)an award of income support, an income-based jobseeker's allowance or an income-related employment and support allowance or an award of universal credit has been made to the applicant or his partner, and

(ii)the application is made within one month of the date on which the claim for that income support, jobseeker's allowance, employment and support allowance or universal credit was received, the first day of entitlement to income support, an income-based jobseeker's allowance, an income-related employment and support allowance or universal credit arising from that claim, or such longer period as the relevant authority considers reasonable;

(d)in a case where—

(i)an applicant or his partner is a person on income support, an income-based jobseeker's allowance or an income-related employment and support allowance or has an award of universal credit,

(ii)the applicant becomes liable for the first time to pay council tax in respect of the dwelling which he occupies as his home, and

(iii)the application to the authority is received at the designated office within one month of the date of the change, or such longer period as the relevant authority considers reasonable, the date on which the change takes place;

(e)in a case where—

(i)the applicant is the former partner of a person who was … liable for Council Tax.

(ii)where the applicant makes an application (for the same property) for a reduction under this scheme within one month of the date of the death or the separation, or such longer period as the relevant authority considers reasonable, the date of the death or separation;

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SUMMARY OF CHANGES FROM 01.04.13

Current Council Tax Benefit Scheme (CTB)	Council Tax Support (CTS)
Second Adult Rebate - Awarded to the customer based on the circumstances of 'second adult'. Can be awarded due to a 'better buy' comparison	No award due for second person. On 'better buy' calculation customer will only be awarded any CTS due.
Reduction of the capital limit - Upper capital limit of £16,000. Above this limit the person would not qualify for CTB. Lower capital of £6,000. Below this figure amount is ignored. Amounts above £6,000 attract tariff income at £1 for every £250 or part of above the lower capital limit	Upper capital limit of £10,000. Above this limit the person would not qualify for CTB. Lower capital of £6,000. Below this figure amount is ignored. Amounts above £6,000 attract tariff income at £1 for every £250 or part of above the lower capital limit
Removal of earnings disregards – Permitted work - £97.50 Lone parents - £25.00 Disabled, carers or special occupations - £20.00 Couples - £10 Single £5	 Permitted work - £0 Lone parents - £0 Disabled, carers or special occupations - £0 Couples - £0 Single £0
Removal of Child Benefit disregard – Child Benefit is fully disregarded for the calculation of CTB	Child benefit is fully included for the calculation of CTS
Increase in non-dependant deductions (using current figures) On pass ported benefit - £0.00 On JSA C/ESAC - £3.30 Works less than 16 hours on maternity, paternity, adoption or sick leave - £3.30 Income more than £394.00 per week – £9.90 £316.00 to £393.99 per week – £8.25 £238.00 to £315.99 per week - £6.55 £183.00 to £237.00 per week - £3.30 £124.00 to £182.99 per week – £3.30 Under £124.00 – £3.30	 On pass ported benefit - £0.00 On JSA C/ESAC - £3.30 Works less than 16 hours on maternity, paternity, adoption or sick leave - £3.30 Earnings less than £100 - £5.00 Earnings between £100 and £150 - £10.00 Earnings above £150 - £20.00

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APPEALS

There will be no joint HB/CTR appeals – they will be heard separately by different bodies. First Tier Tribunals will hear the Housing Benefit appeals (as now) and the Valuation Tribunals Service will hear Council Tax Support appeals.

The legislation is contained within the Local Government Finance Act. Appeals against the local Council Tax Support Scheme will be covered by Regulation 16(b).

Process:

- The customer firstly needs to write to the Council saying they disagree with the decision. There is no time limit to do this. They can request this at any time.
- If we do not alter our original decision the customer has the right to appeal to the Valuation Tribunal.
- To appeal to the Valuation Tribunal the customer will need to do this on line at www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk
- The customer must complete the on line appeal application within two months of the date of the decision notice sent by ourselves upholding the original decision

As local schemes are not legislation, but are locally defined schemes, the Valuation Tribunal will not consider an appeal against a billing authority's actual scheme, as that is beyond their jurisdiction. However, the Valuation Tribunal will advise dissatisfied claimants of their right to apply to the billing authority for a discretionary discount under section 13 (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. They will also hear appeals where the authority refuses to exercise this discretion.

APPENDIX C

Discretionary Discount Policies

1. Second Homes

1.1. Second homes are defined as furnished properties which are not occupied as a person's main residence and include furnished properties that are unoccupied between tenancies.

1.2. The Local Government Act 2003 gave councils new discretionary powers to reduce the 50% Council Tax discount previously awarded in respect of second homes to between 10% and 50% with effect from 1st April 2004. Councils retain the additional income raised by reducing the second homes Council Tax discount.

1.3. The Local Government Act 2012 further extended billing authorities' discretion over the second homes discount to between 0% and 50%. On 17 October 2012 Cabinet approved the reduction of the second homes Council Tax discount from 10% to 0%.

1.4. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 passed in October 2023 enables billing authorities to introduce a council tax premium of up to 100% in respect of second homes.

1.5. On 14 December 2023 Council approved the introduction of a council tax premium of 100% in respect of second homes from 1 April 2025.

1.6. The figures used for the 2026/27 Council Tax taxbase incorporate a 100% Council Tax premium in respect of second homes (other than those that retain a 50% discount through regulation as a result of job-related protection). Implementation of this policy results in the inclusion of 1,390.00 Band D equivalents in the taxbase calculation.

2. Vacant Properties – Former Class A & Class C Exempt Properties

2.1. The Local Government Act 2012 abolished both Class A and Class C exemptions and gave billing authorities' discretion to give discounts of between 0% and 100%. Class A exemptions were previously available for up to 12 months in respect of a vacant property which required, was undergoing, or had recently undergone major repair work to render it habitable, or a structural alteration. Class C exemptions were previously available for up to six months after a dwelling became vacant.

2.2. On 14 December 2017 Council approved the removal of a 50% Council Tax discount in respect of vacant dwellings undergoing major repair, i.e. former Class A exempt properties.

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2.3. In respect of former Class A exempt properties the figures used for the 2026/27 Council Tax taxbase allow for the continuation of the decision previously approved by Council, i.e. to award no discount.

2.4. On 17 October 2012 Cabinet approved the award of a 25% Council Tax discount in respect of vacant dwellings, i.e. former Class C exempt properties.

2.5. Implementation of this policy resulted in a large number of low value Council Tax demands being raised primarily in relation to landlords whose properties are between tenants. A significant number of landlord complaints were received in relation to these Council Tax demands and these small amounts proved to be very difficult to collect. It was, therefore, proposed and approved that a 100% discount be awarded for one month, i.e. effectively reinstating the exemption, and then a 25% discount be awarded for the remaining five months.

2.6. In order to avoid fraudulent 100% claims in respect of these types of properties it was also proposed and approved that the "six week rule" be applied, i.e. if a dwelling which is unoccupied and unfurnished is either exempt or entitled to a discount, becomes occupied or substantially furnished for a period of less than six weeks, after which it falls empty again, it will only resume exemption or discount for any of the original exemption or discount period which remains.

2.7. On 14 December 2017 Council approved the continuation of the policy to award one month exemption when a property becomes unoccupied and substantially unfurnished (subject to the six week rule) and approved a revised policy to remove the 25% for the following five months. This means that when a property becomes unoccupied and substantially unfurnished it would attract one month exemption, then pay full charge for the following twenty three months, then attract an additional 100% council tax premium after two years.

2.8. In respect of former Class C exempt properties the figures used for the 2026/27 Council Tax taxbase incorporate a discount of 100% for one month. Continuation of this policy to award the one month exemption results in the exclusion of 243.34 Band D equivalents from the taxbase calculation.

3. Vacant Properties – Empty Homes Premium

3.1. The Local Government Act 2012 amended the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and also gave billing authorities' discretion to levy an empty homes premium of 50% after a dwelling has been empty and substantially unfurnished for at least two years. In December 2013 Shropshire Council chose to enact this discretionary power with effect from April 2014.

3.2. On 1 November 2018 the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018 was passed which further amended the Local Government Finance Act 1992. This gave billing authorities' discretion to levy an

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empty homes premium of 100% from 1 April 2019 after a dwelling has been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for at least two years, a 200% premium from 1 April 2020 for properties unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for at least 5 years and a 300% premium from 1 April 2021 for properties unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for at least 10 years.

3.3. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 passed in October 2023 further enhanced charging options with effect from 1 April 2024. The Act enables billing authorities to reduce the minimum period for the implementation of the council tax premium for long term empty premises from two years to one year.

3.4. The figures used for the 2026/27 Council Tax taxbase incorporate a 100% Council Tax premium in respect of dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than one year, a 200% Council Tax premium in respect of dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than five years and a 300% Council Tax premium in respect of dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than ten years. Implementation of this policy results in the inclusion of 859.89 Band D equivalents in the taxbase calculation in relation to properties unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than one year, 194.22 Band D equivalents in the taxbase calculation in relation to properties unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than five years and 202.66 Band D equivalents in the taxbase calculation in relation to properties unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than ten years.

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Committee and Date

Cabinet

3 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		
email:	Sonya.Miller@shropshire.gov.uk	Tel:	01743 254264
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 Cabinet 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 cant 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**:

- Fulfils 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

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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.

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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.

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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 Cabinet 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 Cabinet acknowledge the breadth of statutory requirements being successfully delivered and achieving good outcomes for the children and young people in Shropshire.

3.3 Where Cabinet 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 cabinet recommend to Council 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

Risk	*Mitigation*
Potential deterioration of capacity if demands increase on the system.	Children's Services current operating model of increasing early help capacity, secure threshold application, appropriate referrals from partners and timeliness of intervention, securing children and young

	people's long-term homes quickly including adoption was evidenced through the inspection. Performance and demand tracking that is embedded across the system evidence reduced numbers of open cases (per child) monthly, there are 699 children looked after as @ 04/09/25, including 32 unaccompanied asylum seekers through the government scheme in place. This is a reduction overall from 2023/24 and to date numbers of children requiring care for their safety is less than those leaving care month on month. The service is monitoring and tracking these areas of demand weekly/monthly with clear management oversight and service manager check and challenge sessions in place. Benchmarking data will be available in October 25 re numbers of Children looked after per 10.000 and Local Authority spends; the service will be evaluating its position against that when available. 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. 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.
Placement capacity and homes for children and young people not meeting need.	Building our internal capacity will be crucial to avoid the impact of placement breakdowns on costs and impact on children and young people's well-being. The fostering transformation programme and work related to building on our children's homes is in place. Adoption is supported alongside the regional adoption agency and we have evidenced good practice in this area including sibling groups being placed together in the forever homes and family.
Outcomes for children and young people deteriorate. Practice standards and statutory timeliness (the activity of the service), deteriorate.	A continuous improvement approach of high 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

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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 Cabinet 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.

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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:

These are attached as appendices.

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

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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.

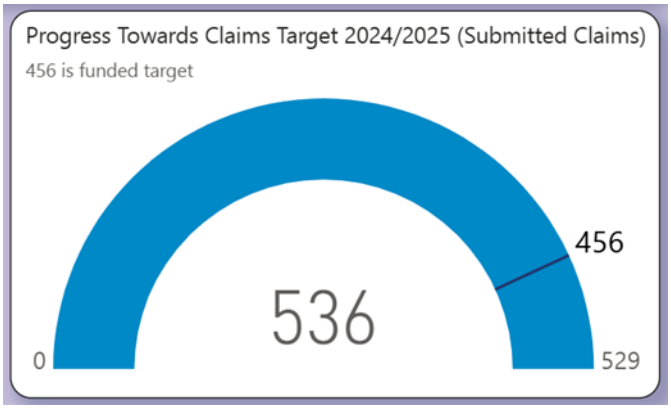
The new Early Help Strategy, titled 'How Can I Help?', was formally launched on 16/07/2024, with well-attended sessions for partners and schools.

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.

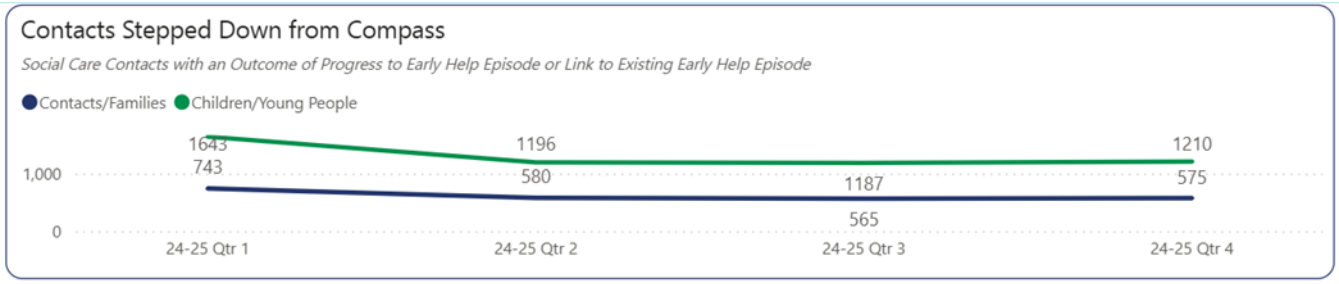
Despite shorter intervention times, parent satisfaction improved significantly, with 73% rating the service 9 or 10 out of 10 in Q4 2023-2024, up from 57% the previous year.

DATA what does it tell us

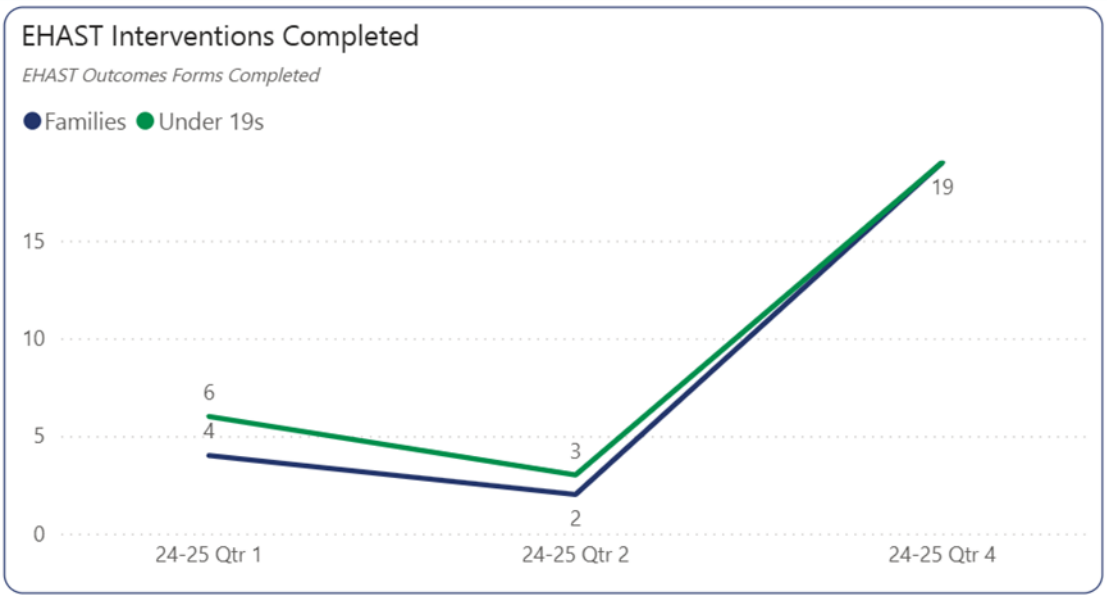
- Potential grant funding for the year 2024-2025, we exceeded the target of 456 and managed to achieve a total of 536 so an achievement of 118% of the funded target.



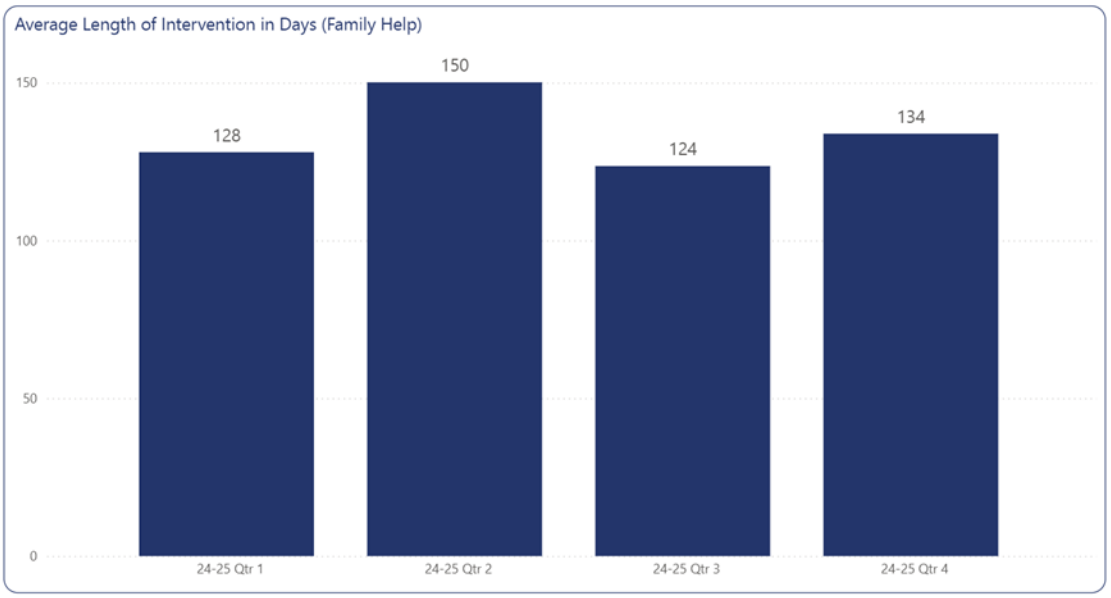
Early Help contacts totalled 1142 compared to 2463 from compass. We do not have the figures from 2023-24 to compare to due to the way recording changed following the EH transformation & recording.



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.

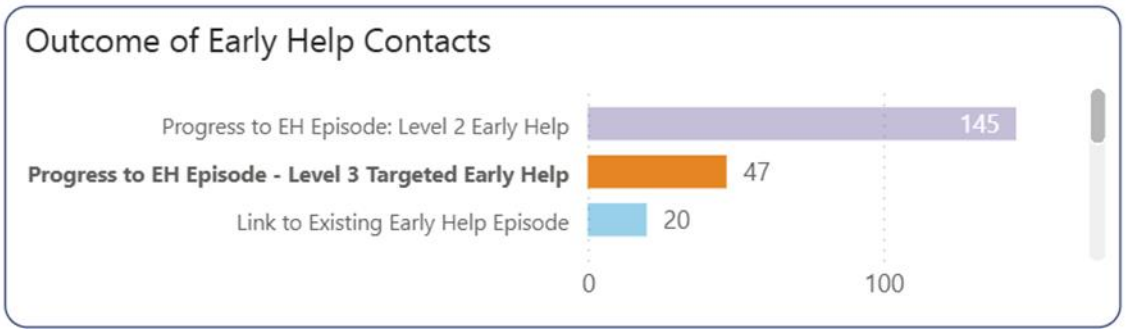


The average length of TEH interventions has reduced slightly, averaging out at 134 days per intervention over the year 2024-25.

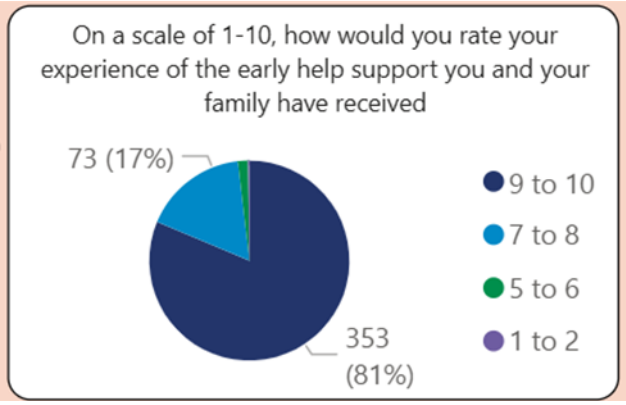


There has been a 31% increase in families worked with in TEH compared to the previous years' increase of 83% (however, this increase is expected to be due to process changes following transformation and the figure should level out over the coming years.

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 it's 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 accountsWe 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 makes accountable for the inclusion of their feedback.

As the board developed it was clear that there isa 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 or 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 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 EHAST, 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

DRAFT

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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

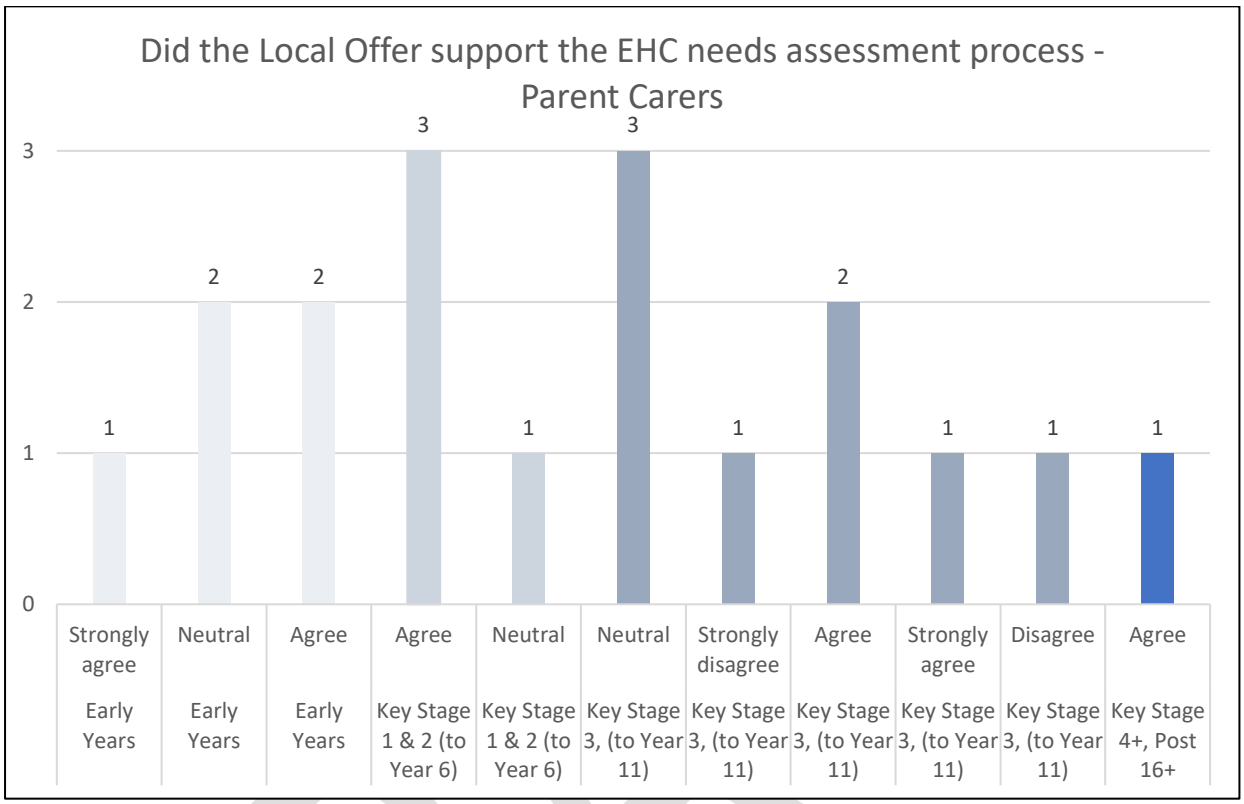
When a parent carer has been through the EHCP process they are asked for their feedback. One of the questions in that feedback asks how the Local Offer supported them.

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

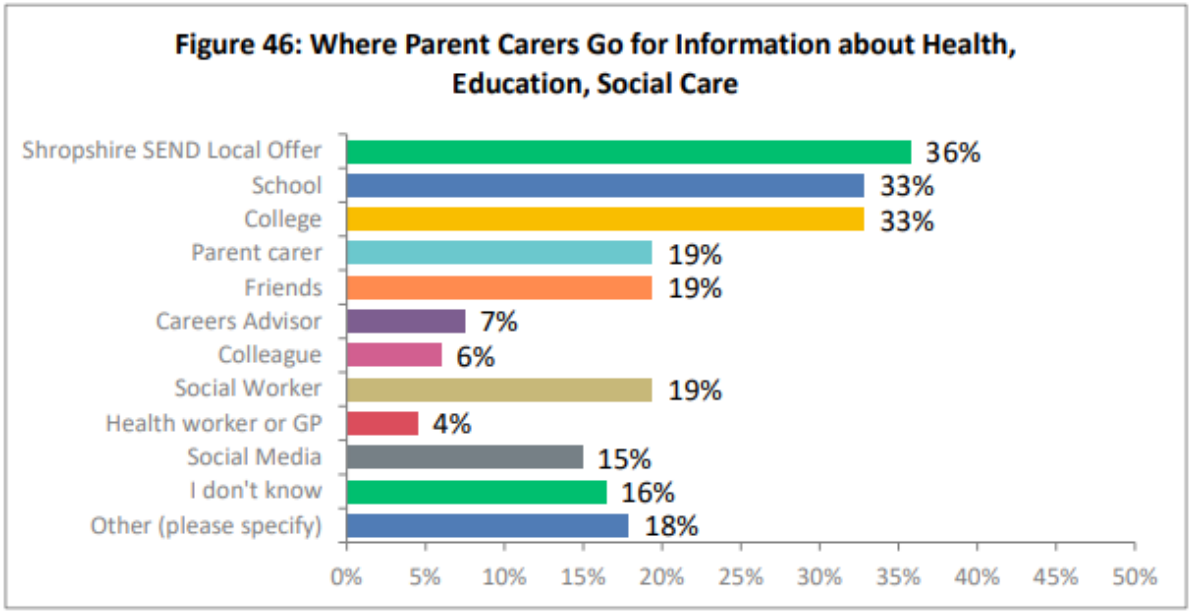
Shropshire Council undertook research between mid-August and the end of October 2024 to understand more about the experiences of people with SEND when preparing for adulthood and completing education. The research considered the views of children and young people from year 9 upwards, parents and carers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

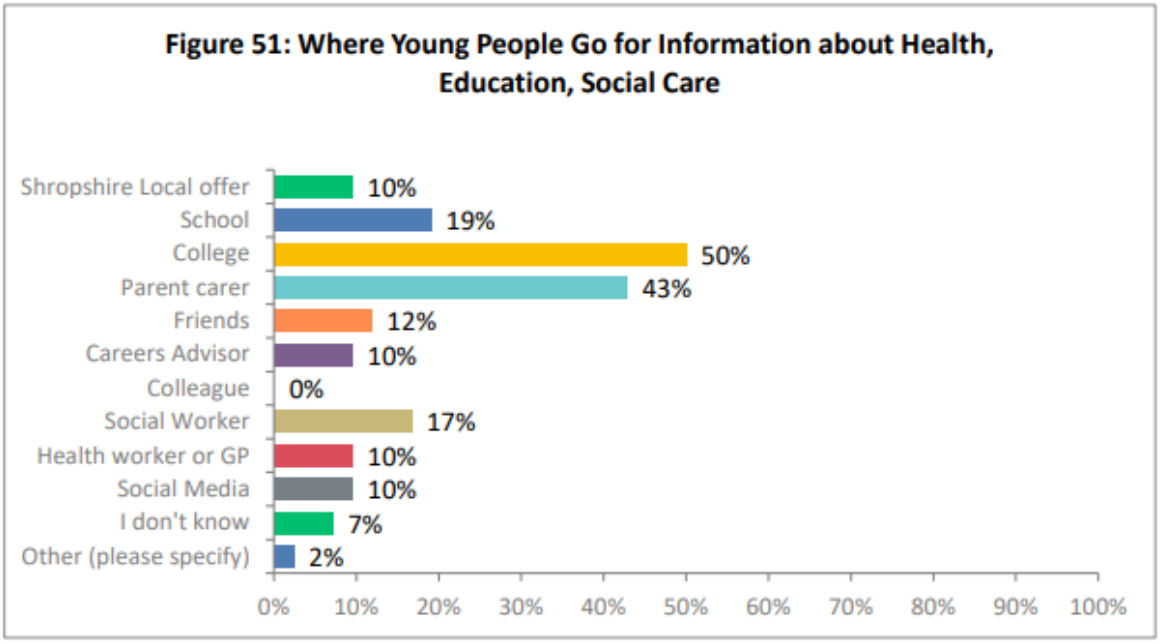
Survey and Audience	Number of respondents
Parents and Carers	88
Young People	46
Professionals	73
Total	207

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.

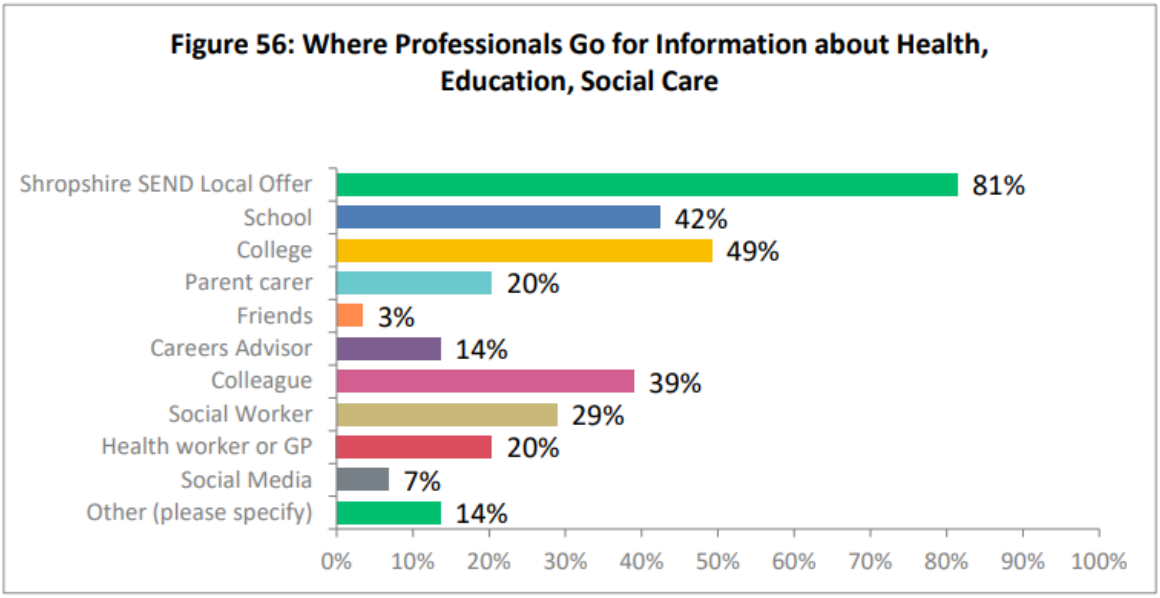
The graph below demonstrates that for over a third of parent carers responding, the Shropshire SEND Local Offer is an information resource. Around a third of respondents also said that school or college are resources for this information.



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.

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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

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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
1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025	30,649	100,134	14,134	1,824
1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024	28,910	76,109	12,567	1,939
1st April 2022 to 31st 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.

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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/carer https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/the-send-local-offer/education/how-is-sen-funded-in-schools/education-health-	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.

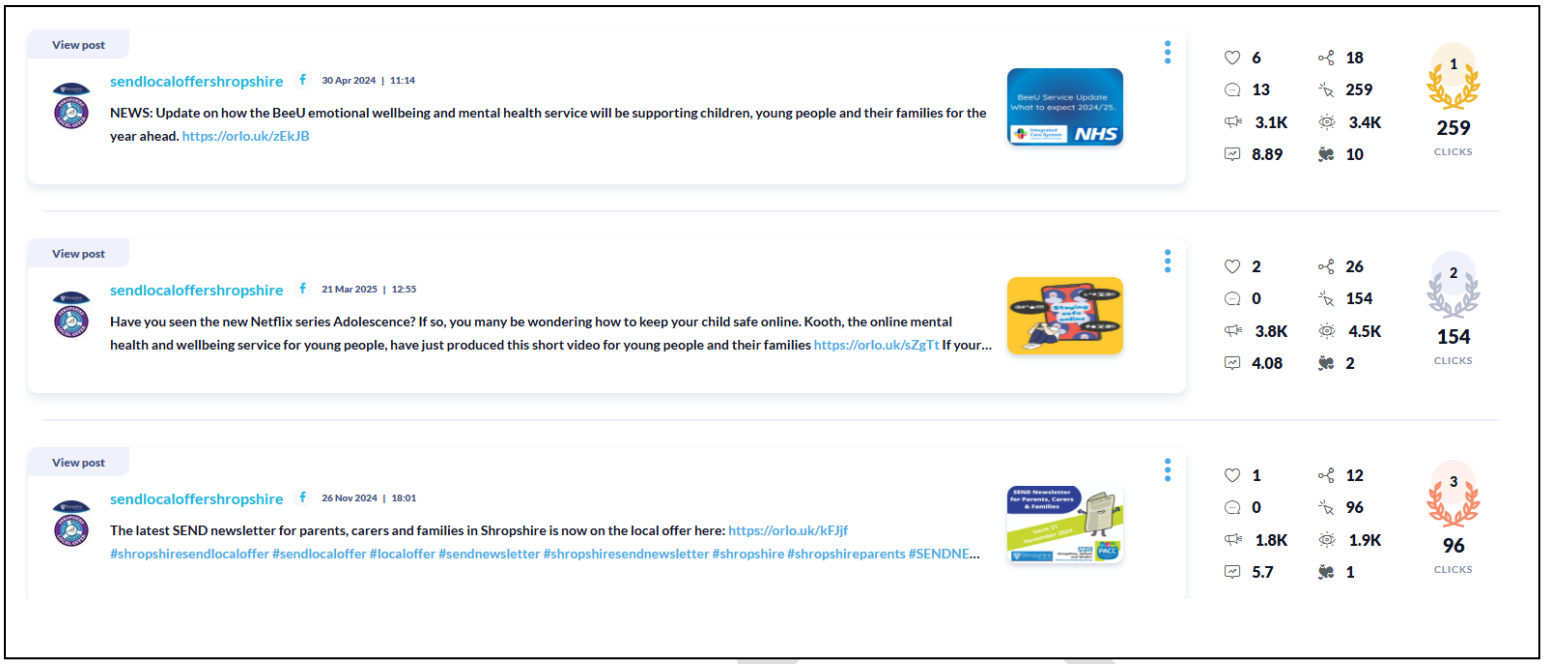
Post engagement, which includes people liking, commenting, clicking on links etc has increased over the last year. Hootsuite state that "most social media marketing experts agree that a good engagement rate is between 1% and 5%. Our engagement rate for Facebook is **1.98%** and **2.33%** on Instagram.

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

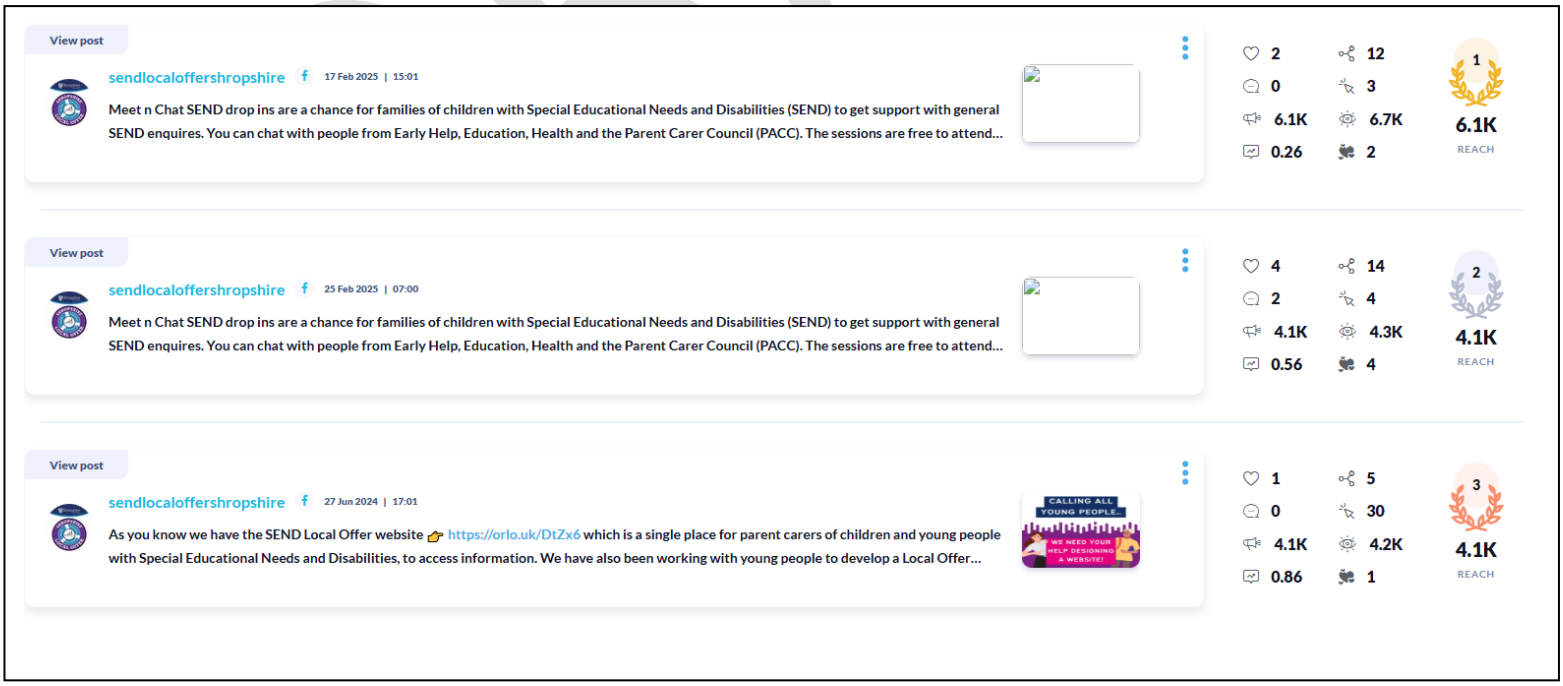


The top 3 posts by reach for the year were:-

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



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 includes 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.

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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:

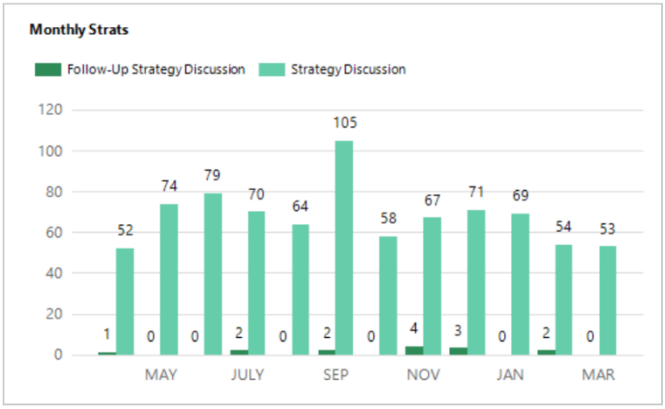
Strats	QTR1			QTR2			QTR3			QTR4			Total
	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	
Follow-Up Strategy Discussion	1	0	0	2	0	2	0	4	3	0	2	0	**14**
Strategy Discussion	52	74	79	70	64	105	58	67	71	69	54	53	**816**
Total	**53**	**74**	**79**	**72**	**64**	**107**	**58**	**71**	**74**	**69**	**56**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

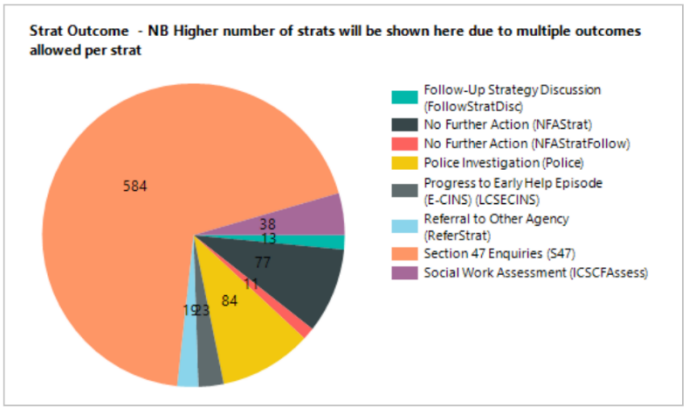
Analysis:

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).

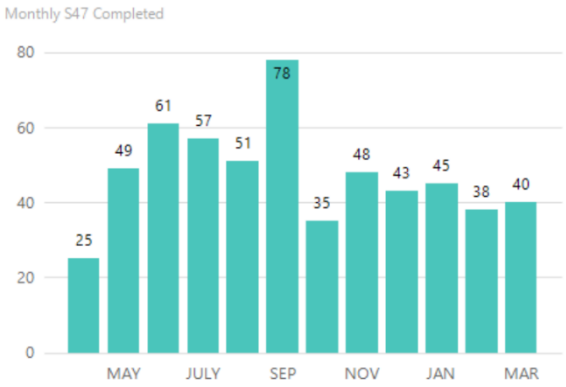
s.47 child protection investigations:

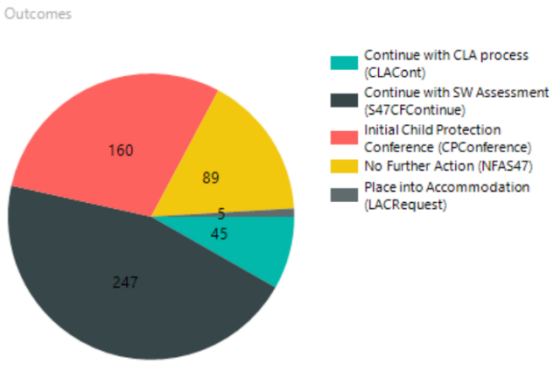
S47	QTR1			QTR2			QTR3			QTR4			Total
	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	
Total	25	49	61	57	51	78	35	48	43	45	38	40	496

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:





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:

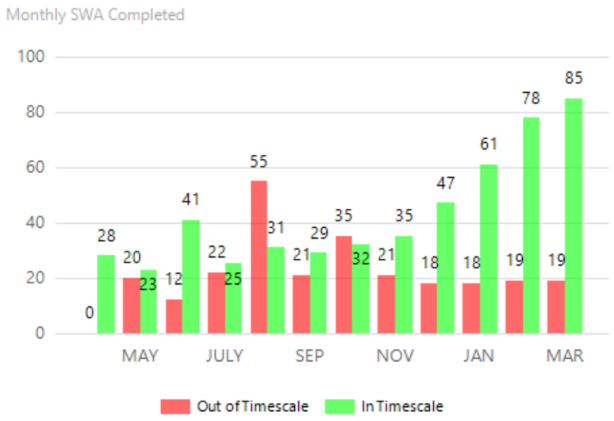
SWA	QTR1			QTR2			QTR3			QTR4			Total
	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	
In Timescale	28	23	41	25	31	29	32	35	47	61	78	85	**515**
Out of Timescale	0	20	12	22	55	21	35	21	18	18	19	19	**260**
Total	**28**	**43**	**53**	**47**	**86**	**50**	**67**	**56**	**65**	**79**	**97**	**104**	**775**

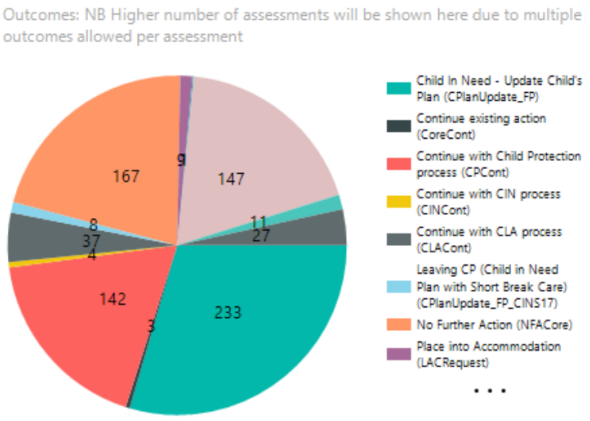
Analysis:

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:





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)

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

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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

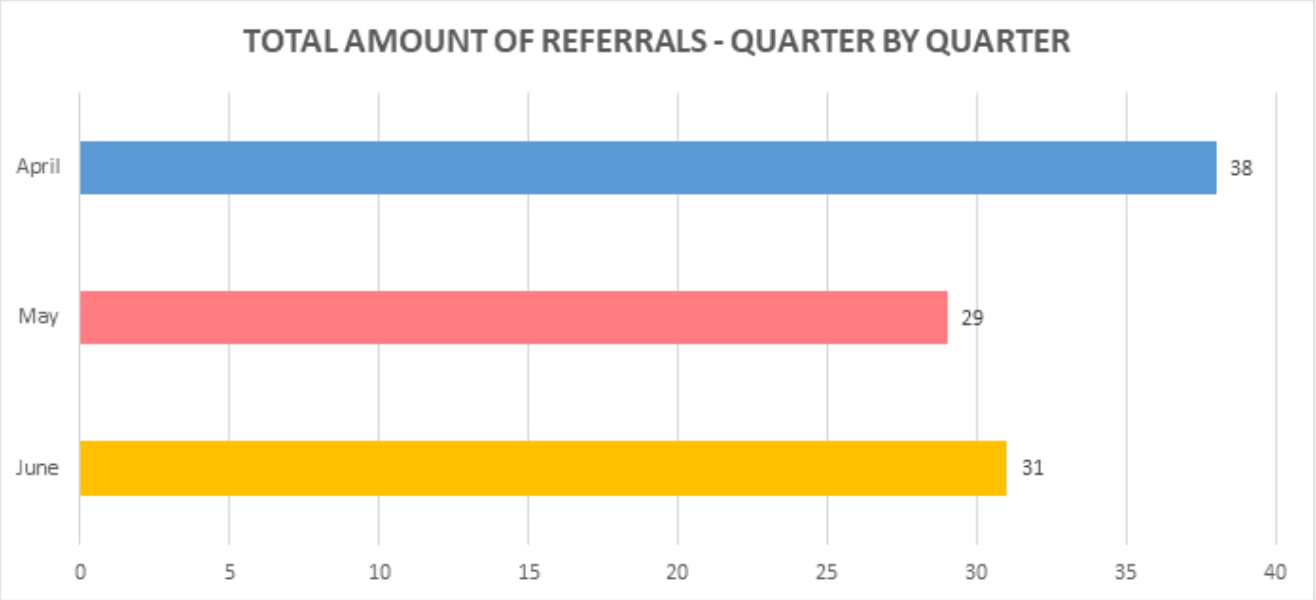
April 2024 – June 2024

Total Amount of Referrals

Total amount of referrals this quarter: 98

Type of Referrals

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



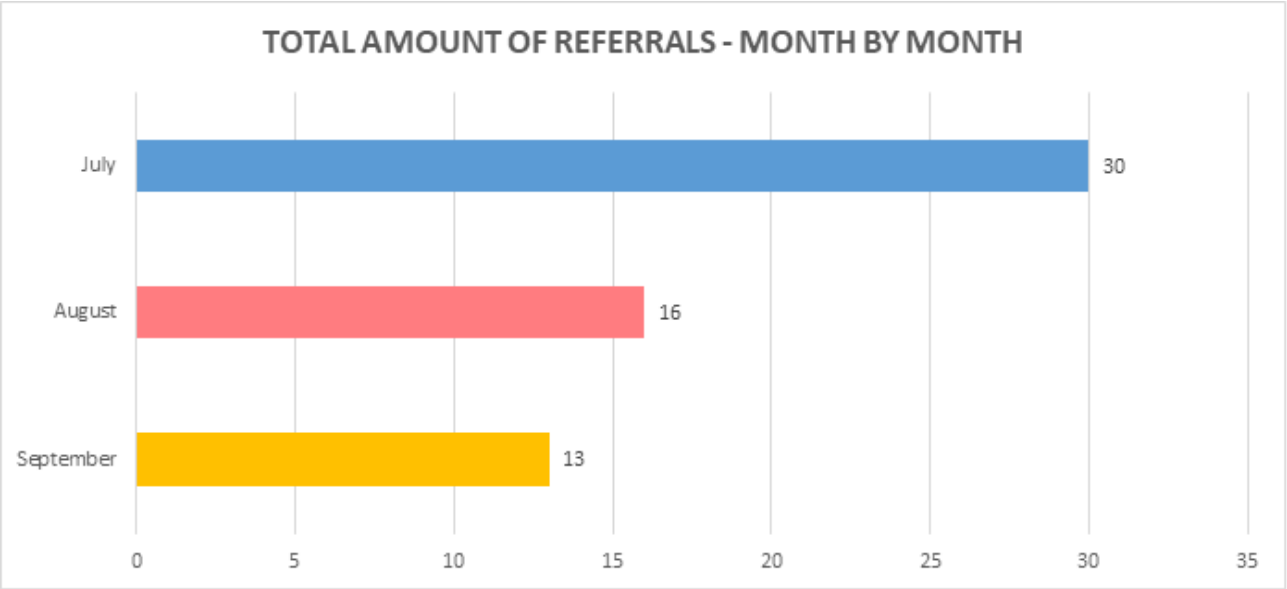
Q2

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

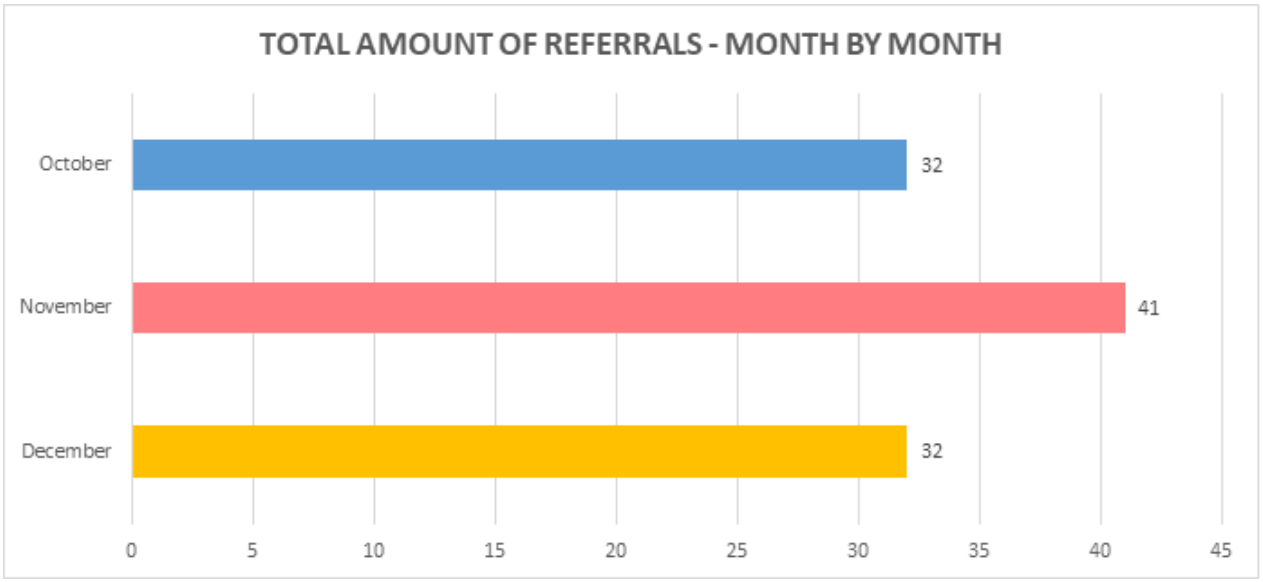
October – December 2024

Total Amount of Referrals

Total amount of referrals this quarter: 105

Type of Referrals

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



Q4

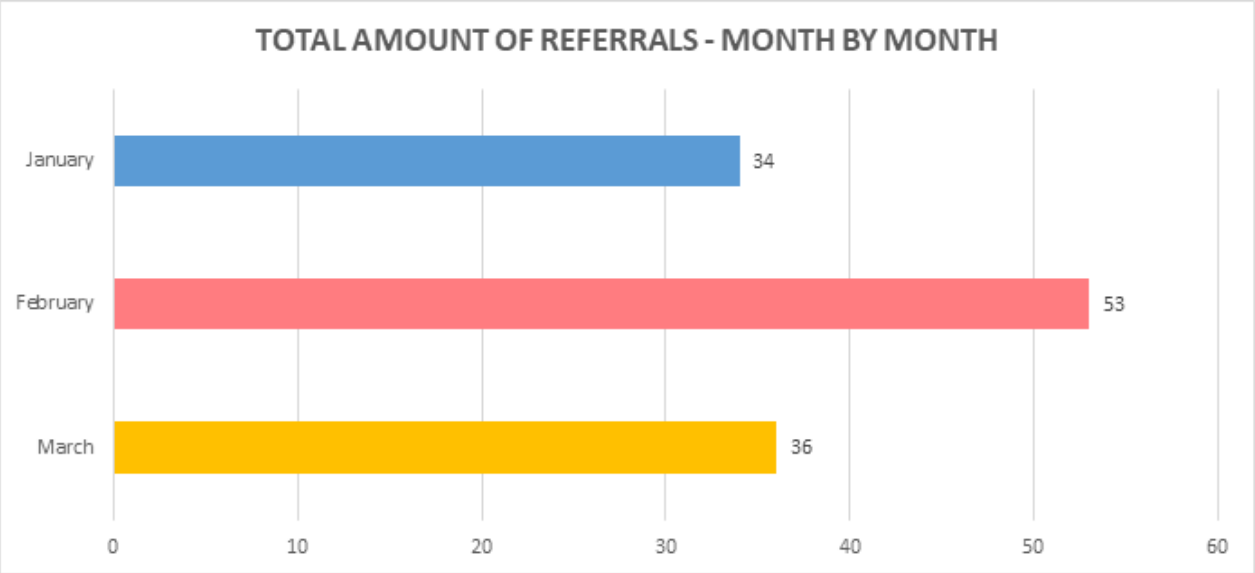
January 2025 – March 2025

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

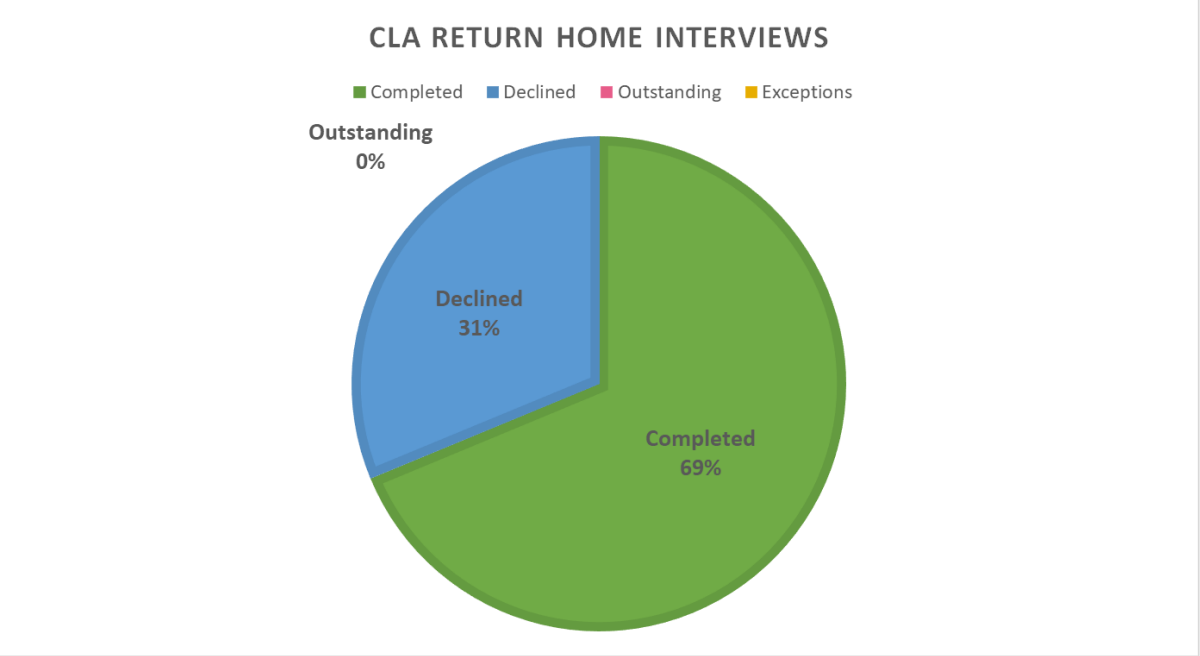
Male:	18
Female:	24

Return Home Interviews

Q1

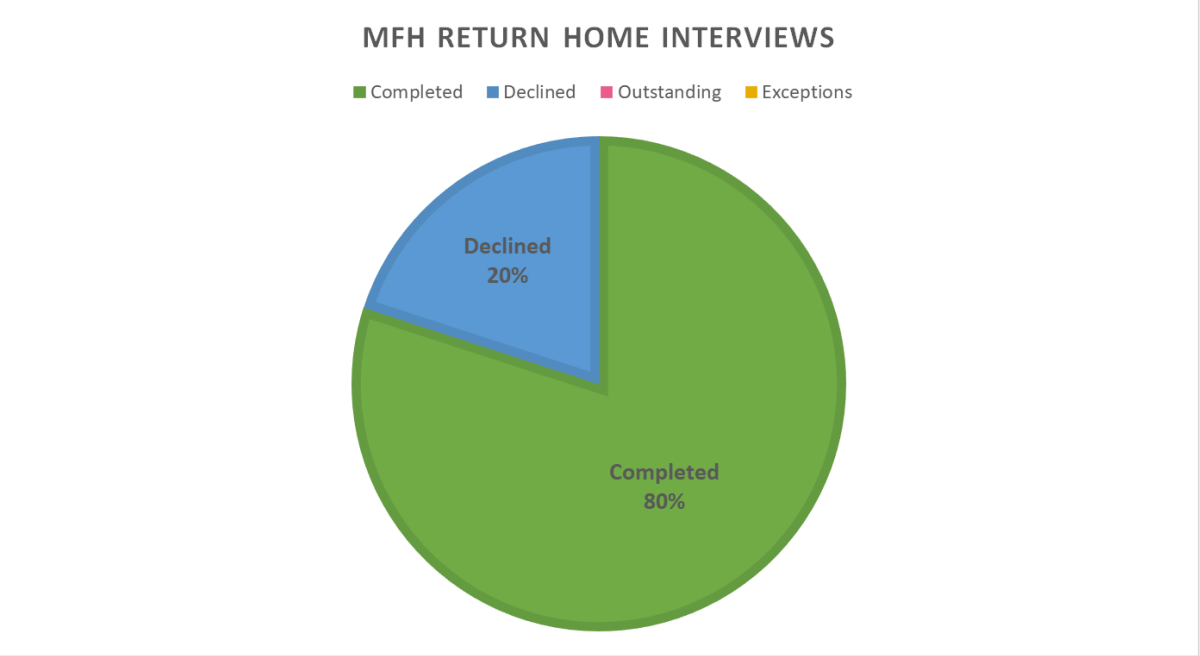
CLA Return Home Interviews

Completed RHIs:	44	Outstanding RHIs:	0
Declined RHIs:	20	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

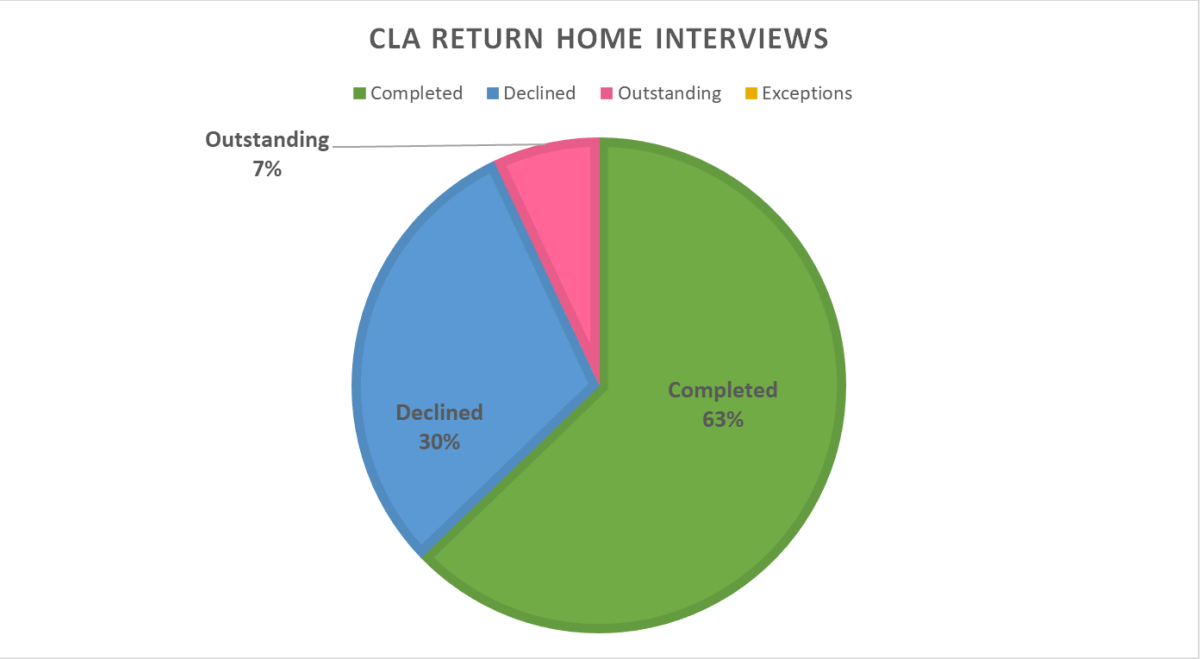
Total number of children who went missing: 43

Gender

Male:	20
Female:	23

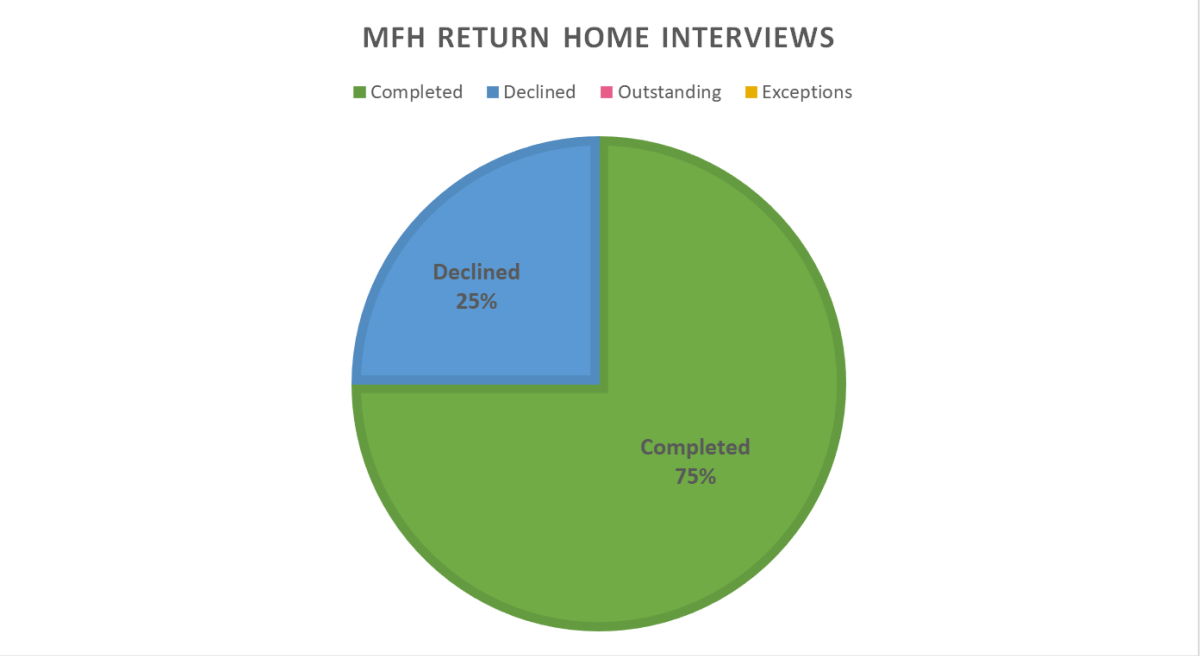
CLA Return Home Interviews (total episodes for Shropshire children missing from their placement: 43)

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

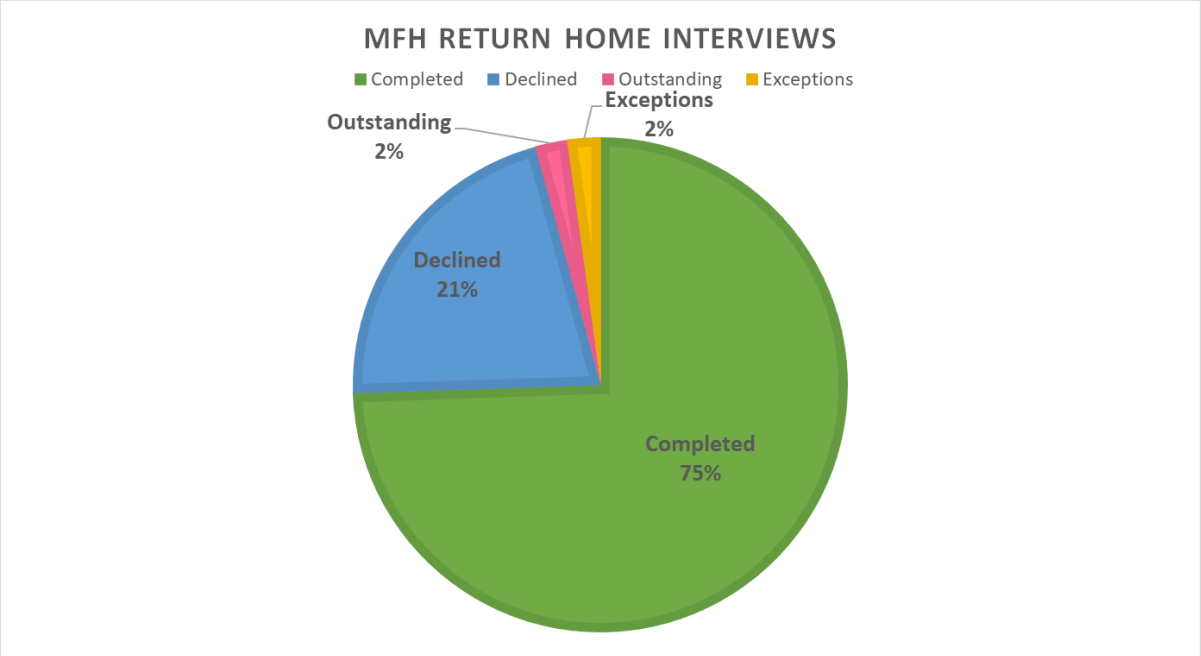
Male:	25
Female:	25

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 2024and 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.

<u>Findings - to be improved.</u>

- 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.

<u>Findings - positive.</u>

- 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 utilise 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:

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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 preciously 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 tofe

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 that 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 in 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 ¼ 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 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

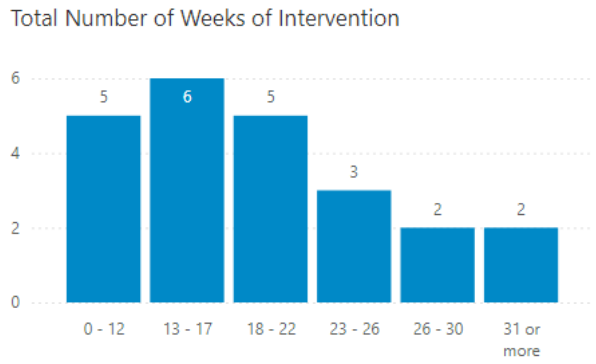
All 3 Play Practitioners have completed Portage training and are now able to use this in their 121 interventions as well as delivering portage groups. The groups are coordinated and evaluated by the Team Manager for the 0-5 team.
1 trial group has been carried out with 1 parent attending.

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 had worsen, 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.



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 paly 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

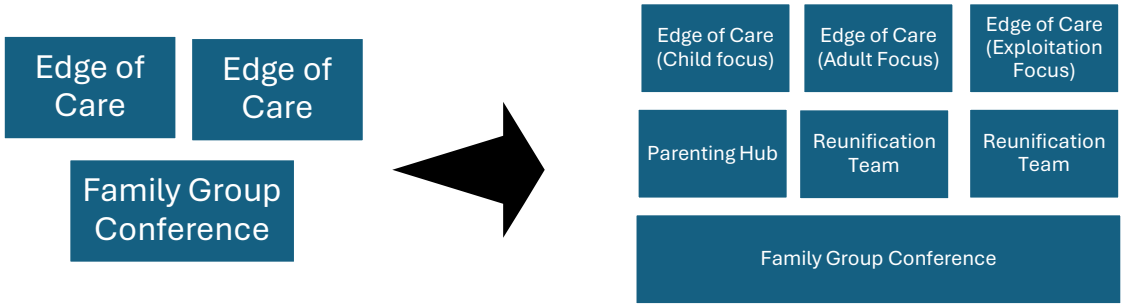
Title	Stepping Stones Annual Report
Purpose/scope	Stepping Stones Service (Year 4 of Programme) 2024-25
Subject key words	Stepping Stones, Children, Young People, Outreach, FGC (Family Group Conference), Step Down, Fostering, Residential, Therapeutic Approach, Multi-agency, Intensive Support, CLA (Children 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

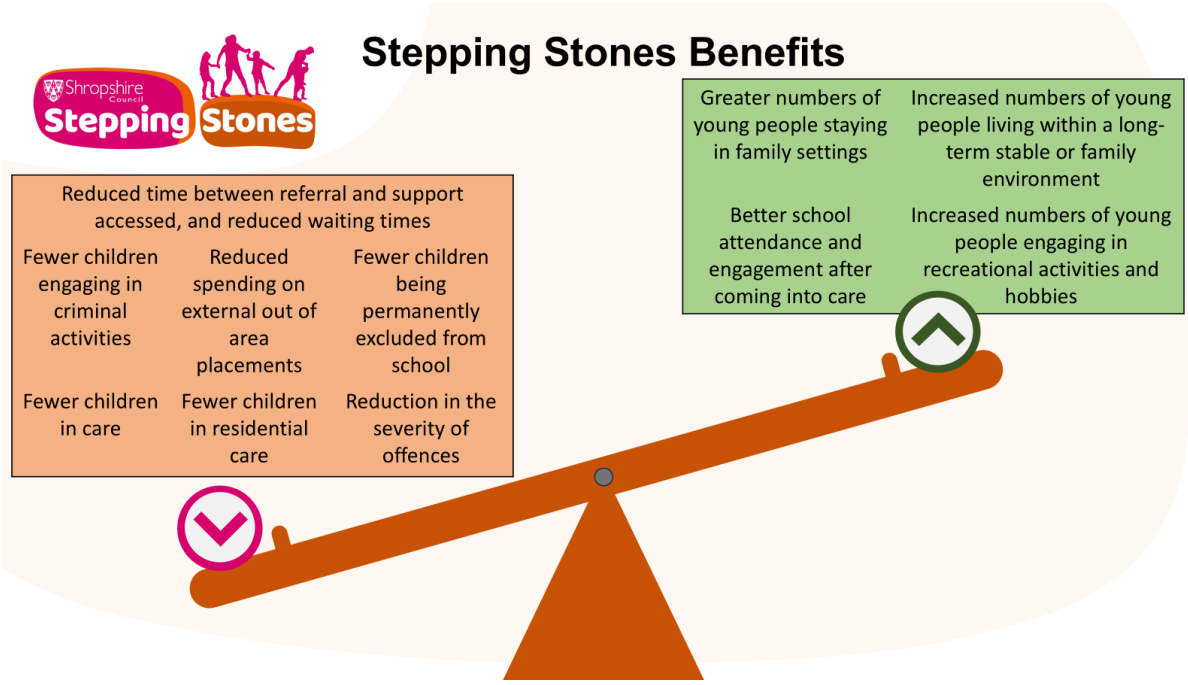


Figure 1. Stepping Stones benefits slide

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**

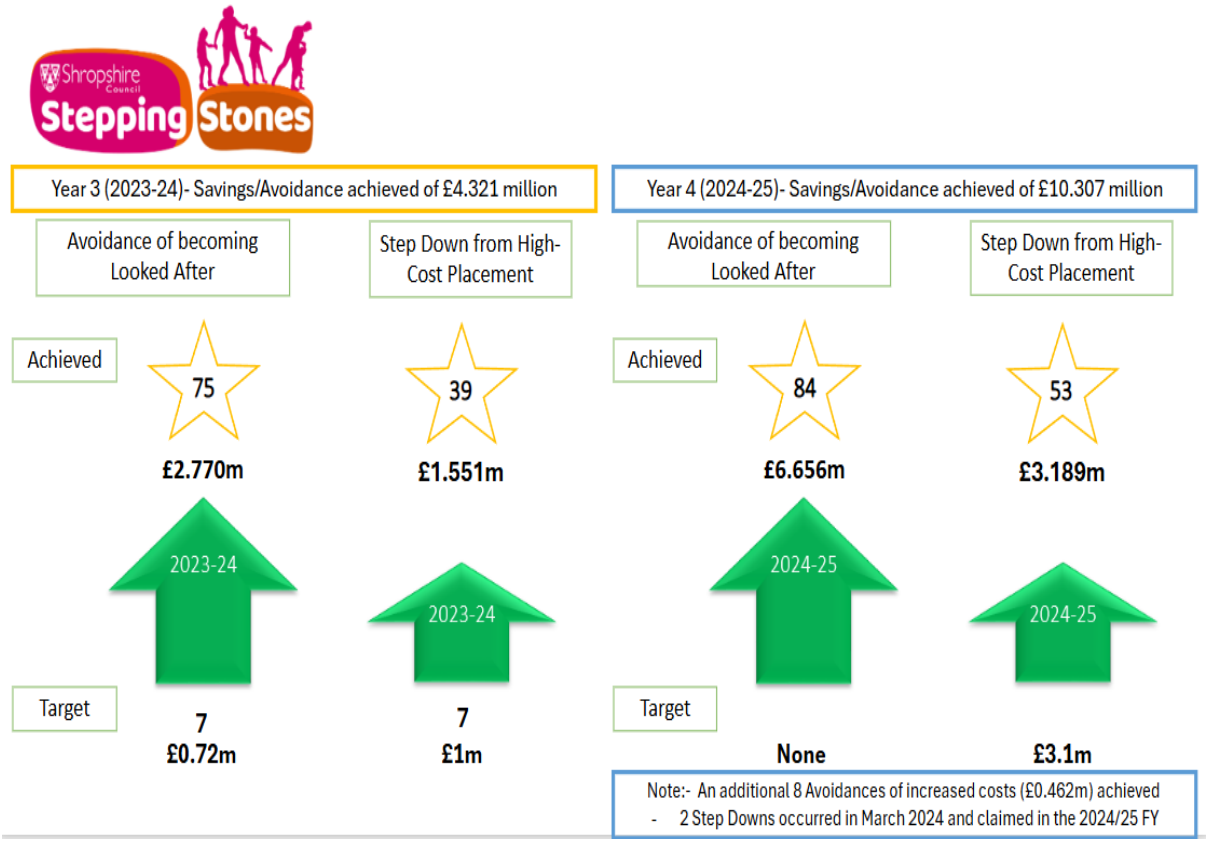


Figure 2. Target vs Achieved in 2023-4 & 2024-5

- 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.

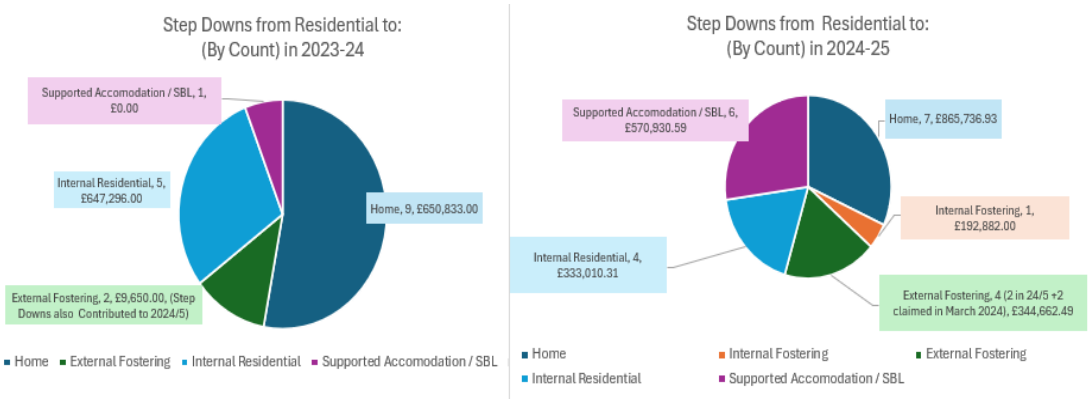


Figure 3. Step Down from Residential to Placement Type in 23/24 & 24/25

- 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.

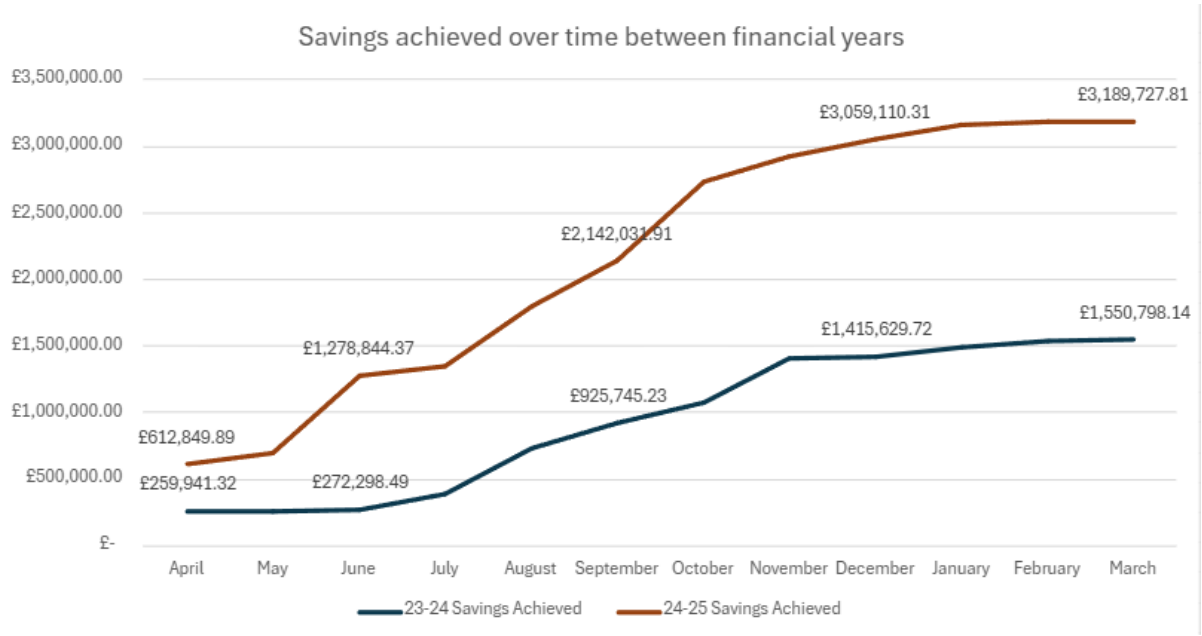


Figure 5. Savings each month in 2023-4 and 2024-5

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

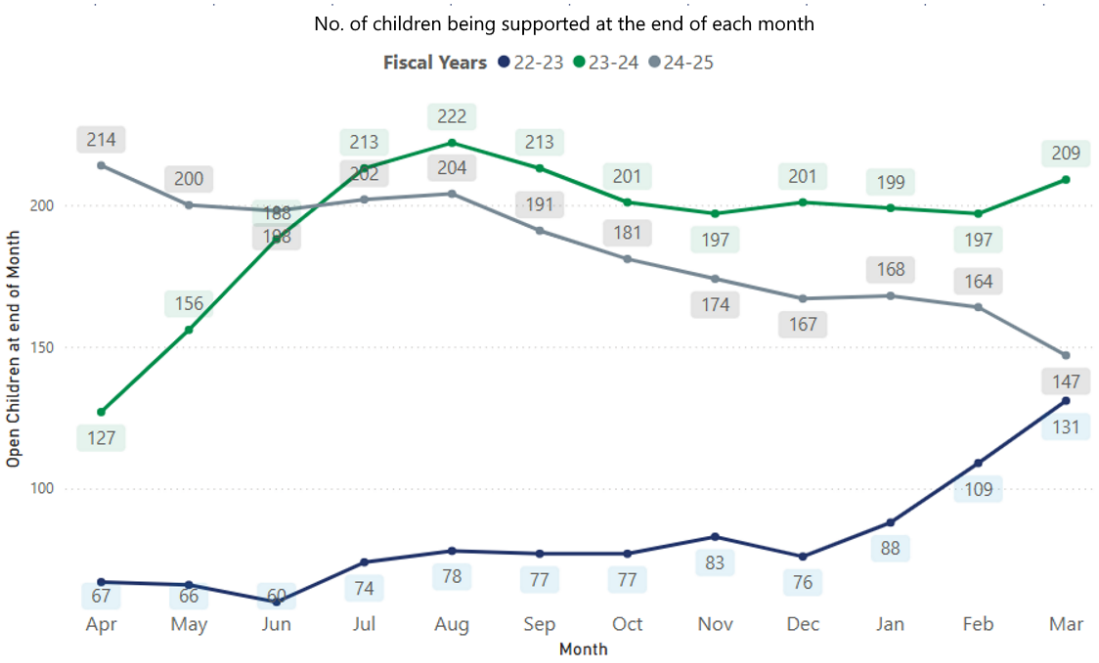


Figure 6. Children being supported each month in the last 3 years

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%.

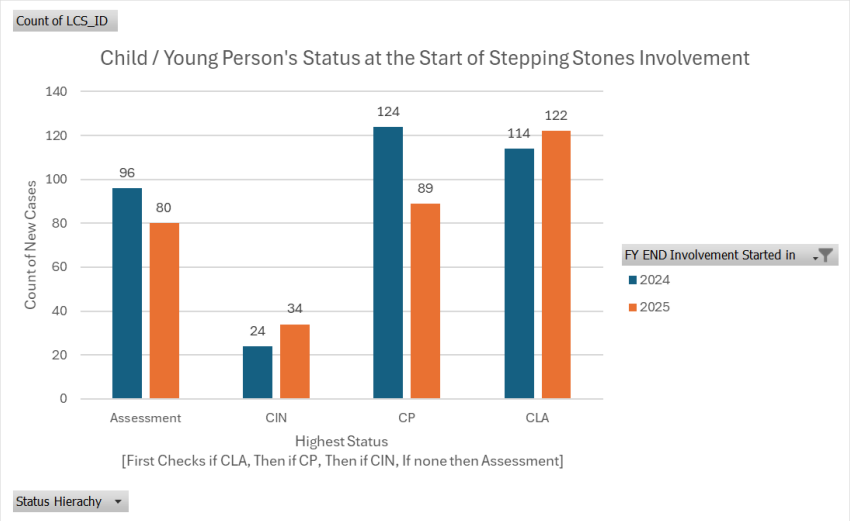


Figure 7. Status when involvement started

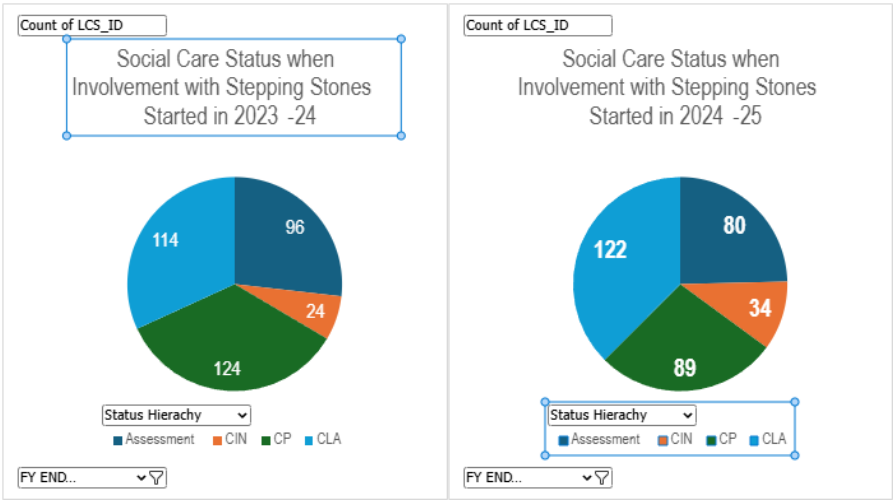


Figure 8. Pie charts of status when involvement started

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 undertaking 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.

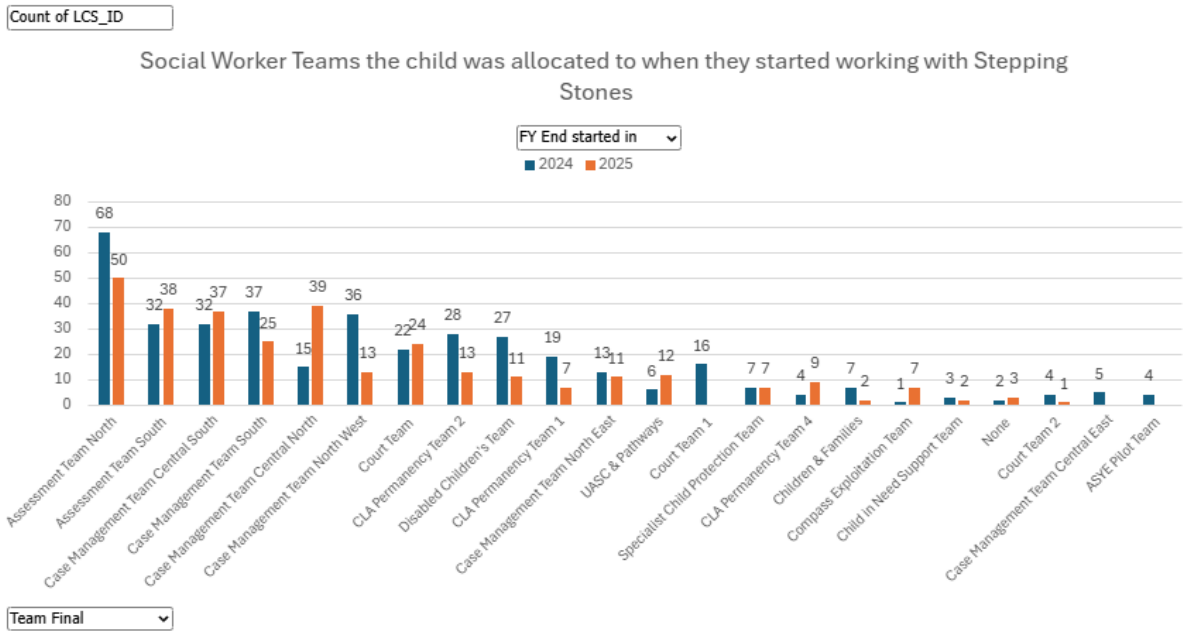
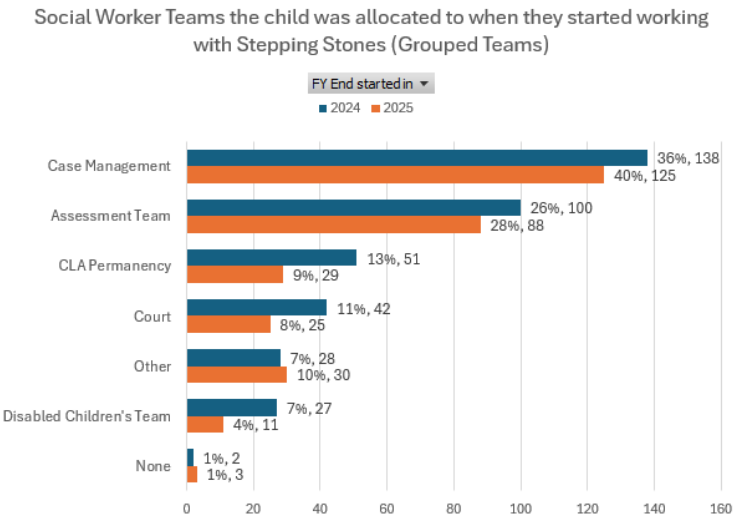


Figure 9. Allocated SW Team when Stepping Stones involvement started



Team	Grouping
Assessment Team South	Assessment Team
Case Management Team Central South	Case Management
Assessment Team North	Assessment Team
CLA Permanency Team 1	CLA Permanency
Court Team 1	Court
Case Management Team North East	Case Management
CLA Permanency Team 2	CLA Permanency
Case Management Team North West	Case Management
Disabled Children's Team	Disabled Children's Team
Case Management Team Central North	Case Management
CLA Permanency Team 4	CLA Permanency
Case Management Team South	Case Management
Court Team	Court
Specialist Child Protection Team	Other
None	None
Case Management Team Central East	Case Management
Court Team 2	Court
Children & Families	Other
ASYE Pilot Team	Other
Child in Need Support Team	Other
UASC & Pathways	Other
Compass Exploitation Team	Other

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.

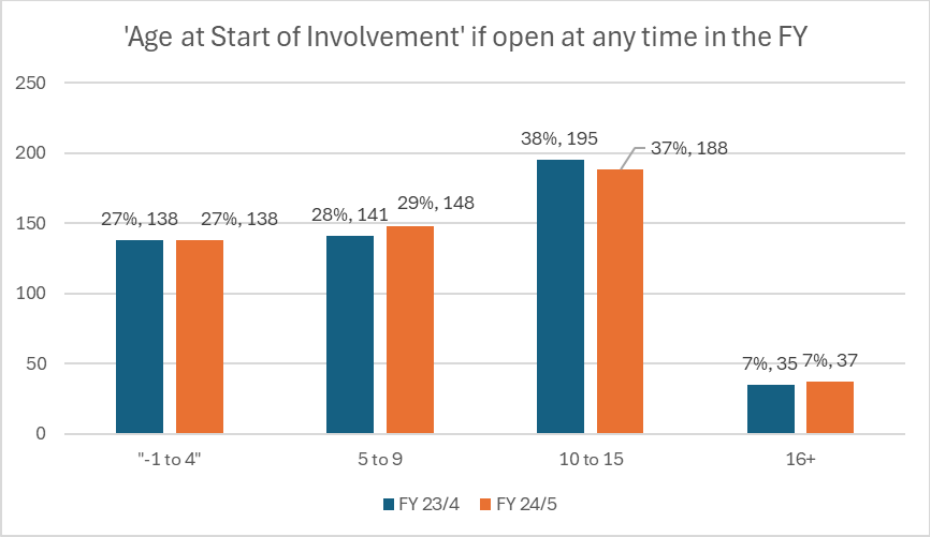


Figure 11. Age at the start of the involvement

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.

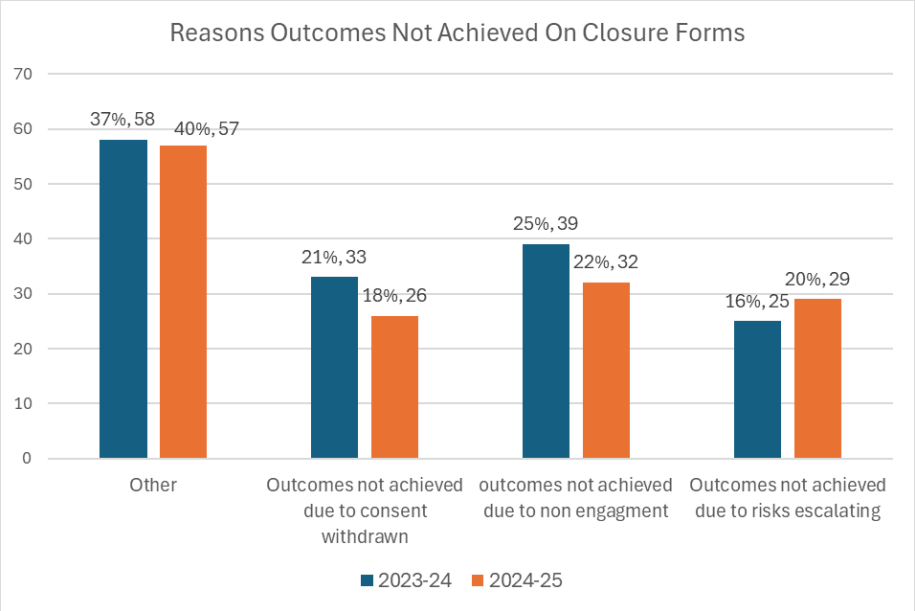


Figure 12. Reason Outcome Not Achieved on Closure Records

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.

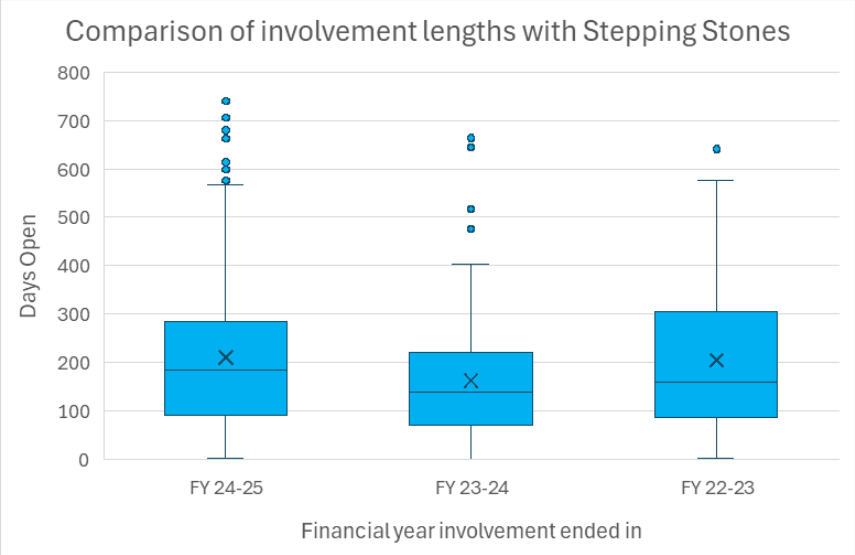


Figure 13. Stepping Stones involvement duration if ended in FY

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 were there were considerably less staff to undertake the work. This was accomplished due to the strong infrastructure of Stepping Stones which as been developed over the years and the practice that has been embedded. Regular Performance meetings ensured close management oversight. Power BI as 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.

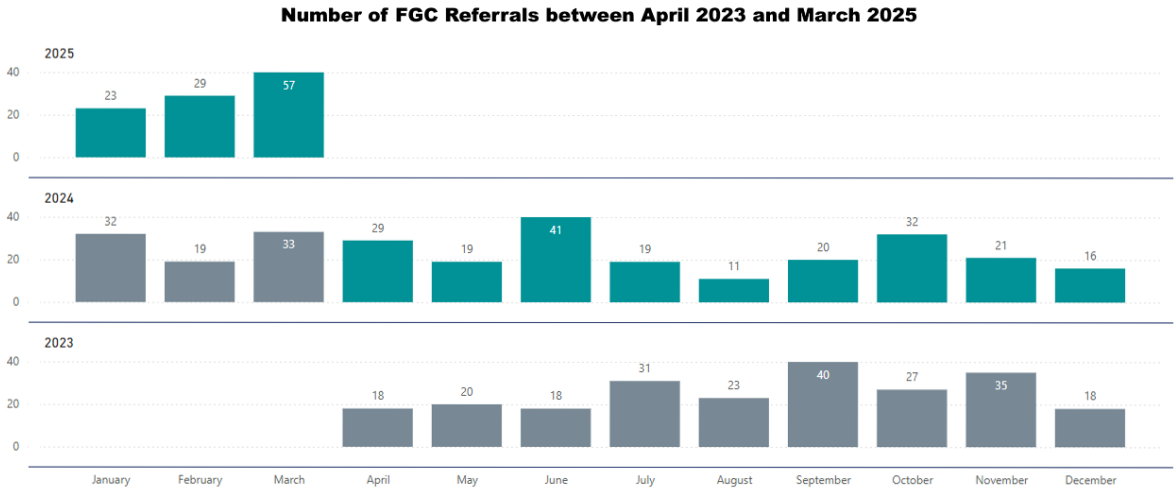
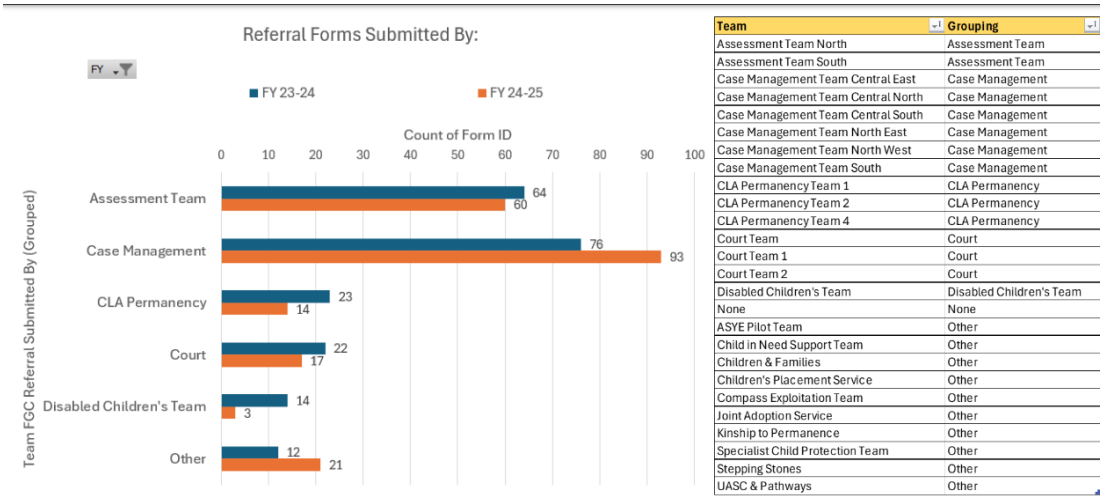


Figure 14. FGC Referrals each month

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.



Team	Grouping
Assessment Team North	Assessment Team
Assessment Team South	Assessment Team
Case Management Team Central East	Case Management
Case Management Team Central North	Case Management
Case Management Team Central South	Case Management
Case Management Team North East	Case Management
Case Management Team North West	Case Management
Case Management Team South	Case Management
CLA Permanency Team 1	CLA Permanency
CLA Permanency Team 2	CLA Permanency
CLA Permanency Team 4	CLA Permanency
Court Team	Court
Court Team 1	Court
Court Team 2	Court
Disabled Children's Team	Disabled Children's Team
None	None
ASYE Pilot Team	Other
Child in Need Support Team	Other
Children & Families	Other
Children's Placement Service	Other
Compass Exploitation Team	Other
Joint Adoption Service	Other
Kinship to Permanence	Other
Specialist Child Protection Team	Other
Stepping Stones	Other
UASC & Pathways	Other

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%.

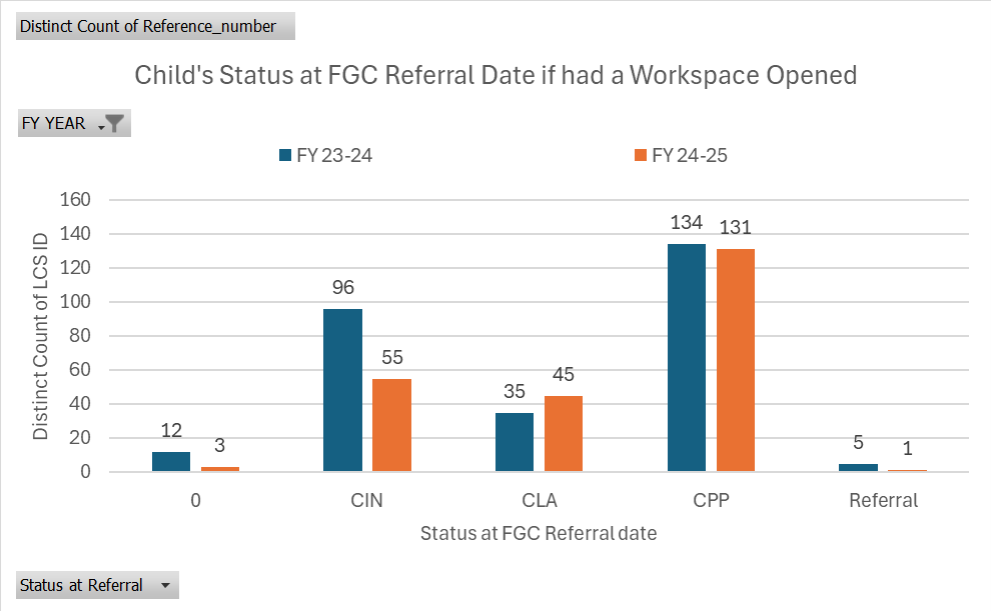


Figure 16. Status when FGC Workspaces opened

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.

	FGC		Family Meeting		Total
Financial year	**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

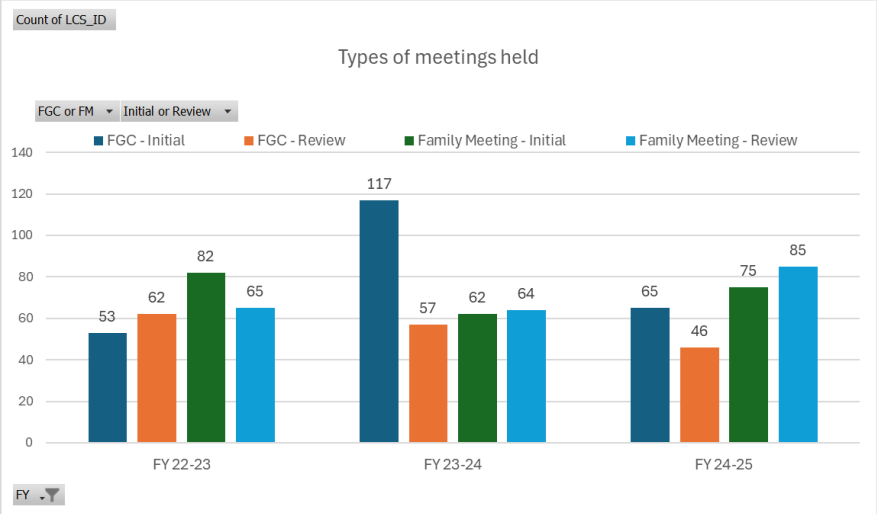


Figure 17. Number of FGC Meetings held each year

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%.

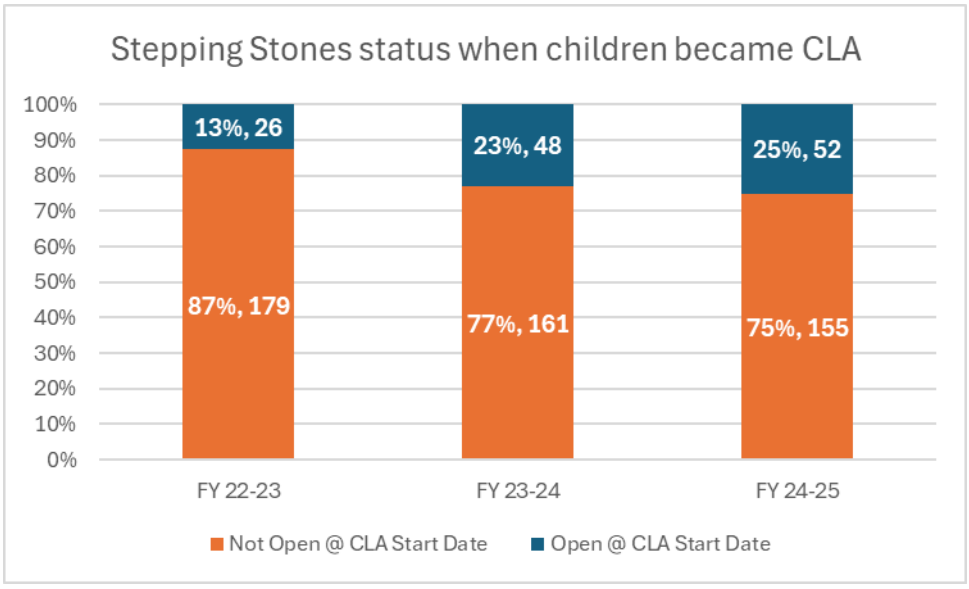


Figure 18. Percentage working with Stepping Stones if they became CLA

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.

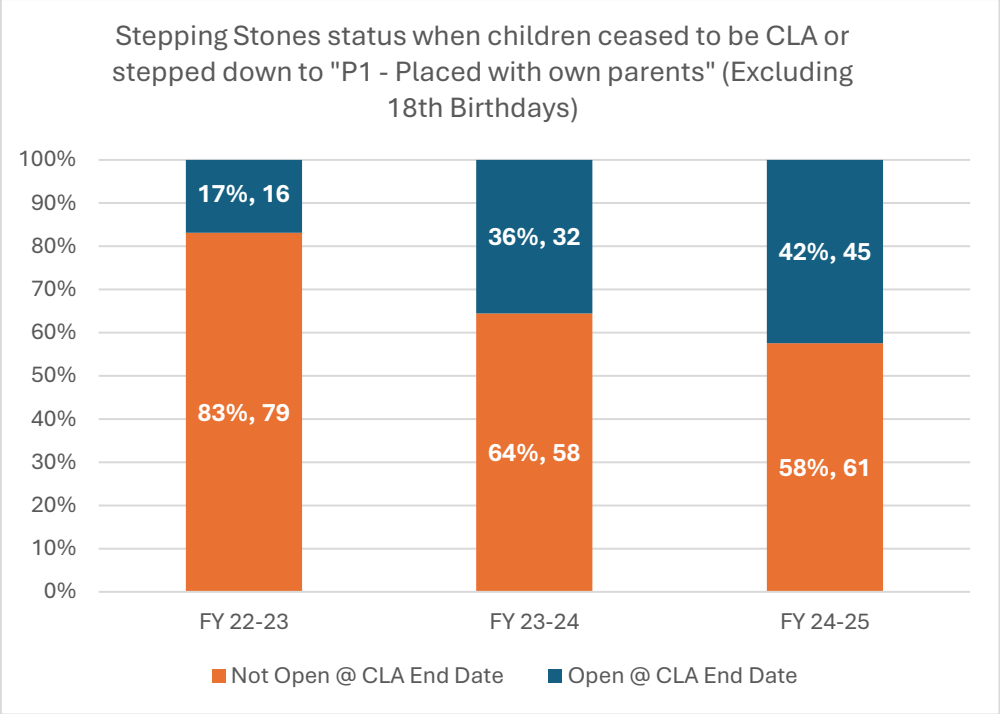


Figure 19. Percentage working with Stepping Stones when they ceased being CLA or moved to 'Placed with own parents'

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.

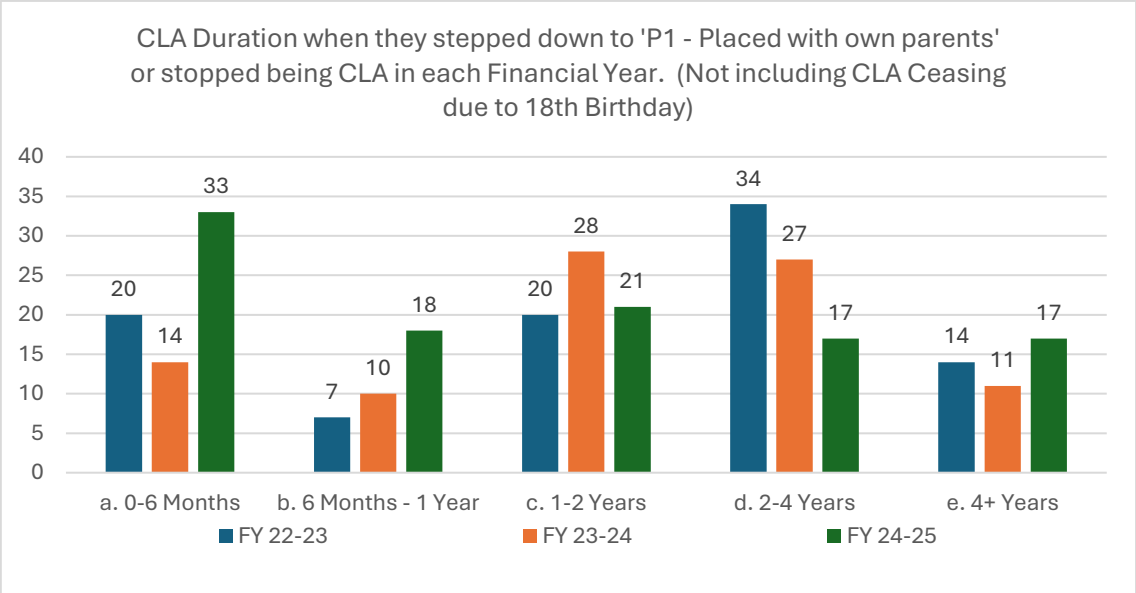


Figure 20.Number of children who ceased being CLA or moved to 'Placed with own parents' each year

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.

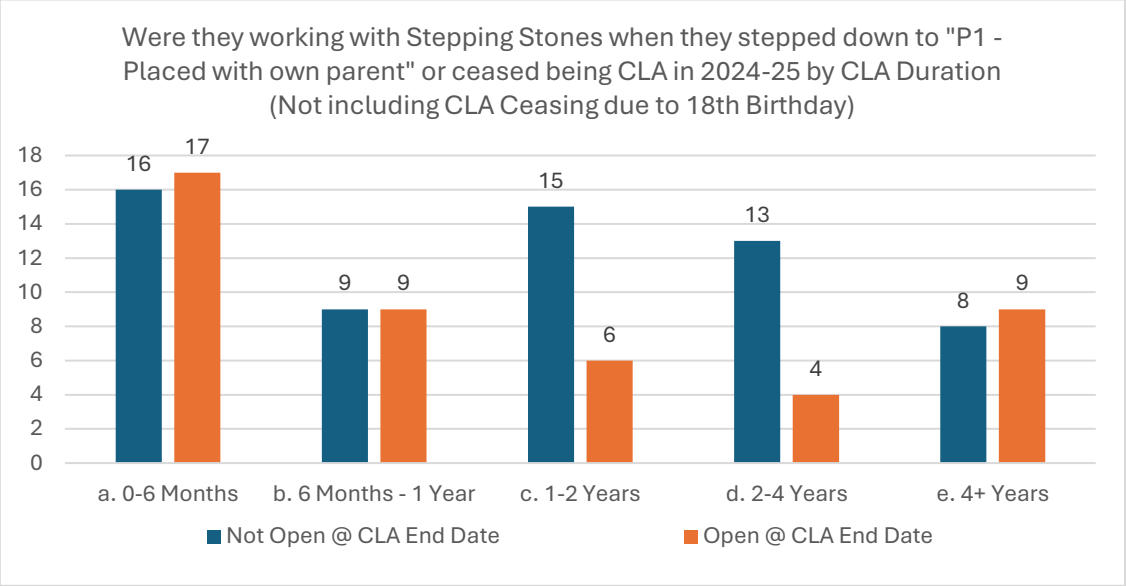


Figure 21. CLA Duration if they ceased being CLA or moved to 'Placed with own parents' in 2024-25

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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LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

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

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

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.

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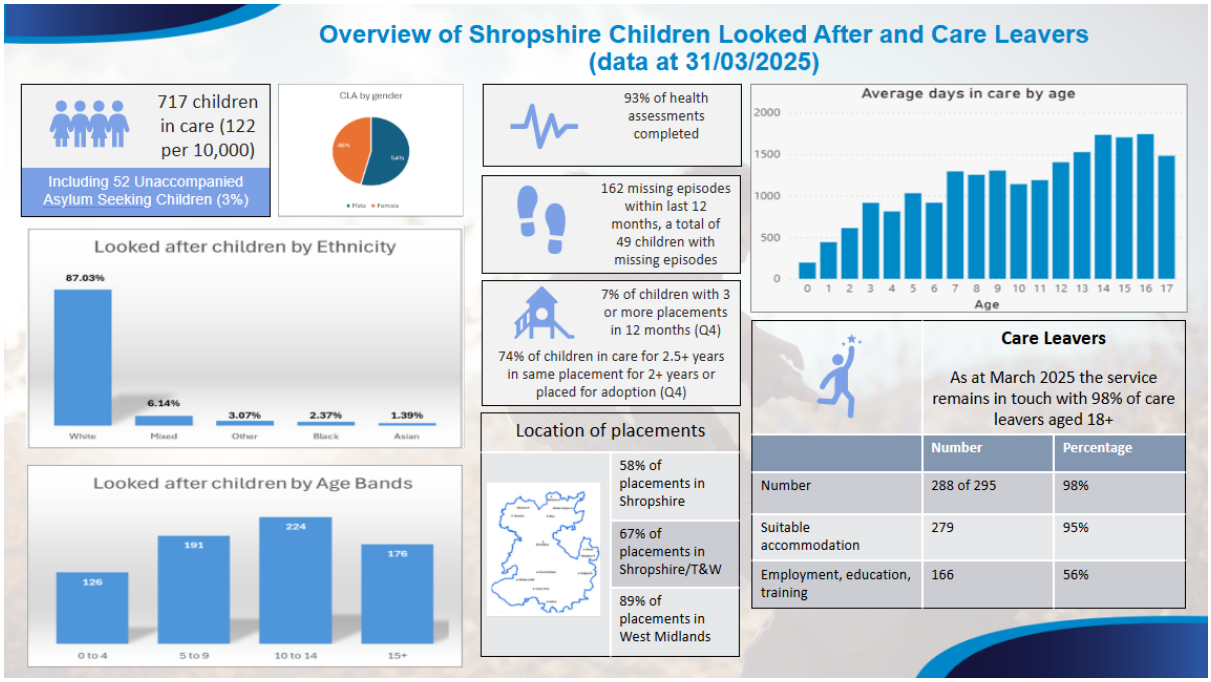
LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

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

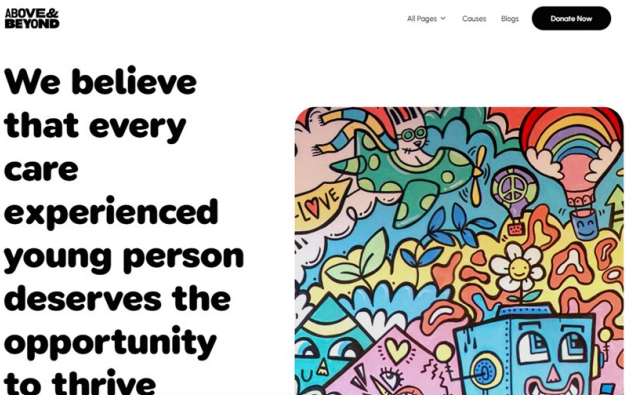
- A well-established Corporate Parenting Steering Board that acts as an advisory and consultative body to the Council, its partners and its committees and other strategic groups and will provide robust challenge to ensure that Corporate Parenting duties are carried out effectively and consistently. (see 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.



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 yp

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.

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.

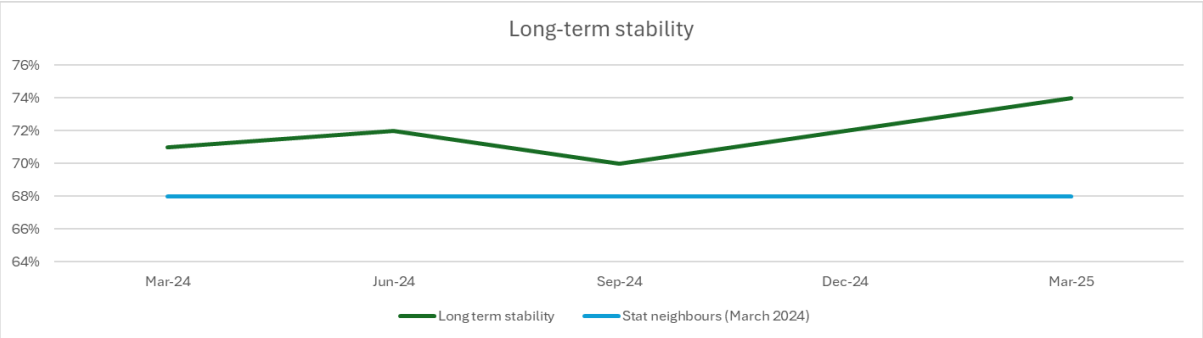
In 2024/25, all children under the age of 16 who entered care had their permanence plans reviewed by the Permanence Forum. In the reporting year,102 children attended Permanency Forum. 75% were within timescale, being heard b efore their 2nd CLA Review. Many of these children had multiple parallel plans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

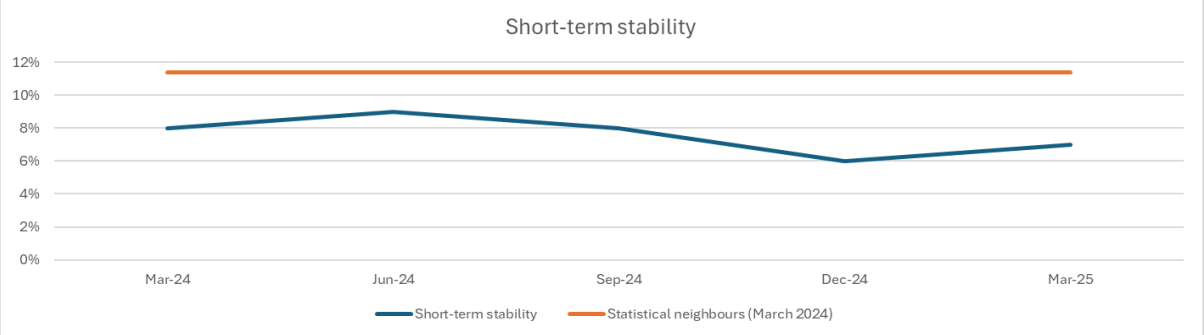
Stable Homes

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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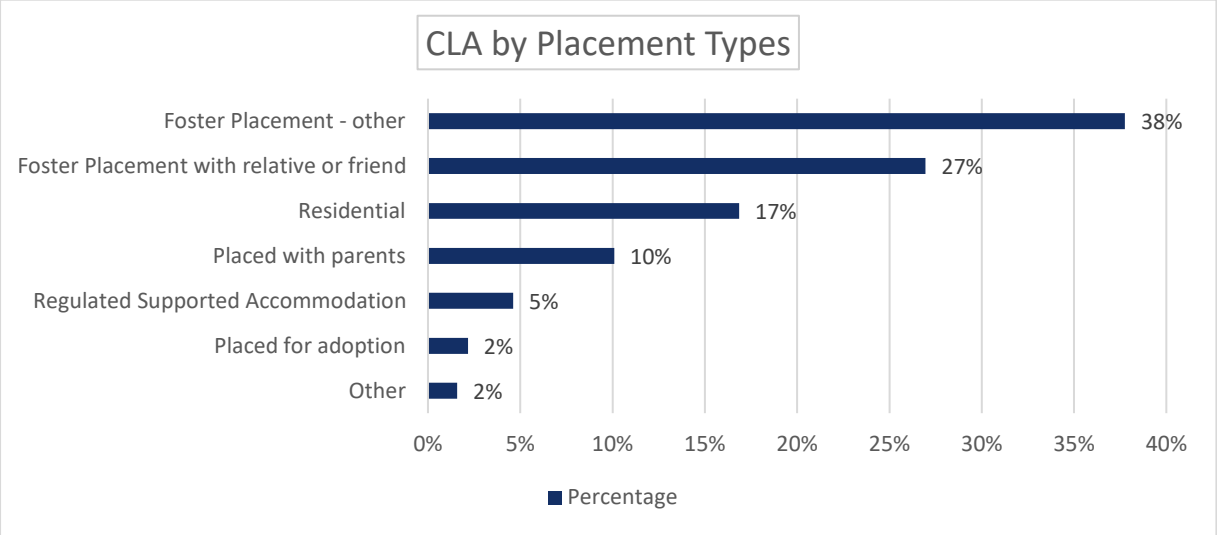
Where our Children Live

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

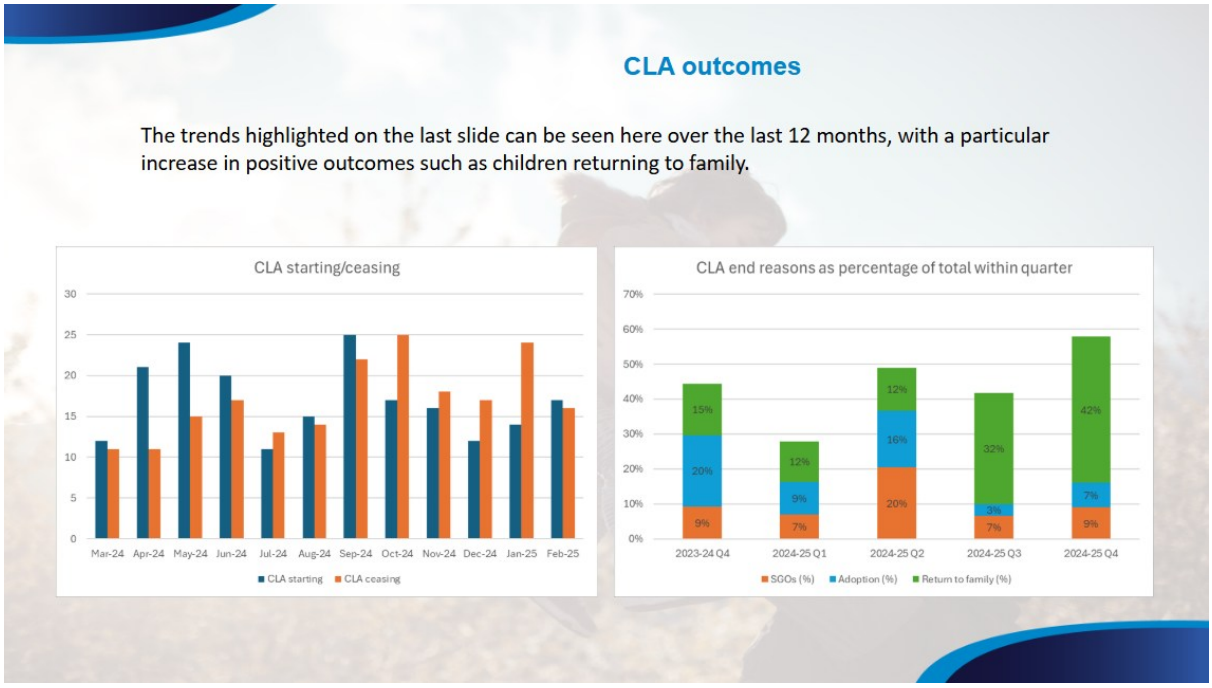
Shropshire own and operate 6 residential children's homes. One of these is a short-break home

- 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

- 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

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

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**.

- 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 M

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

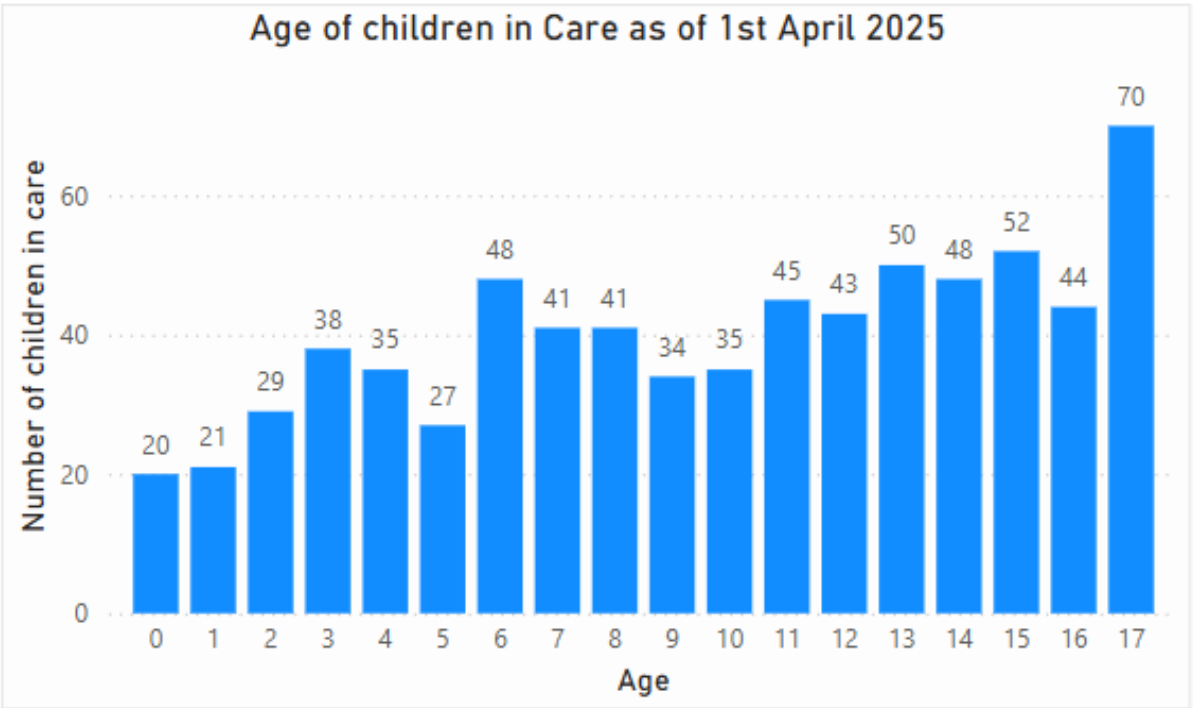
Ethnicity of IRO	Number	Percentage
White British	12	76%
Other background	2	14%
White Irish	2	14%
Total	**16**	**100%**

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:

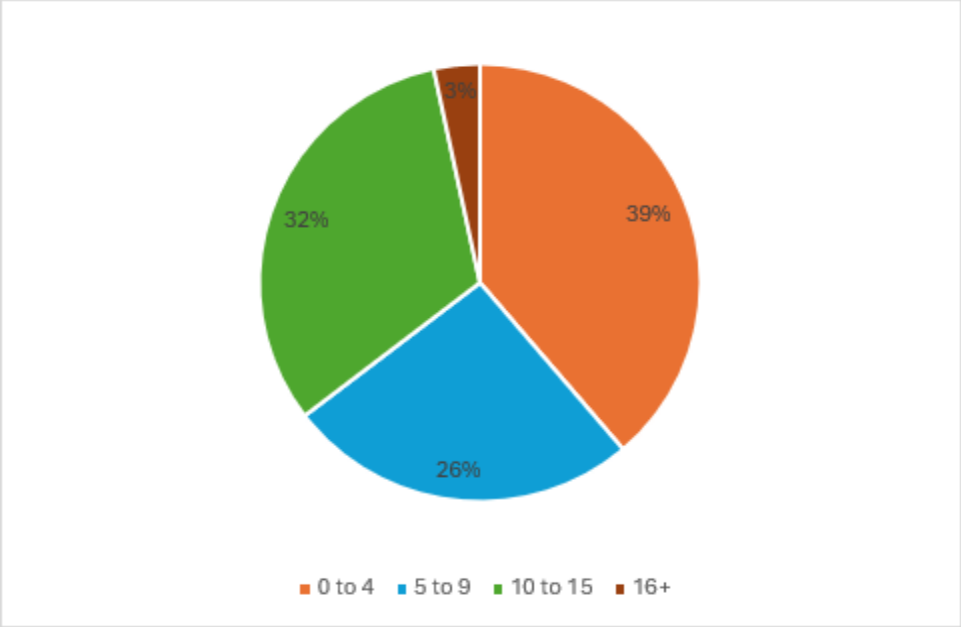
- 500 children subject to a Care Order which was an increase of 13% from the beginning of the reporting period.
- 104 children subject to an Interim Care Order which was a decrease of 26% from the beginning of the reporting period.
- 45 children with a Placement Order status which was an increase of 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 were 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 an 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 were 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.

10.2As 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 Childrens 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/Childrens 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 of 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 they 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 workflows 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.

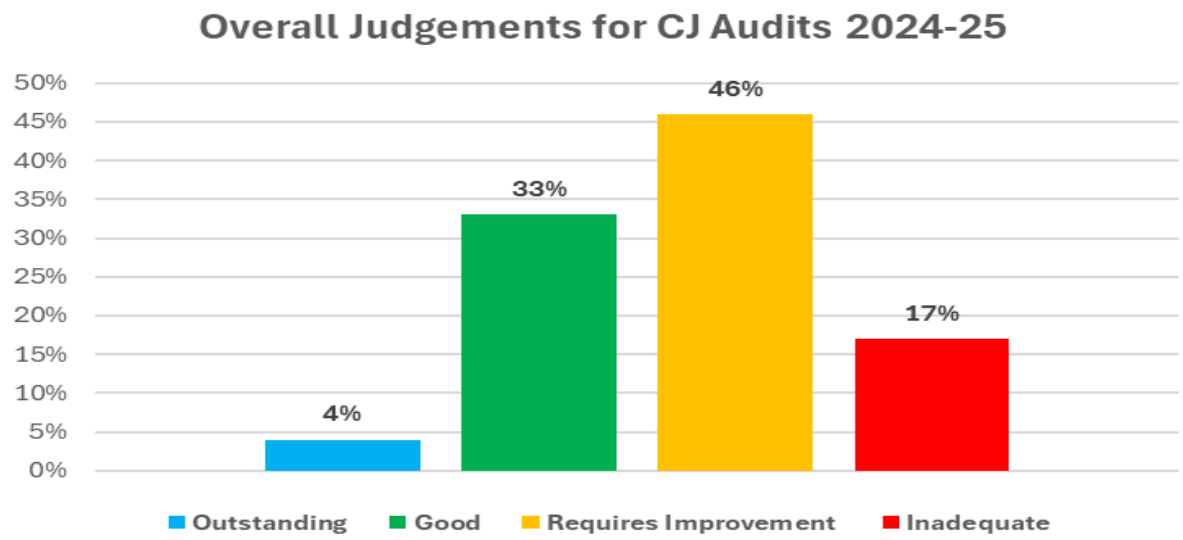
To ensure accountability, a "Closing the Loop" action tracker has been established and is sent to Team Managers on a weekly basis. It is their responsibility to update the tracker when audit actions have been completed. We continue to incorporate service user feedback into our

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	

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
(If bid for DfE funding for SLIP support from Wiltshire is successful) **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''.

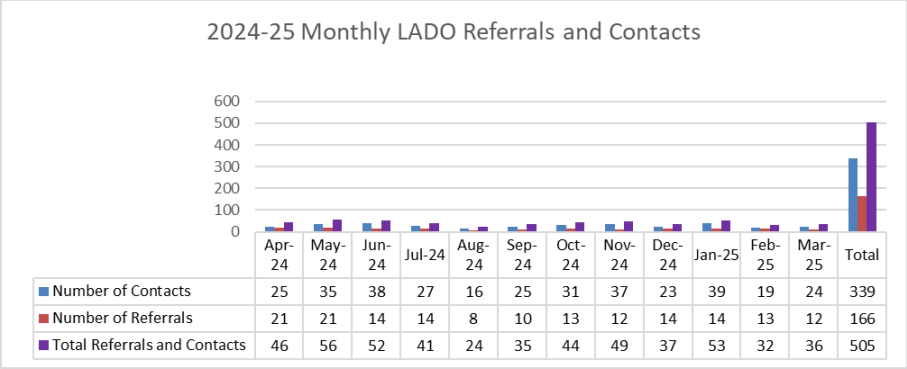
"My experience has always been positive with Shropshire LADO with quick responses and good communication for updates and outcomes. I feel supported by the team who I contact and feel comfortable to seek advice if needed''.

"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''.

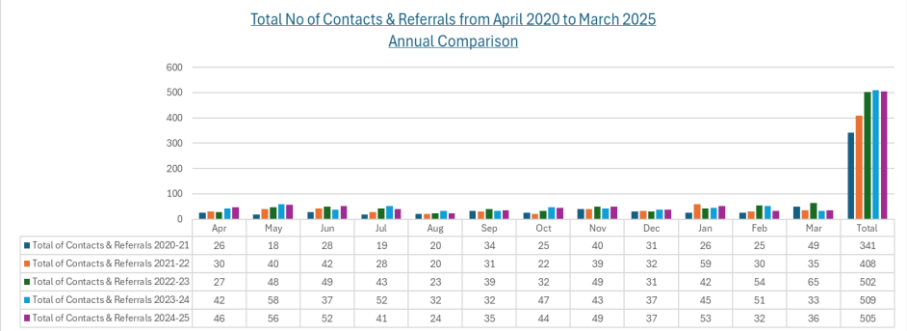
"*I find the approaches of the LADO measured, professional and always supportive. Their knowledge is invaluable, and I value the positive working partnership I have but also leaders within my services have commented on. Reports/records are also shared promptly and accurately by the service. Thank you for all the work you do''.*

5. Activity data



	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Total
Number of Contacts	25	35	38	27	16	25	31	37	23	39	19	24	339
Number of Referrals	21	21	14	14	8	10	13	12	14	14	13	12	166
Total Referrals and Contacts	46	56	52	41	24	35	44	49	37	53	32	36	505

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.



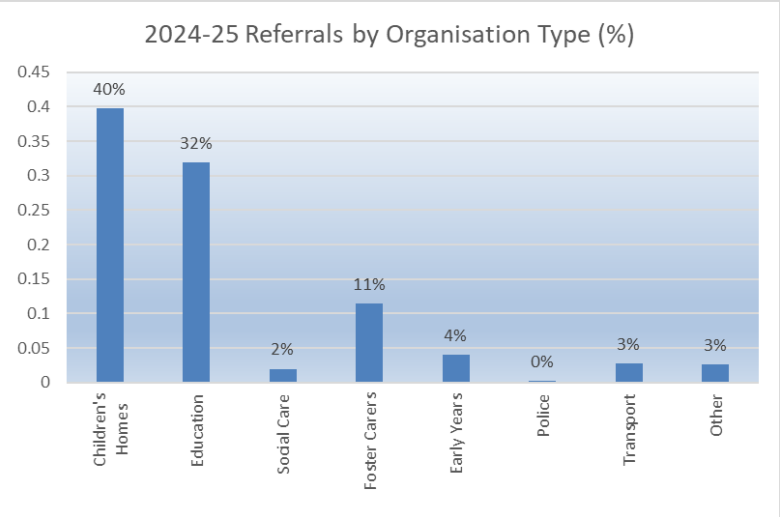
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Total of Contacts & Referrals 2020-21	26	18	28	19	20	34	25	40	31	26	25	49	341
Total of Contacts & Referrals 2021-22	30	40	42	28	20	31	22	39	32	59	30	35	408
Total of Contacts & Referrals 2022-23	27	48	49	43	23	39	32	49	31	42	54	65	502
Total of Contacts & Referrals 2023-24	42	58	37	52	32	32	47	43	37	45	51	33	509
Total of Contacts & Referrals 2024-25	46	56	52	41	24	35	44	49	37	53	32	36	505

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

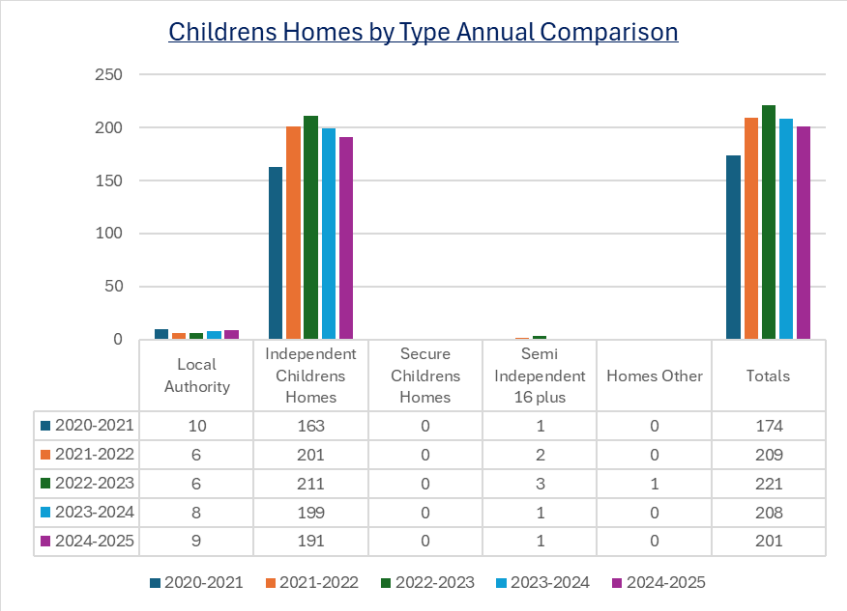
was only formally introduced to the LADO criteria early in 2021 which we believe explains the increase in contacts since this date. We have noted an increase in contacts relating to domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health issues – this is hypothesised to be a symptom of post pandemic as well 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 equitable 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.



	Local Authority	Independent Childrens Homes	Secure Childrens Homes	Semi Independent 16 plus	Homes Other	Totals
2020-2021	10	163	0	1	0	174
2021-2022	6	201	0	2	0	209
2022-2023	6	211	0	3	1	221
2023-2024	8	199	0	1	0	208
2024-2025	9	191	0	1	0	201

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.

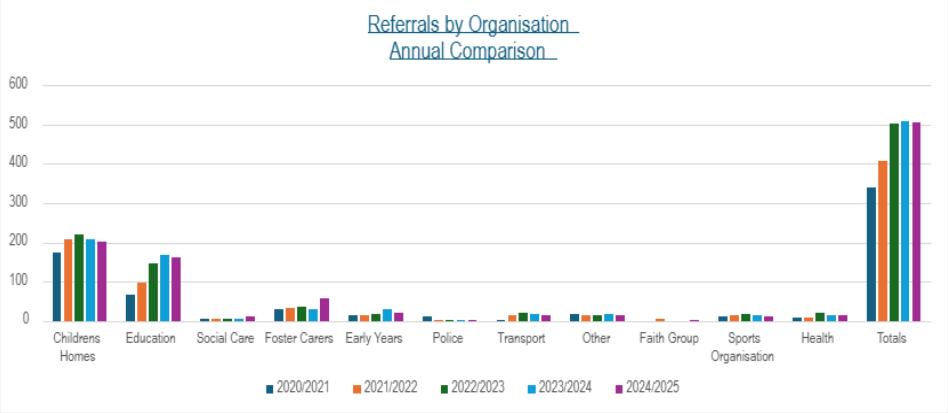
There has been an increase in the number of foster carers referred this year – up from 6% last year to 11% this year. Further work is needed to understand this rise. For the LADO service we will seek to amend our current recording format to more easily identify if carers about whom allegations are made 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.

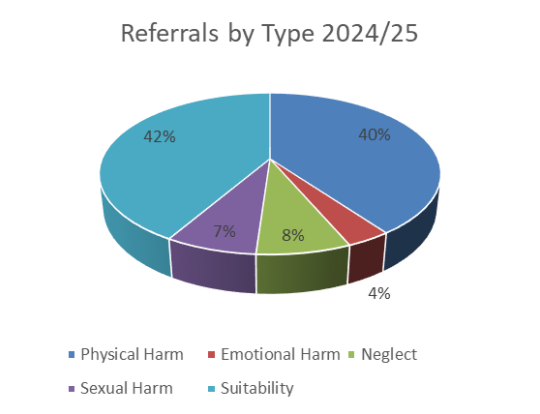
From conversations with regional colleagues, this appears to be a national trend. A letter had been sent by the National Police Chief's Council in February 2023 to remind Police colleagues

of their statutory duties. Whether this leads to changes locally is yet to be determined. LADO will continue to try and engage the PPSD.

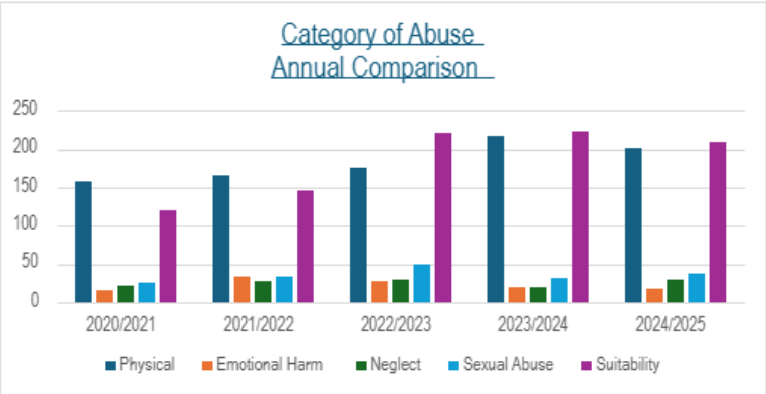


The chart above demonstrates the organisations referred over the past five years, which highlights the consistency in terms of the sectors of employees being brought to our attention. The slight decrease in figures relating to Children's Homes over the past three years may be representative of the consistent messages that managers are being given regarding thresholds, both directly and via awareness raising sessions.

7. Categories of abuse

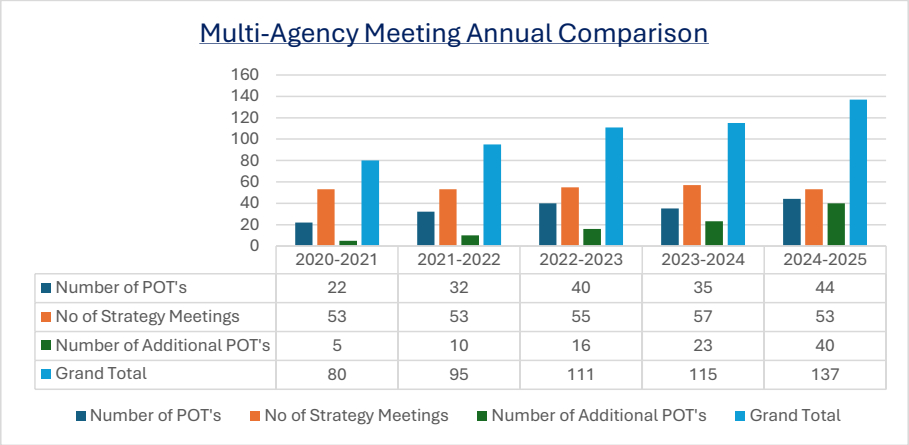


The main categories of concern have remained consistent with last year's figures. Suitability and physical abuse still account for over 80% of all referrals. A significant number of physical abuse allegations are made by young people in care homes and specialist education provisions who do not feel that 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

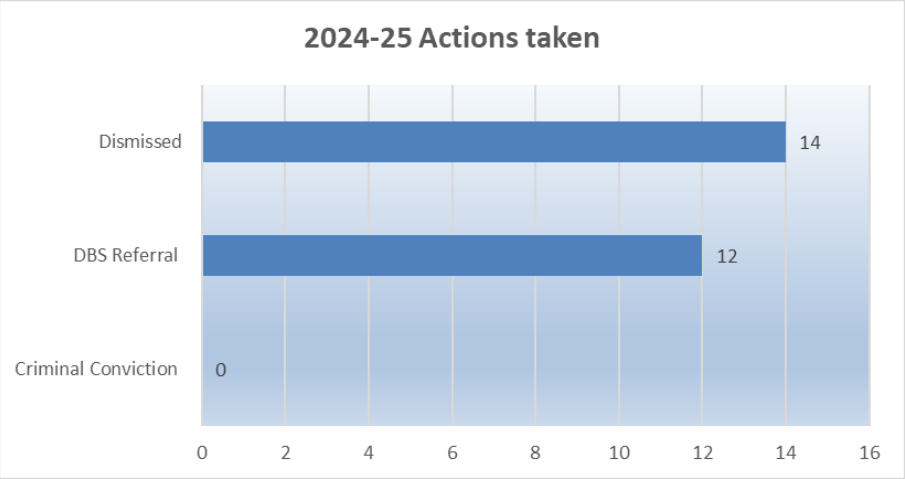


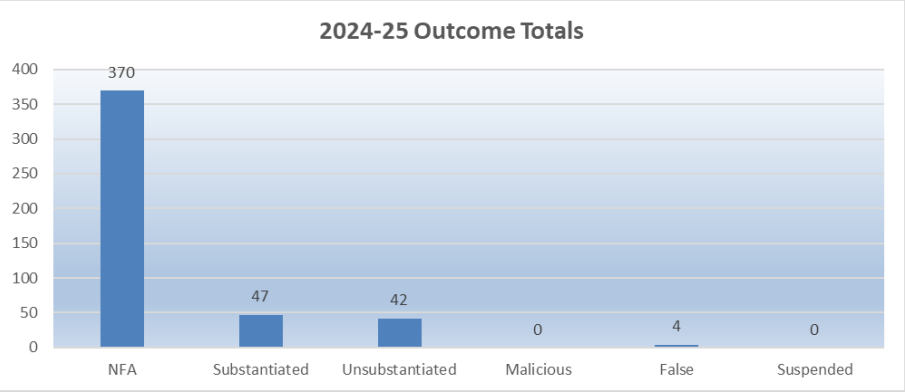
	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Number of POT's	22	32	40	35	44
No of Strategy Meetings	53	53	55	57	53
Number of Additional POT's	5	10	16	23	40
Grand Total	80	95	111	115	137

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

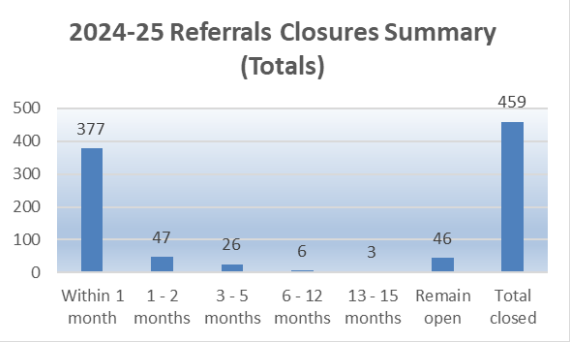
The number of cases resulting in a substantiated outcome have decreased from previous years, however there are still a significant number of cases yet to be concluded at the time of writing this report, and therefore the number is likely to increase as those cases are closed. Despite 45 cases concluding 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]: @Ellie 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]: @Jennie 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)

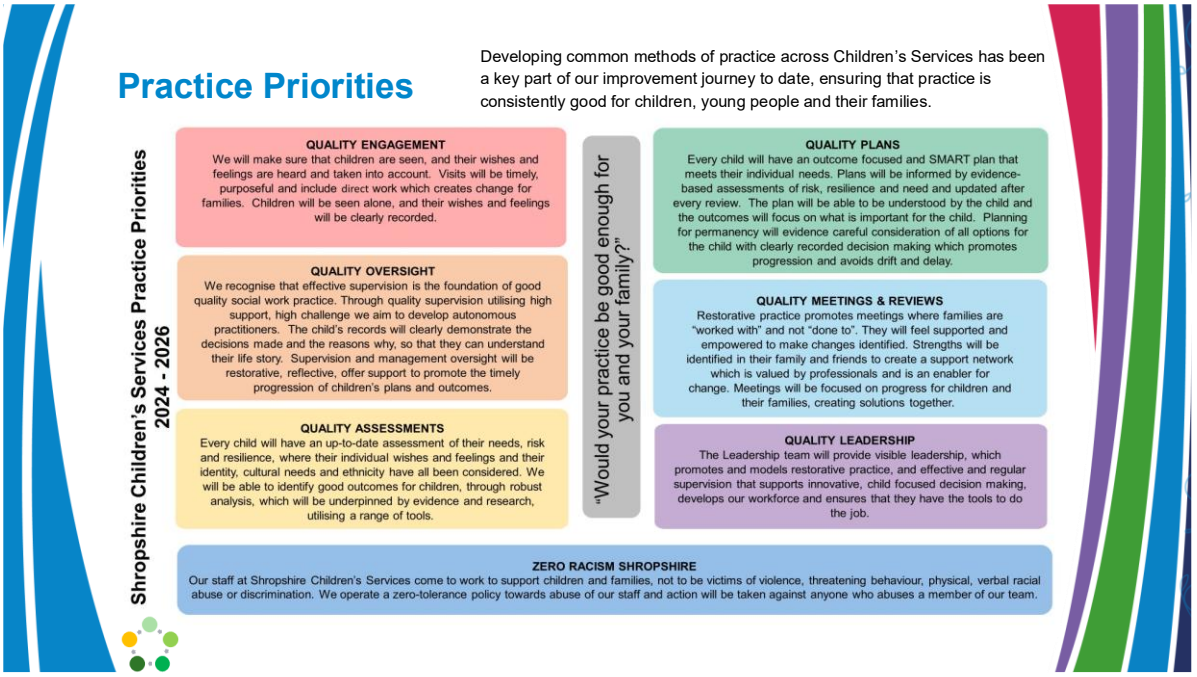
- 2 Assistant Directors
- 8 Service Managers
- 26 Team Managers
- 51 Senior Social Workers
- 67 Social Workers
- 18 ASYEs
- 9 trainee Social Workers
- 6 Registered Mangers
- 87 Residential Care Workers
- 106 foster carer households
- 71 connected carer households
- 13 team leaders
- 4 0-5 Family Support Workers
- 21 Hub based Family Support Workers
- 5 EHAST workers
- 3 FIS Assistants
- 4 Parenting Practitioners
- 3 Play Practitioners
- 8 Youth Workers

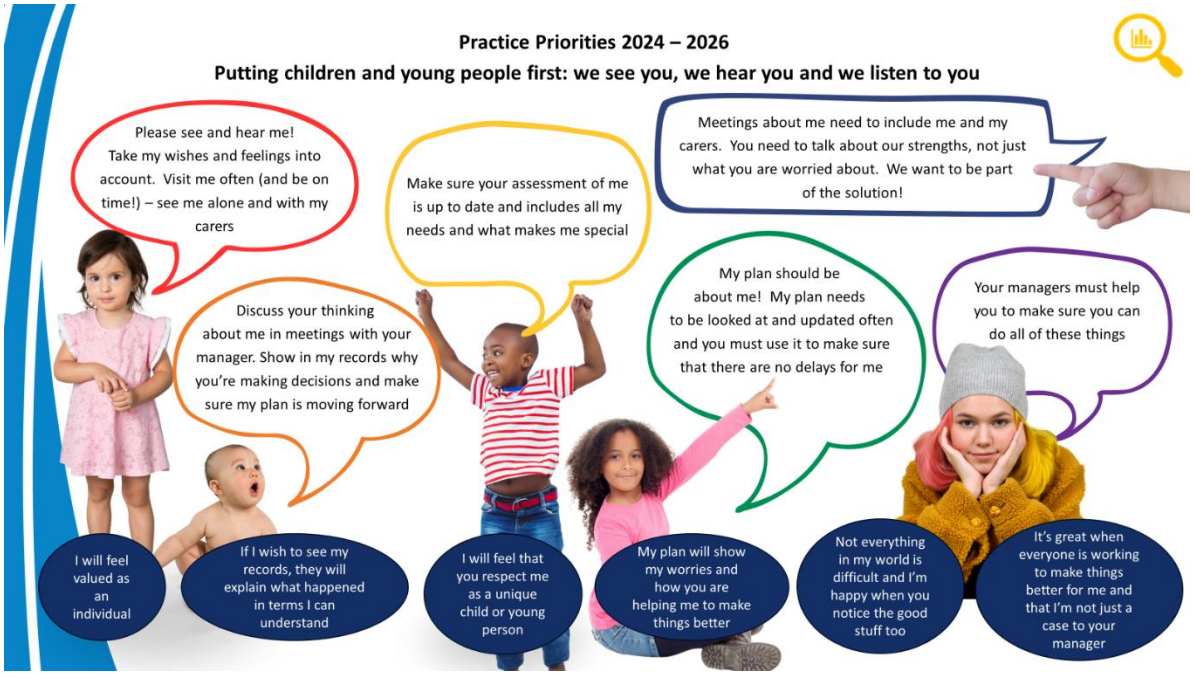
Vacancy rate	8.5%
Sickness rate	3.36%
Turnover rate	6.15%
Agency worker rate	21%

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

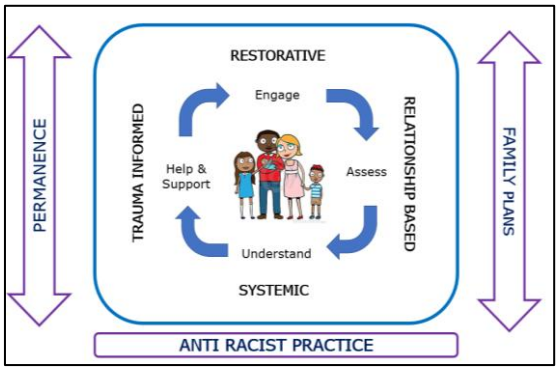
Developing common methods of practice across Children's Services has been a key part of our improvement journey to date, ensuring that practice is consistently good for children, young people and their families. We have refreshed our 6 Practice Priorities for the service which has helped focus our workforce and drive improvement, embedding these in all of our strategic work. These will be relaunched and promoted through spring 2025.

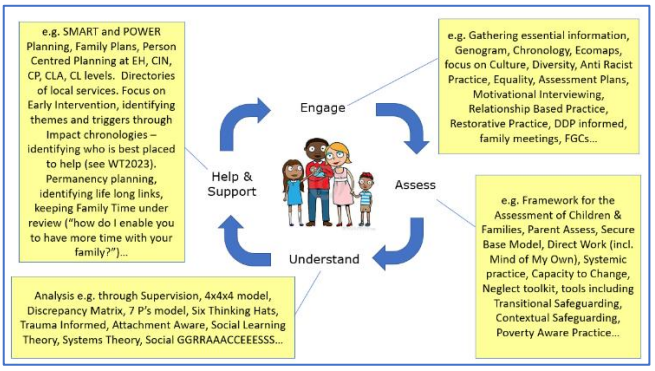




Practice Frameworks

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 routs 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 odder 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 no 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

<u>What more do we need to do?</u>

- 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 mangers 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 a 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.

<u>Key challenges experienced in 2024/25:</u>

- 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.

ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25
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)

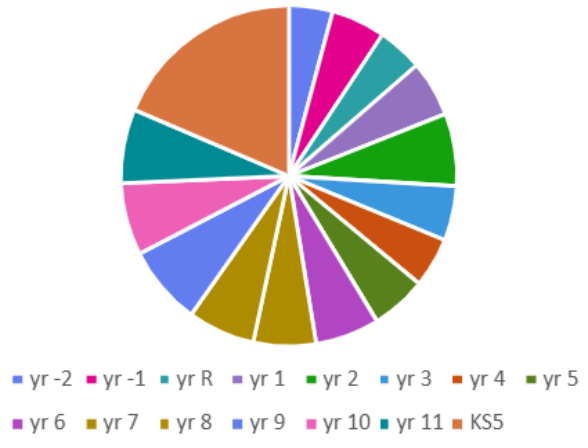
Shropshire Virtual School plays an integral role in Corporate Parenting. The VS organised an event in July to promote this and consider the proposed changes around the role of the Corporate Parent in the Childrens Bill. This event hosted Jaz Ampaw-Farr and included one of the few book-signing events 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=r3xIVe

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



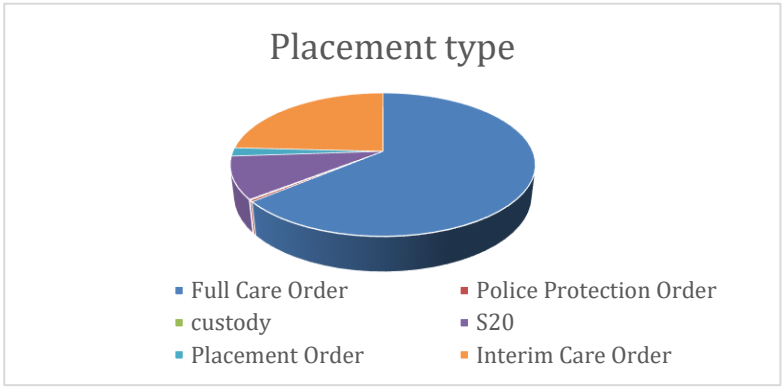
There has been a **+3.3% change in the numbers** of looked after children from year –2 to 13 through this academic year. (Year -2 refers to two years before Reception).

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 her 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%

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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.

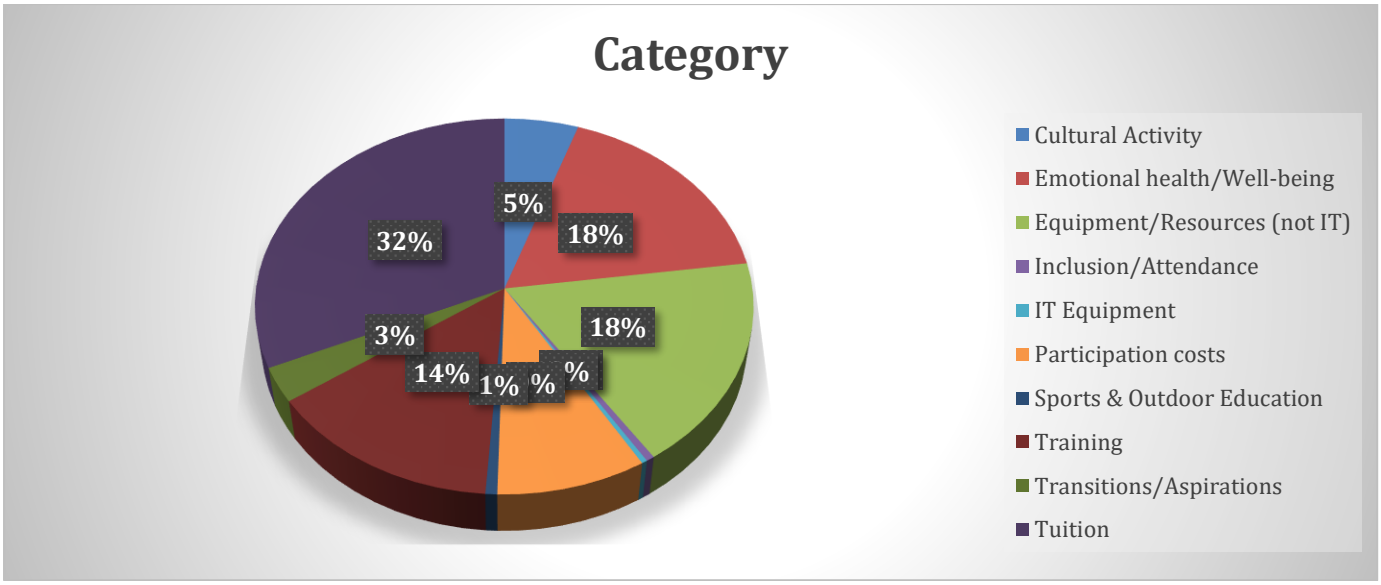
(The SVS Quality descriptors can be found here Personal education plan (PEP) | Shropshire Council)

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:



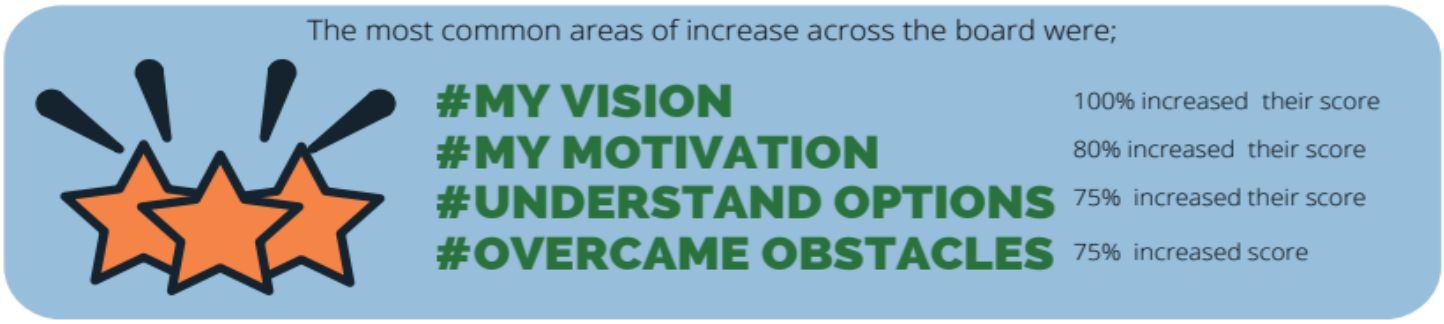
Impact Summary from some of our interventions:

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 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 t be very positive, for example:

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“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.

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General Enquiries: 0345 678 9000

Case Study:

B 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 very social child who 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.

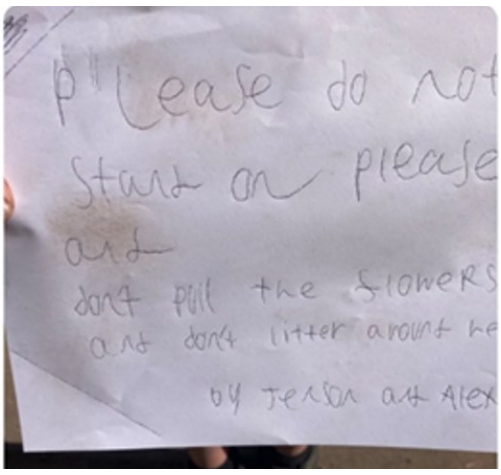
Over the 10-week programme, we co-developed a small garden together. The garden we created was inside the Year 7 break area where students sat or walked by whilst we worked. B received endless kind comments from students and teachers about the garden plot as we developed it. He seemed to enjoy the attention and appeared very proud of his garden. When asked what he was doing, 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

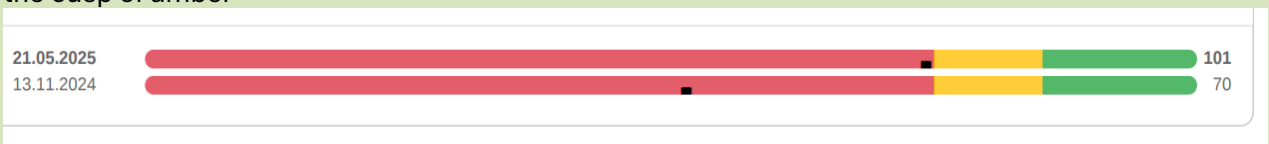
One school commented that:
"If children had been in mainstream class, then they wouldn't be here. Children with significant need are making progress. The impact of this work has been that children with high needs have been able to stay in our school."

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) 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."*

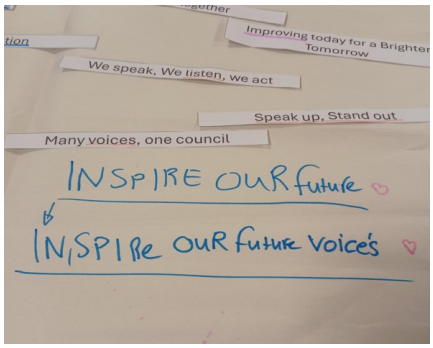
4.9 In 2024-25 our young people presented at Corporate Parenting Board and also to Cabinet on issues they find important.

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

6.4

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.

www.shropshire.gov.uk
General Enquiries: 0345 678 9000

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:

www.shropshire.gov.uk
General Enquiries: 0345 678 9000

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

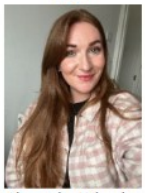
Heather Hobman
EASO

Holly Morris
EASO

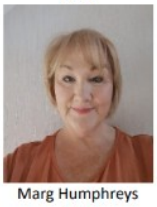
Katherine E Jones
EASO

Leni Findlay
EASO

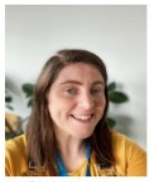
Lisa Wildgoose
EASO


Alexandra Wheeler
EASO

Lydia Williams
EASO (maternity leave)


Marg Humphreys
EASO

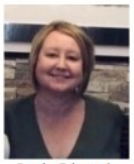
Sophie Bishton
EASO


Suzie Rawson
EASO

Ruby Angel
EASO

Emine Buckley
UASYP Project Officer

Kerri Jones
Participation Support Officer


Paula Edwards
Business Co-ordinator

Amy Gallagher
Administrator

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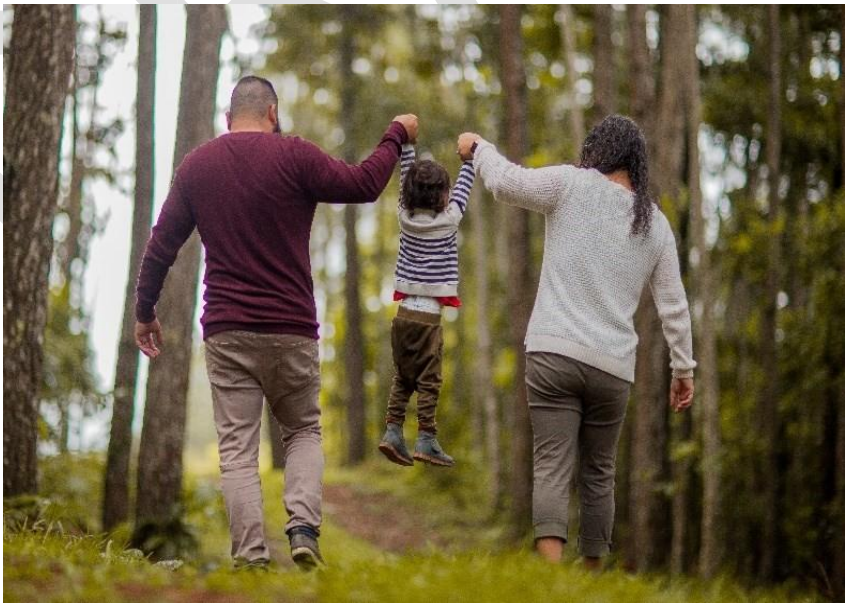
Fostering Service Annual Report 2024/2025



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

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Marketing and recruitment functions, data and insight and further development of the foster carers support offer.

3. <u>In House Foster Carer assessments & Recruitment</u>

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.

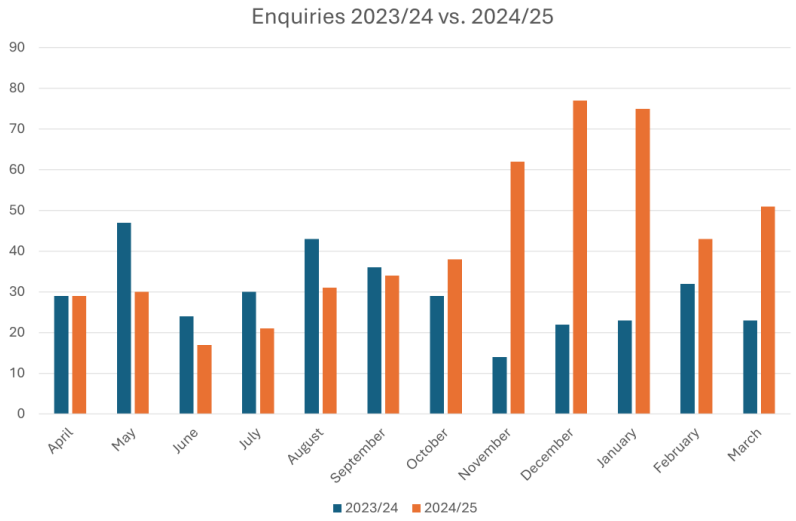
A referral scheme was also launched for Shropshire Council employees and Shropshire Fostering Carers, promoted through internal webinars and newsletters.

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.



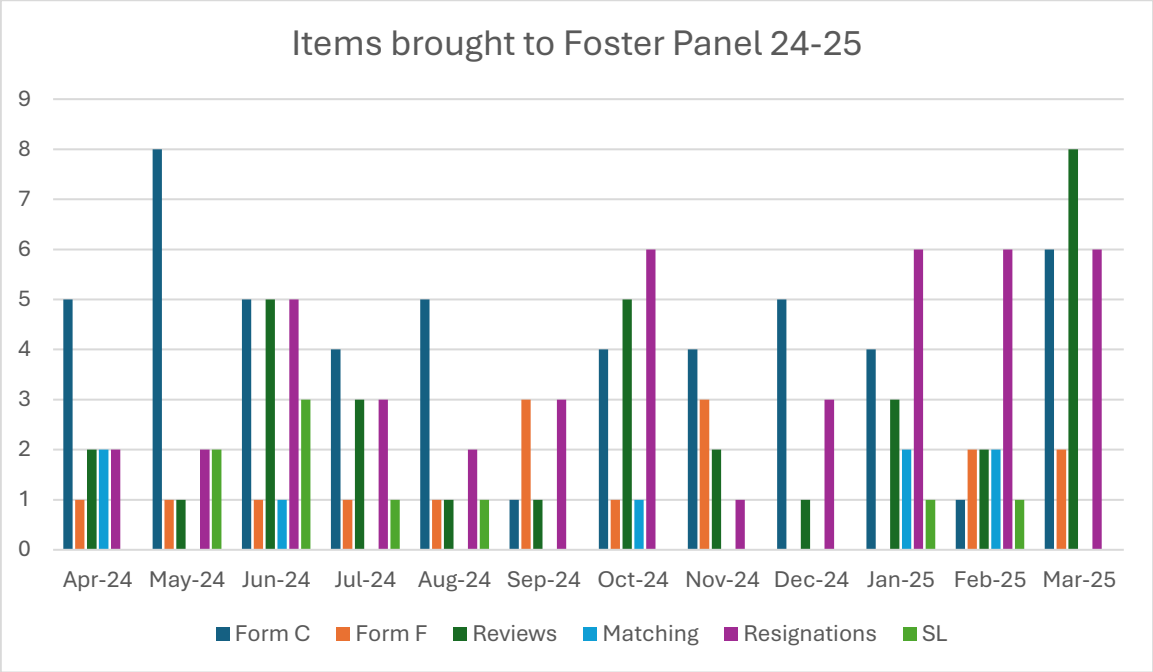
4. <u>Approval Data</u>

During this period, 16 mainstream Foster Carer households were presented to panel and approved.

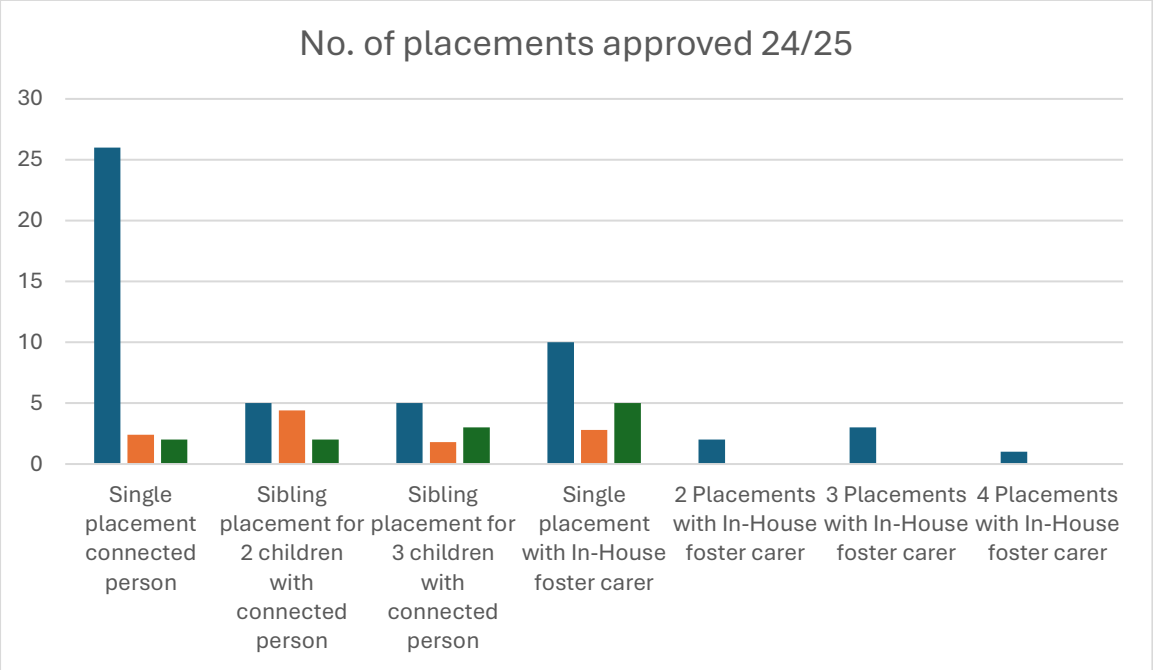
51 Connected Person Foster Carer households were presented at the Fostering Panel resulting in 38 Connected Person Foster Carer approvals. Under regulations, negative fostering assessments in stage 2 must be presented to the panel. In this period, 13 assessments had negative outcomes due to concerns 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.

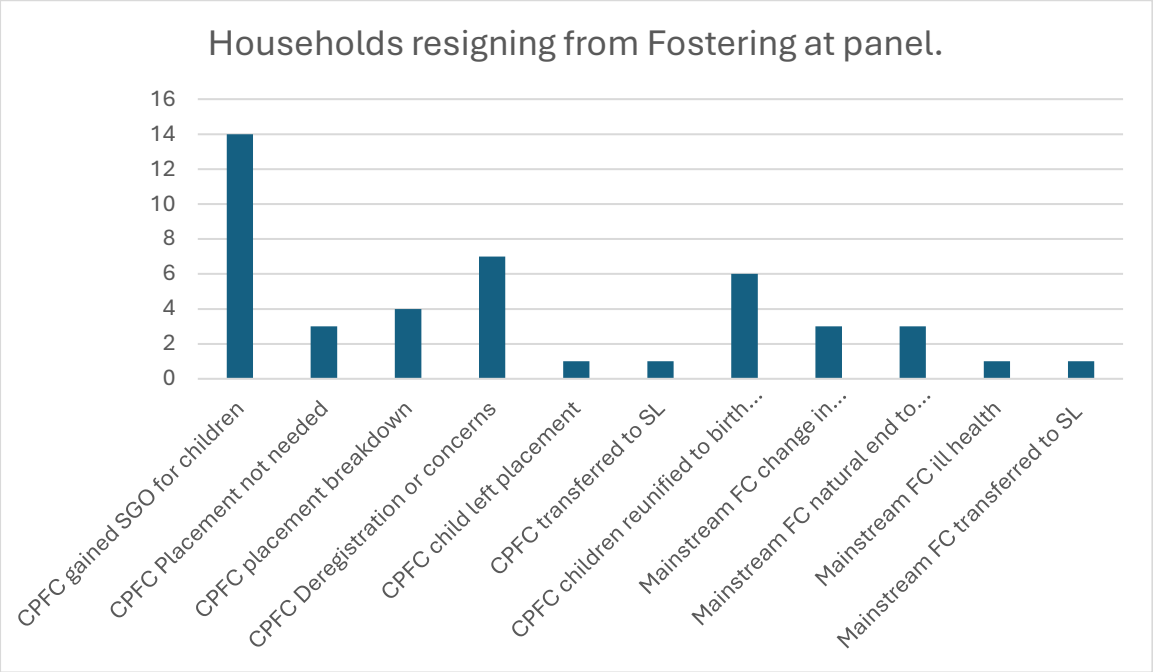
Ofsted now regulates Supported Lodging (SL) provisions as part of the government's review of unregulated care for young people.

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. <u>Foster Carer Annual Reviews</u>

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.

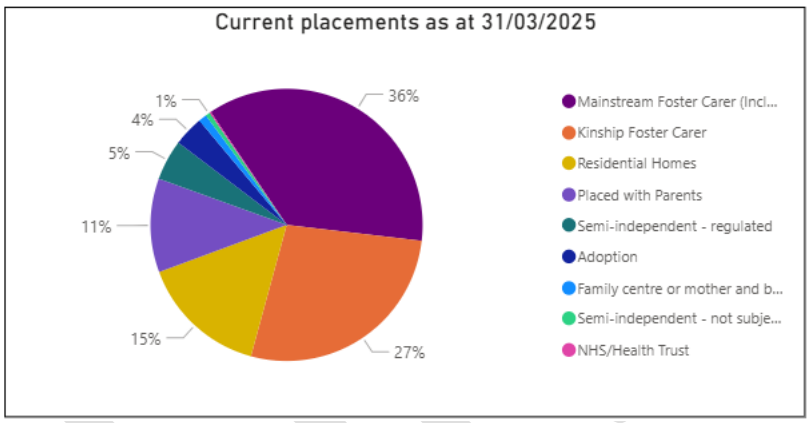
9. Matching

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.

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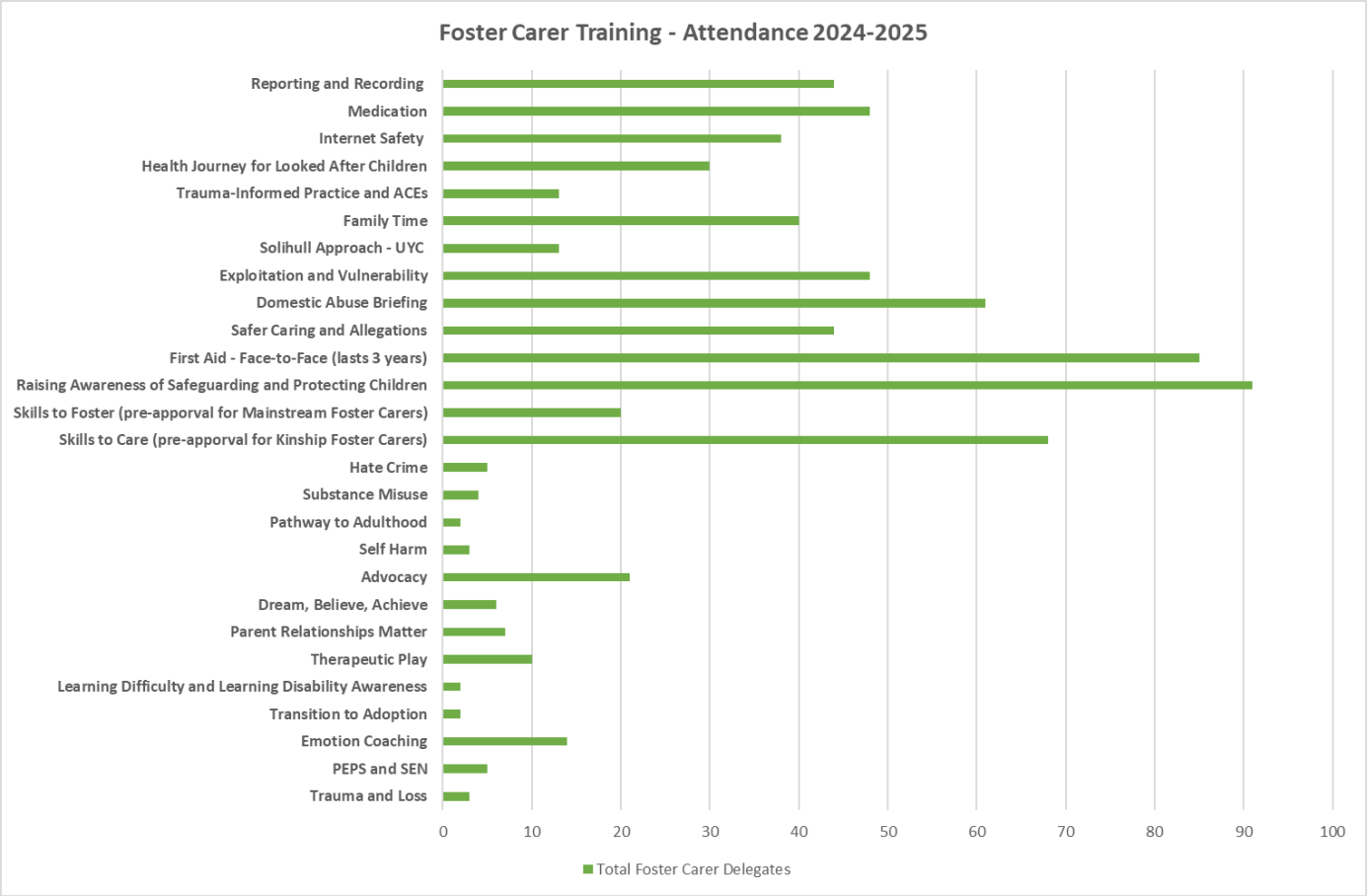

Developments

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.

Childrens 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. <u>Permanence</u>

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. The 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, stabile 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.

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For more information, please visit

[Foster Care In Shropshire | Shropshire Fostering | Home]

END OF REPORT

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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.

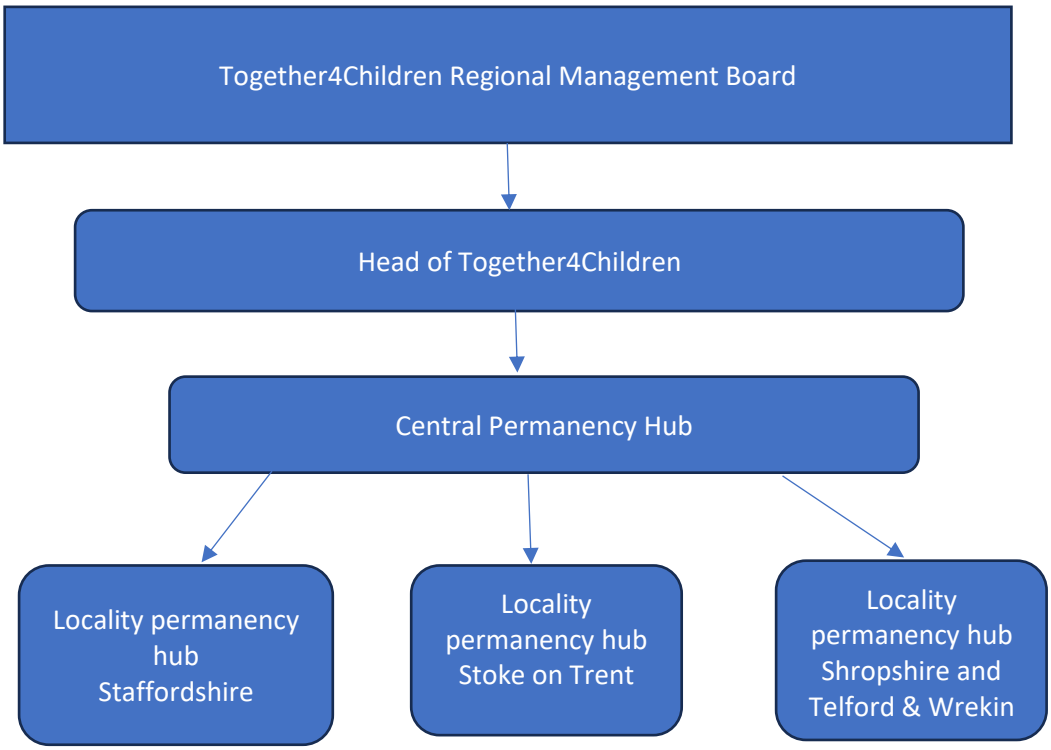
We know how important it is to secure children's permanency through adoption in a timely way. We regularly have approved adopters willing to offer early permanence; however, the lack of adopters generally means they are often matched with children already waiting.

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).

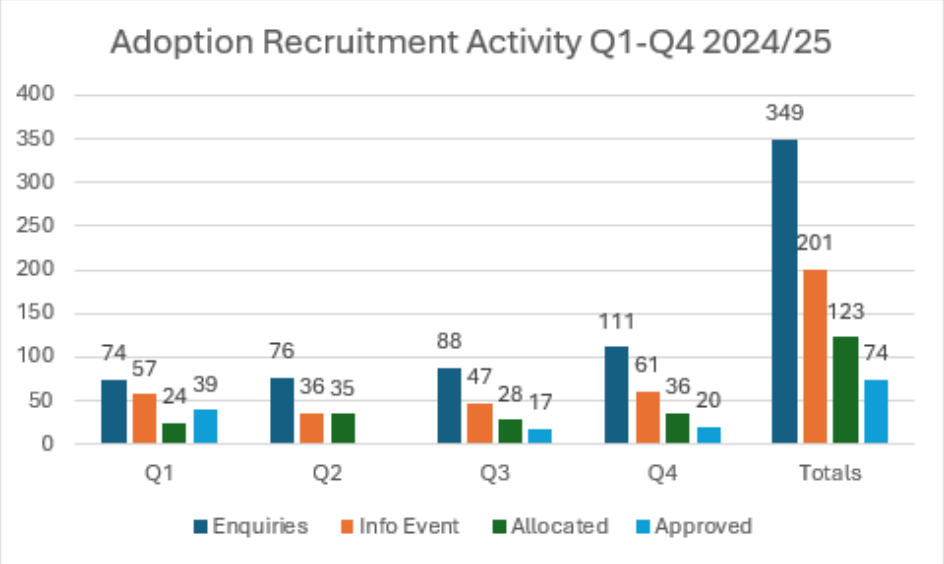
Other developments have included the development of a pre-recorded information event, which is available for people who are unable to attend a live online event or if waiting for an event would cause delay. The full enquiry form (which triggers potential allocation of the household to localities) is 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.

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

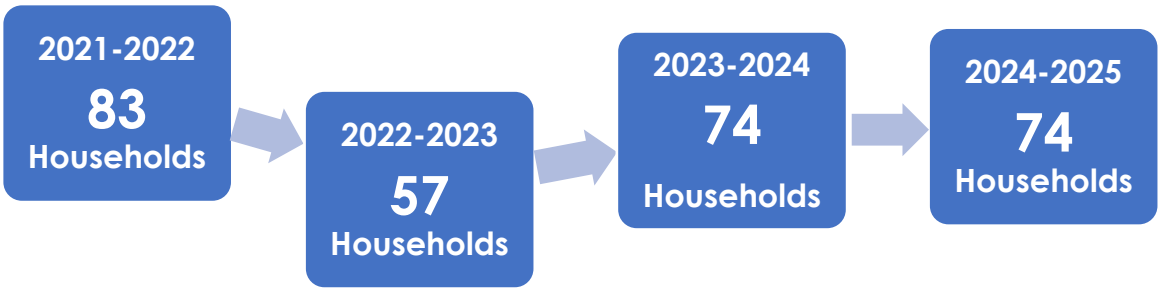
National Picture

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 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.

Fantastic, engaging leaders of the course. Very approachable.

"We really appreciated the guest speakers explaining their journey to us to give us greater insight."

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."

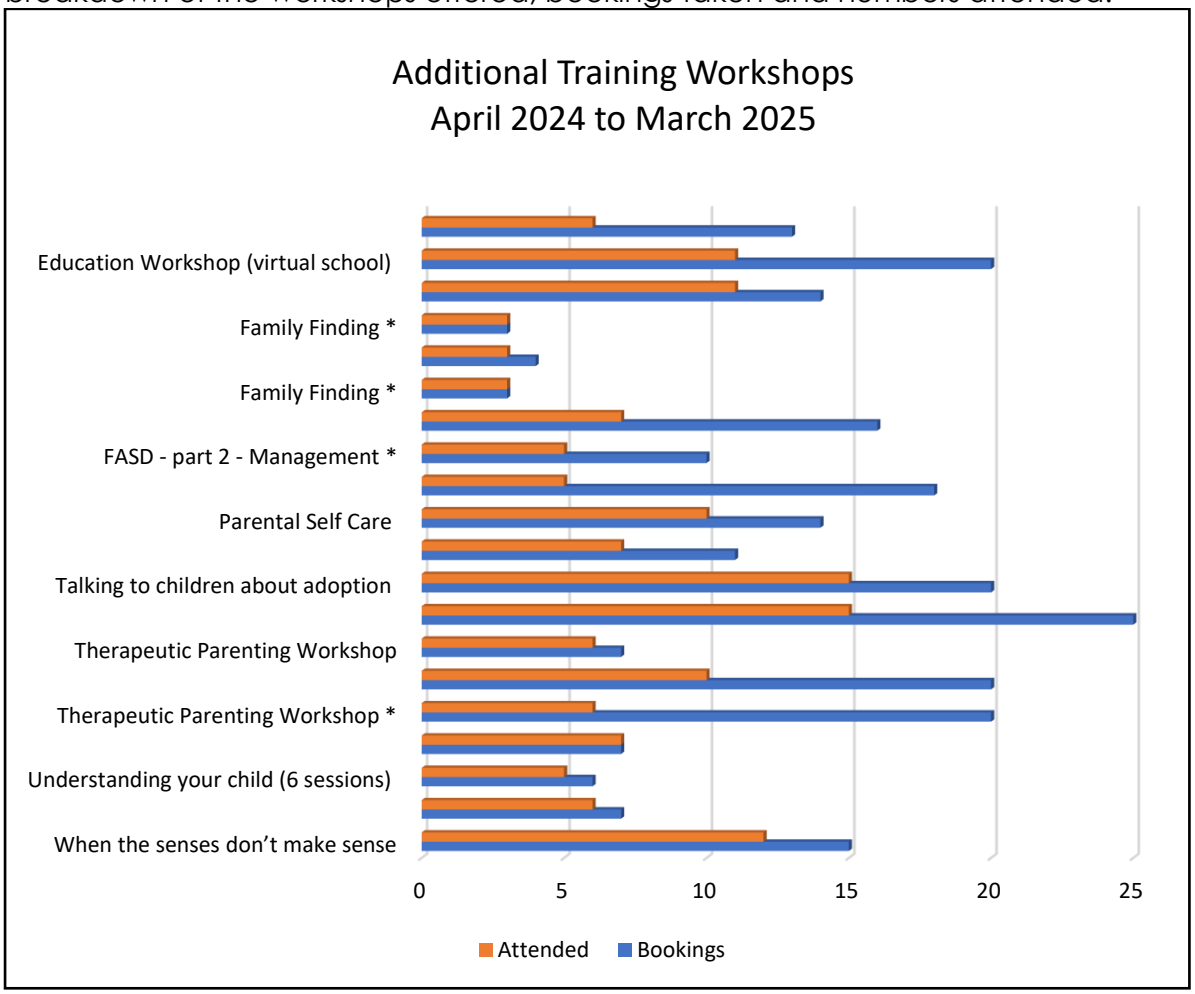
Family & Friends

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 prospectives 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%

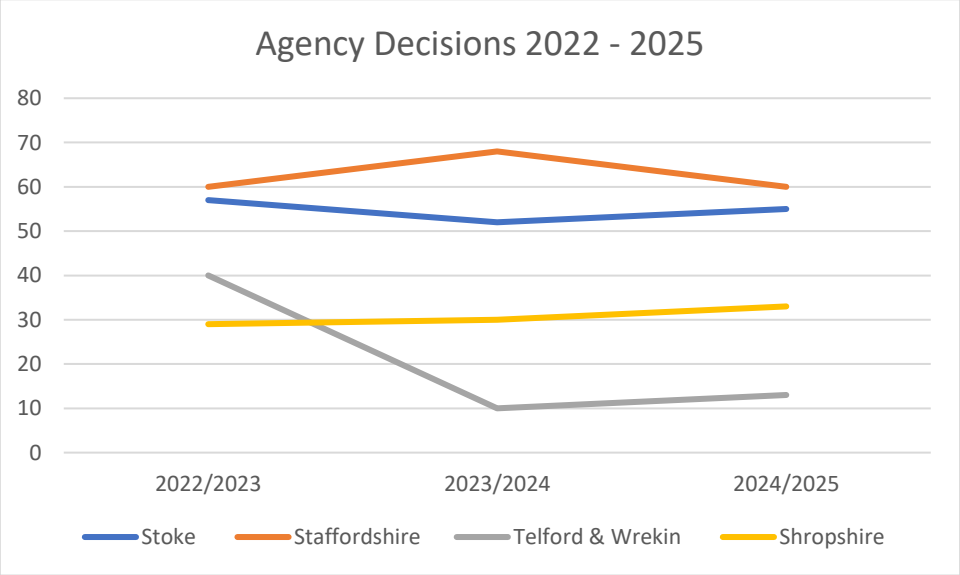
	Total CIC @ 31/03/2024	Total CIC @ 31/03/2025	% +/- Last 12 Months
Shrops	720	717	-0.4%
Staffs	1310	1308	-1.5%
Stoke	1151	1059	-7.8%
T&W	412	410	-0.5%
Total	**3593**	**3494**	**-2.7%**

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

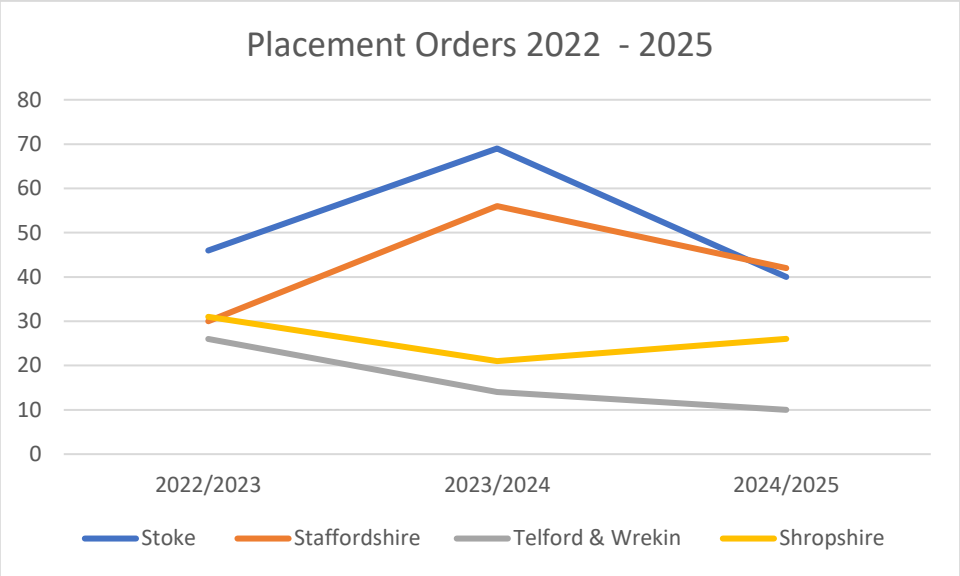
The decision to place a child for adoption is recognised as being one of the most significant decisions about a child's life that a Local Authority makes through the discharging of their statutory children's social work duties. Together4Children supports senior managers in our partner Local Authorities 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.

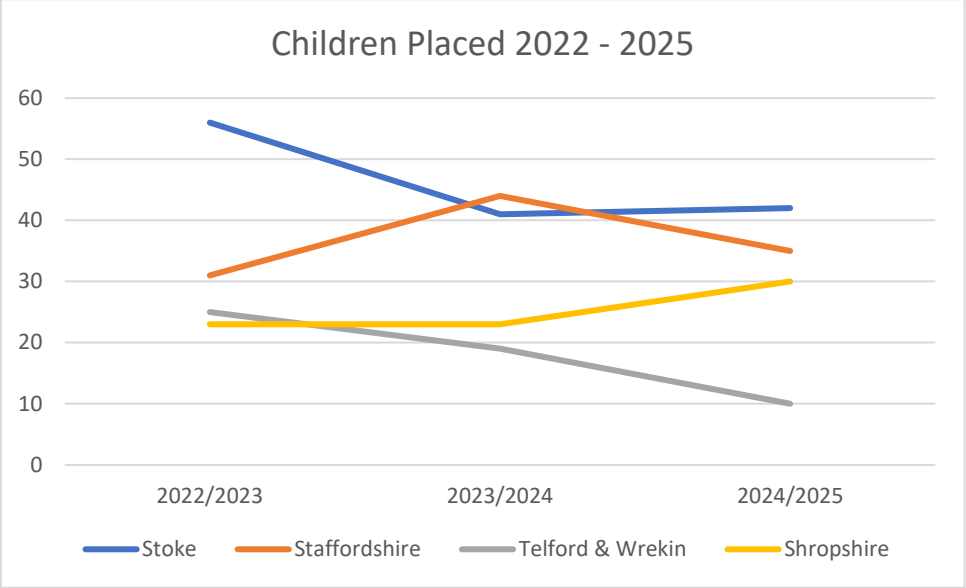
A total of **161** agency decisions were made in 2024-2025 compared to **160** the previous year, a 0.6% increase. Nationally, there was an increase of 4% in children's agency decisions. (*DfE's Children looked after in England including Adoption 2024 data*)

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'.

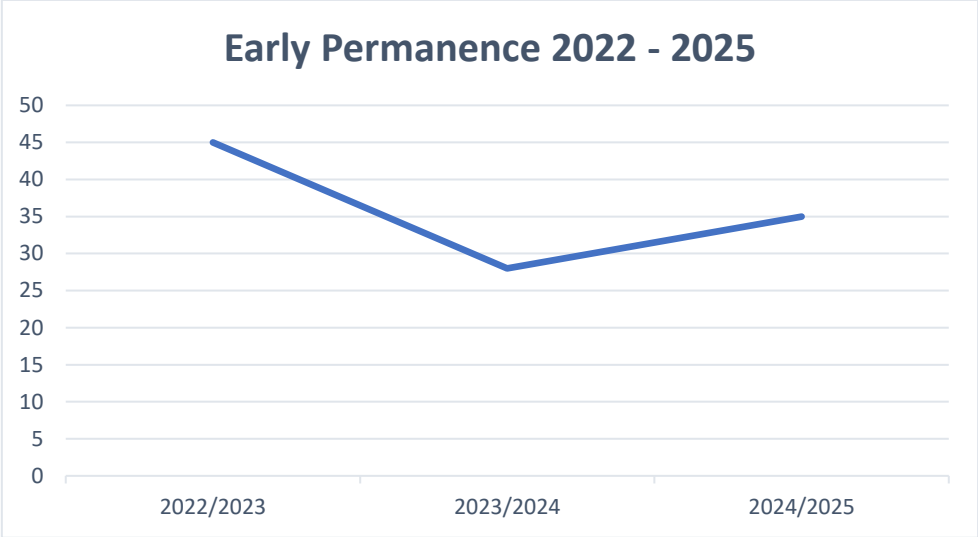
In this model, the Local Authority is primarily progressing towards a decision for the care plan to be adoption, and family reunification appears unlikely based on known factors relating to birth family. The child is placed with prospective approved adopters who are also temporarily approved as foster 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.

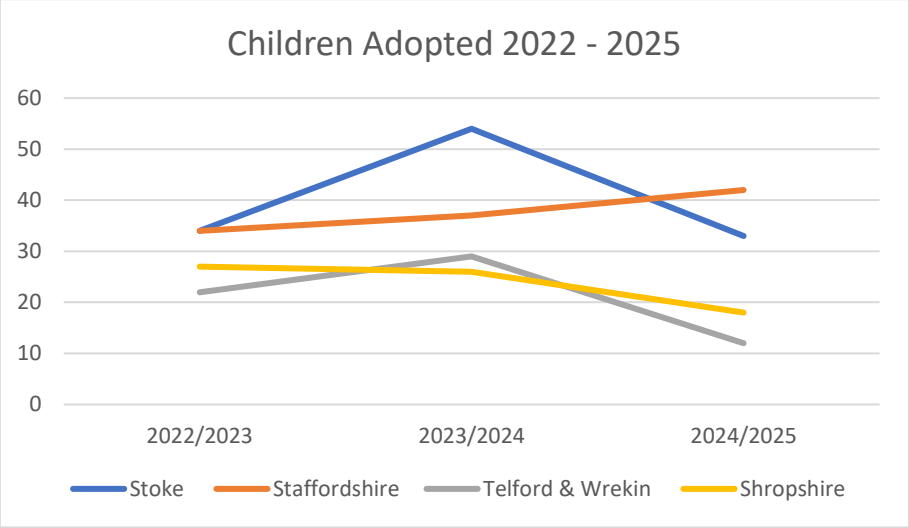
The above table indicates that 3 of the 4 local authorities have seen a positive decrease in timeliness, whilst Telford & Wrekin have seen an increase of 60 days.

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

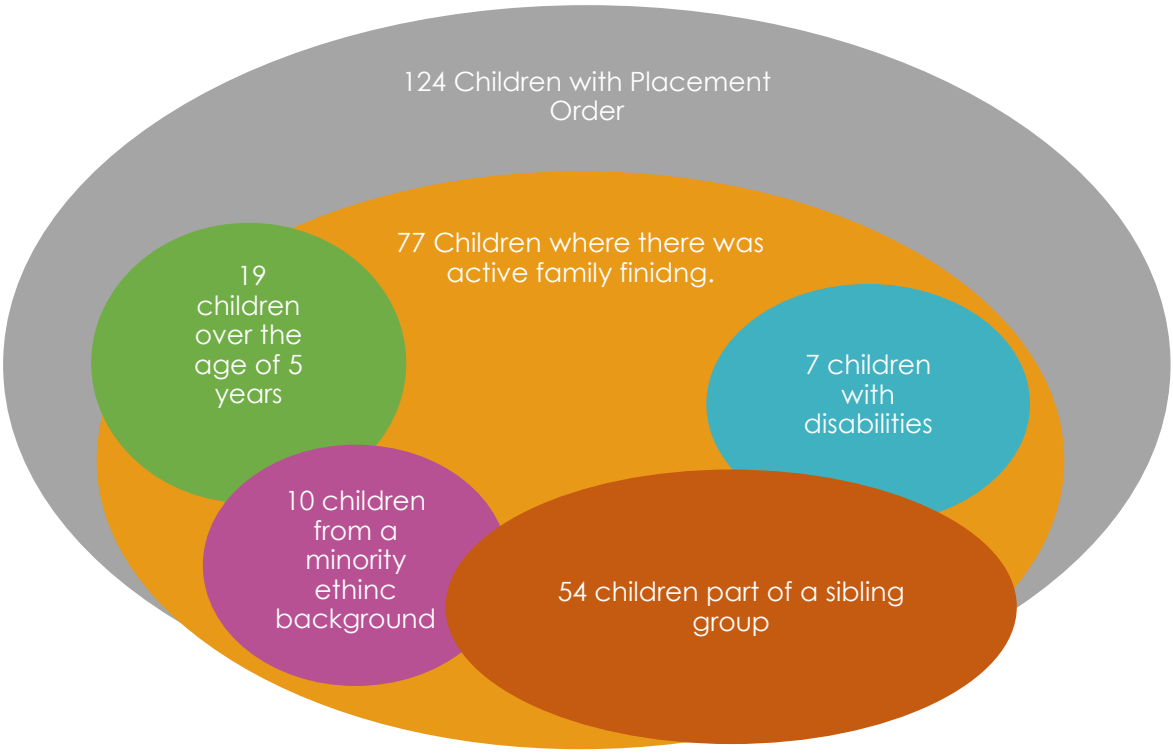
At the end of the current reporting year, there were **180** children across our region where Agency Decision Maker's across our partner local authorities had decided on a plan of adoption.

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.

"the care that was shown was so treasured and made what was at times a difficult journey, much more manageable"

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.

- 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 though support and challenge

Taking responsibility- We take ownership

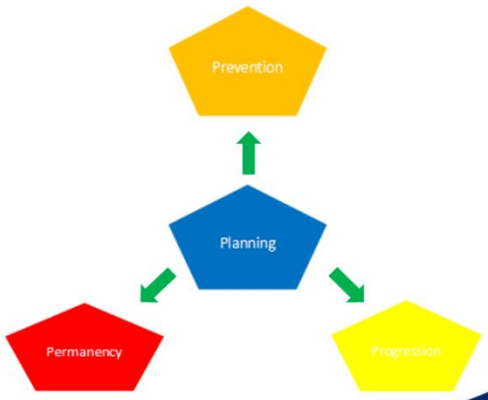
Adventurous- We find creative and innovative solutions.

Loyalty- We are genuine and honest.

Our strategy (interdependency framework): Prevention, Planning, Permanency and Progression

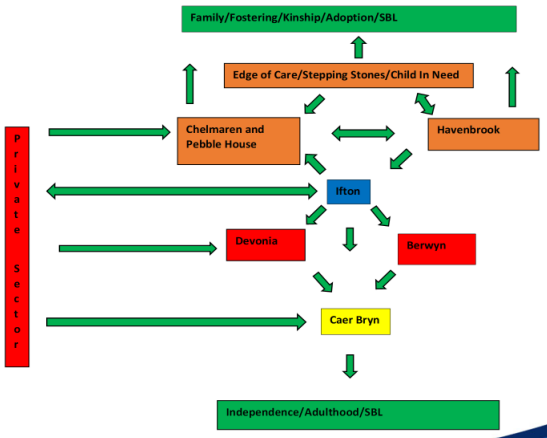
Shropshire Council

The four P's



Shropshire Council

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 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 though 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 though 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

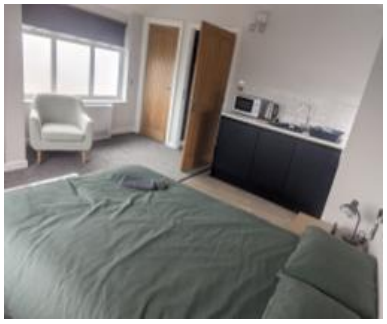
Previous placement: Chelmaren

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 Cear 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 form a safe a secure base with support when faced with any challenges. Child ! 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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