

# SHROPSHIRE

## LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

SHROPSHIRE CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022



### Charter for Children in Care & Care Leavers

The council should use these priorities when they are making decisions that will affect young people's lives. This document aims to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what the council should do to be good corporate parents. This charter will try to ensure that all children in care and care leavers have equal access to services, support and life opportunities.

#### My Health

Offer me advice and opportunities to help me be healthy. Give me easy and open access to health services, including sexual and mental health.

#### Education, Work and Training

Provide me with a suitable education, a budget if I choose to go onto university, and help seeking employment, training or education.

Shropshire Council should continue to provide young people in care the chance to do work experience with the council as if it was the 'family firm'.

#### My Social Life

Make my life fun! Provide opportunities and activities for me to take part in.

#### Support

Support me in my endeavours. Offer me practical and financial support. Give me access safe people to turn to when I am upset or angry, and the chance to talk things through with someone who is not part of the council.

#### Inform Me

Explain to me what my rights are. Tell me what I'm entitled to and what I can ask for at different points of my life. Give me clear information about myself and my time in care when I want it.

#### Generally

Respect me and treat me fairly, and as an individual. Be honest and don't make promises you can't keep. Do your best to promote children in care and make sure they don't get a bad name. Acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of children in care.

#### My Voice

Listen to my views and opinions. Put my needs and feelings at the heart of all decisions about me. Ask me what I think and I want to do. If you don't agree then tell me why.

#### My Home

Give me carers who are people-friendly and a home that is appropriate to my individual needs. Offer me a home where I can be safe and happy, not just a bed. Don't forget about me if I live far from home. Help me to move onto independent living when I am ready.

#### Moving On

Plan for the future with me clearly, and be ready to put support in place if things go wrong. Prepare me before it's time to move on, with things like life skills, cooking, driving and money management.



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### Introduction

Shropshire's Corporate Parenting Steering Board brings together a number of 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.

### Annual Report

The Annual Report 2021/2022 provides an overview of the work undertaken by members of the Board during the year 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. The report ensures that full Council has an appreciation of the achievements of our children and young people looked after and care leavers, and also some of the challenges they face. It 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.

6<sup>th</sup> September 2022

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## Corporate Parenting Principles

- Act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people
- Encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings, and take them into account
- Make sure they have access to services
- Make sure children and young people are safe, with stable home lives, relationships and education or work
- Promote high aspirations and try to secure the best outcomes for them
- Prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

*Looking after and protecting children and young people is one of the most important jobs that councils do and when a child, for whatever reason, can't safely stay at home, it is up to us as the local authority to step in and give them the care, support and stability that they deserve. This isn't just up to the lead member or director of children's services – we need everyone looking out for our most vulnerable children and young people, and every councillor has a role to play in embedding the corporate parenting principles and doing all they can to support children in care to live meaningful and fulfilling lives.'*

*Councillor Judith Blake, Chair, LGA Children and Young People Board  
LGA Corporate Parenting Resource Pack (November 2019)*

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### Foreword



**Councillor Kirstie Hurst-Knight**  
**Cabinet Member for Children's Services & Education**

As Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education it is my pleasure to introduce this Annual Report of Shropshire's Corporate Parenting Steering Board (2021/22), which I now chair.

During 2021-2022 the Corporate Parenting Steering Board has supported the Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Service and wider Council in achieving a 'GOOD' outcome from the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Services (ILACS) in February 2022.

Our Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum and the feedback we receive from our children and young people through various means, play an integral part in our service development. This annual report charts the work they have been doing alongside the achievements of all of our children and young people for whom we are their Corporate Parents. I would like to express my sincere thanks to them for their help and commitment.

This Annual Report provides a summary of the business of The Corporate Parenting Steering Board sub-groups throughout 2021-2022 and includes an overview of the themes presented, extracts from the reports and accompanying actions which form an over-arching action plan. We know we still have a lot to do to improve the lives of our children and young people looked after and our care leavers, but with the support of the Board and as committed Corporate Parents, we are passionate about taking our journey forward together.

*KHurst-Knight*

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## Headlines for 2021-2022

### We are GOOD Corporate Parents 😊.

In our Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in February 2022 we were assessed as delivering a GOOD service for our looked after children and care leavers. Ofsted praised the dedication and commitment of the staff and the Council for the investment in our children and young people looked after.

Ofsted Inspectors endorsed our own self-assessment, demonstrating that we know ourselves well.

We know what we need to do to improve and aim to become OUTSTANDING.

## Appendix 1 Full Ofsted Report

### Areas of good and outstanding practice for children looked after and care leavers

- Children are listened to and included in plans about them. They are encouraged to make lifelong links.
- Our improved tracking and initiatives to ensure children can live in a permanent safe, and stable home throughout their childhood and beyond.
- Increase in the number of children who have ceased to need to be looked after either through return to their birth parent, or to be with a connected family member or carer through Special Guardianship, or to be adopted by another family;
- The majority of children who needed to remain looked after in 2021-2022 were able to live in stable and safe homes with only a small number experiencing 3 or more moves;
- The Virtual School was instrumental in preventing exclusions of looked after children and improved the quality of Personal Education Plans (PEPs). There remains a higher proportion of our children looked after with Education, Health & Social Care Plans (EHCPs) than in the general child population.
- Most children have their annual health checks in timescale and our care leavers are all offered a 'Health Passport'.
- The Independent Reviewing Service has good oversight of children looked after.
- Young people who are care leavers get on well with their Personal Advisors and are helping to shape service developments.

## Key Issues and challenges



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- There had been a continued growth in our children looked after and care leavers. population between April 2021 and end of March 2022.
- In terms of numbers and rates of children looked after, Shropshire is above the national average and statistical comparators as at end March 2022. Forecasting ahead - there had continued to be an increase in the number of children looked after since end March 2022 although this is at a slower rate and includes an increased number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people;
- The impact of Covid continued to be felt through 2021-22 in terms of stress on families leading to injuries to children, neglect and family breakdown, alongside ongoing Court delays in making decisions about children's plans for their future.
- Our approach with families where there are safeguarding concerns needs to be more restorative to reduce risks and increase safety factors to enable more children to remain at home without state intervention.
- The introduction of the Government National Transfer Scheme to enable all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to be looked after arriving at ports by boat has had an ongoing impact on our numbers.
- The low return rate of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs), challenges in collating data from the mental health services, and lack of suitable local services for children and young people experiencing emotional and mental health difficulties remains a challenge, impacting on our ability to fully understand and address the emotional wellbeing of all our children looked after.

### Plans going forward

The increase in the number of children needing to be looked after poses significant challenges in terms of improving outcomes for children looked after, most importantly, in ensuring children experience stability and are supported to achieve timely permanence.

The development of Stepping Stones, the revised Public Law Outline pathway and the revised Special Guardianship Support offer have been reported to the Corporate Parenting Board as integral to supporting more families to care for their children without the need for undue state intervention through becoming or remaining looked after.

We are working closely with health partners to address the pathways for the emotional and mental health needs of children and young people to be identified early and timely interventions put in place.

Our Early Help offer is being revised to ensure families can receive the right support at the right time.



## **Participation and the Voice of our Children and Young People**

### **Feedback through Mind of My Own**

Mind of My Own is a web-based feedback App with a variety of different ways for children and young people to share their views and express themselves to communicate with professionals, making sure they are heard. The Apps have facilities to support children and young people to communicate in over 100 languages and can enable children and young people to communicate in different ways if they have a learning difficulty or learning or physical disability.

152 statements were received from children through Mind of My own in 2021-22.

Although it is encouraging that young people are beginning to utilise the app, significant progress will need to take place in order for young people's views to be regularly collated and impactful. In total the app was utilised on 128 occasions in 12 months. This is on average 11 statements a month, when on average 40-50 meetings are arranged by the IRU each week.

The majority of statements received from young people are positive, with 94% children and young people being positive about where they lived. The majority of those that responded negatively were 17 years +. The majority of young people, 88%, were also positive about their local area. Of 131 children and young people responding, 69% of them felt positive and only a very small proportion reported feeling unsafe or scared. Children and young people looked after who reported to feel scared stated this related to a risk they felt within their local area or bullying in school, and not related to their home.

Continued activity will be taking place to encourage the use of Mind of My Own in 2022-2023, including all Looked after children over the age of 8 years being written to in order to inform them how to use Mind of My Own.

### **Feedback from Coram Voice Advocacy and Independent Visiting Service**

Shropshire Children's Social Care's advocacy service had been provided by Coram Voice since 2012. In the period 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022 63 children and young people have received community advocacy support reporting 102 issues and 7 have had Independent Visitor matches. This represents just over 10% of our CLA young people who have received an

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advocacy service. 46% of those utilising the advocacy service are between 12 years and 16 years and 37% are 17+years.

### Advocacy

In 2021 to 2022 54% of referrals for advocacy came from social services, 22% from other professionals, 14% were self-referrals and 10% were from relatives/friends. It is the aim that in 2022-2023 all Children who are Looked After are informed of their right to an advocate on a regular basis.

In terms of users of the service:

- 46% of children and young people accessing advocacy support were aged between 12-16 years old.
- 49% of children and young people access the advocacy service identified as Female.
- 86% of children and young people accessing the advocacy service identified as White British.
- 75% of children and young people lived in the Shropshire area.
- 33% of children and young people were on a Care Order.
- 22% were on Child Protection Plans.
- 54% of referrals were received from Children's Social Care from Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officers or Child Protection Chairs.

Although most children and young people looked after and care leavers report a positive experience, for those who used the advocacy service, there have been more children and young people reporting concerns around their Social Worker or Personal Advisor, which includes not feeling listened too, actions not being completed, being unable to make contact with their worker or disagreeing with decisions being made. More children and young people have also been asking around the formal complaints process or support in making a complaint.

Across 2021-22 children and young people have asked for support from an advocate for 102 issues.

*"They put me on it (Deprivation of Liberty Order-DOLS) as a way to control me. They would bring up DOLS in conversations long before it was put in place. I think they were threatening me with it."*

*"I want to have a PA again and help around my council tax"*



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*"I kept asking for support for my mental health but wasn't getting any"*

*"I would like my Social Worker to help me get my prescription, chase my counselling appointment and to see someone about my eyes and ears"*

As we reach end of the 2021-22 financial year we are delighted to see an increase in the number of children and young people access advocacy support and a high number of advocacy issue being resolved to the satisfaction of the child.

## **Independent Visiting**

It has been a disappointing and challenging year for the IV service following the Covid pandemic. The lockdowns and restrictions brought into place during the previous year restricted face to face contact and group events. This made it difficult to form new matches. At the beginning of 2021-22 restrictions began to lift, this meant existing matches were able to get back to going out for visits. However, we have seen a decline in referrals in 2021-22, with none being received. This concern has been raised in review meetings with the interim Principal IRO at Shropshire. The Principal IRO has been working alongside team managers to promote the IV service with Social Workers and IROs to see how we can increase referrals. We have also been sending out information on the IV service to the Social Work teams to remind them of the service. Of the matches that have continue during the year, at the beginning of 2021-22 there were 7 IV matches, over the course of the year this has reduced to 4 matches follow 3 matches coming to an end. These 4 matches have continued are going well and will carry on into 2022-23.

## **Support through the Children in Care Council**

Throughout the lockdowns and restriction period young people continued to be supported 1:1, walking outdoors was the main activity although some young people chose home visits when possible.

Peer Supporters met monthly to complete the training programme; then continued to meet to maintain contact and support each other. Groups gradually started to meet again from Aug 2021, we met for walks; 1:1 support continued.

Vouchers purchased from Jump-in as we went into lockdown were used with 2 small groups of young people during Sept-Oct 2021.

Peer supporters and the Band-build group joined together for a Christmas Dance Party. Peer Supporter used this as a trial run for a session they planned to deliver for younger children during Feb half-term; unfortunately, this had to be postponed as the Christmas event for Foster families was rescheduled for the same date.



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Between Dec 21 – April 22 a small group of young people participated in the Hidden Waterways Project – this was an Intergenerational project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund focusing on creatively interpreting people’s memories & stories and community history to encourage community engagement and increase investment and positive attitudes towards the canal restoration. Young people (11-17 years) were invited to combine archival information with cutting edge technology such as animation, film making, photography, traditional arts; and music in creative workshops. The group chose to do a Photography project; two professional photographers worked with the group; on Sunday afternoons we walked the old canal paths taking photographs of the changing landscape. Another application to Youth Music was submitted in conjunction with the Hive; this was successful, and young people are starting to put their names forward to join the next Podcast Project due to start in June this year and run until Summer 2023. We are now in the process of recruiting for the next Peer Supporters.

### **Care Leavers’ Forum and feedback from 16-25 year old young people looked after and care leavers**

The Care Leavers’ Facebook page continued to be hosted by the Care Leavers’ Ambassador, promoting the Care Leavers’ Local Offer and events-virtual and face to face for care leavers. This was a challenge through COVID and beyond due to the lack of a base, but we have persisted.

16 and 17 year old looked after young people and care leavers post 18 met with Jill Boak, the Government Youth Homeless Advisor on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2021\*. She was so impressed with their willingness to meet and share their views.

The National Care Leavers’ Week in October 2021 was an opportunity for care leavers to share their challenges and successes and to promote opportunities for care leavers across the Council.

During this week 16 and 17 year old looked after young people and care leavers, including some of our unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, came together to meet with members of the Corporate Parenting Board, including the Lead Member and Deputy Lead Member, and the Director of Children’s Services and senior managers.

Feedback to senior officers and members and to the Youth Homeless Advisor were very similar:

- Generally young people feel that Shropshire Council tries to look after them very well and there is a good ‘Local Offer’.
- However, too many young people are not able to find a post-18 home close to family links or access to work opportunities especially as there is a shortage of 1-bed accommodation.



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- Some young people found they could only be offered a home at a distance from Shropshire due to their level of need.
- Transport across Shropshire is a challenge, so if you do live a distance from family and friends this can be very isolating.
- Access to the right emotional or mental health services was variable, depending on where you live and the transition pathway from CAMHS to Adult Mental Health Services was difficult.
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people who felt settled in an area such as Wolverhampton or Birmingham found there were barriers to them being able to access priority housing in those areas post-18.

A small group of care experienced young people are providing input into the service development of our 16+ care home. Their feedback has been invaluable in holding up a mirror to our services to challenge our thinking about how it feels to be 'looked after'.

Look out for feedback next year on 'How is that even a thing?' in respect of the different expectations and rules that children and young people have to negotiate in state care that do not exist for children and young people living within their own family.

### **The Care Leavers' Covenant and renewal of the Corporate Parenting Pledge**

In February 2022 the Full Council accepted the proposals for the Council's Care Leavers' Covenant Offer and Councillors renewed their Corporate Parenting pledge to uphold the Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Charter.

### **The Corporate Parenting Board**

**Aims and Principles:** The responsibility of being a Corporate Parent is the shared responsibility of the Council as a whole. The aim of the Corporate Parenting Board is to ensure that the Council, supported by our partners, fulfils its responsibilities in terms of improving outcomes for children and young people looked after and care leavers.

The term 'Corporate Parenting' is used to describe the responsibility of the local authority in fulfilling its role of caring for children in care and young people leaving care. The role of Corporate Parent is a legal responsibility given to local authorities under the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004.

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The Children and Safeguarding Service is accountable for achieving these best outcomes for children in care, on behalf of the Council but Corporate Parenting responsibilities extend to:



- ✓ All Shropshire Council departments and partner agencies;
- ✓ Community NHS Trust, Clinical Commissioning Group, Foundation and or Hospital Trusts;
- ✓ West Mercia Police;
- ✓ National Probation Trust;
- ✓ Schools, Academies and Further Education colleges

'Corporate Parenting'

In reality the range of potential partners is as wide as the number of agencies and organisations within the area.

**Role:** The role of the Corporate Parenting Board is to ensure our children and young people looked after and care leavers are supported to have high aspirations, achieve their potential and have good outcomes. Integral to this is the responsibility of members to advocate for our children and young people and assist in developing and delivering services, irrespective of the agency they represent. To do this, the Corporate Parenting Board has identified key areas to focus upon for improving outcomes for children and young people looked after and care leavers. Our priorities include improving engagement and participation in plans about them, with children looked after and care leavers, promoting the importance of health and wellbeing, improving educational attainment, and identifying greater opportunities from which to support our care leavers into work and adult life.

**Accountability:** The Corporate Parenting Board is accountable to Full Council. As a standing item, the Board will submit this Annual Report to the Full Council.

**See appendix 2 for details of The Corporate Parenting Board and sub-groups**

### **Corporate Parenting Board priorities identified for 2021-22:**

The following priorities were identified in the last Corporate Parenting Board Report 2021/22:

- Sign up to the Care Leavers' Covenant

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- Progress Stepping Stones to reduce the need for children to be looked after or residential care if this is not required
- Work with health and education partners to improve access to the right support at the right time
- Develop the pathway for transitions to adulthood with partner agencies and services
- Increase opportunities across the Council and with partners for care leavers to be in education, employment and training post-16
- Increase opportunities for children looked after and care leavers to contribute to service and policy development

### What we achieved:

- Full Council approved the proposals for Shropshire's Care Leavers' Covenant Offer in February 2022 and all Councillors were asked to renew their Corporate Parenting Pledge.
- The Stepping Stones project was developed and progress reported to the Corporate Parenting Board showing the initial impact of diverting children from needing to be looked after and supporting children to 'step down' from residential care to live with a family again. Further investment has been agreed for 2022/23 and reports on progress and impact will be made to the Corporate Parenting Board.
- Ofsted feedback in February 2022 confirmed that the emotional and mental wellbeing of children looked after were being met, but with considerable investment by Children's Services that could not be sustained. A joint initiative has been started led by health partners to improve the pathways for children and young people looked after and on 'the edge of care' to access the right mental health support at the right time.

### Reporting

Throughout the year the Corporate Parenting Board received the following reports:

- Fostering Annual Report 2021/22
- Annual Adoption Report from Together4Children 2021/22
- Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2021/22
- Health of Children Looked After Annual Report Q1-4 2021/22
- Virtual Head Teacher's Annual Report (Sept 20-Aug 21)
- Children in Care Council quarterly updates
- The Coram Voice Annual Report (advocacy and independent visiting) 2021/22

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In addition, presentations were received regarding the following:

- Children Looked After and Care Leavers core data
- Summary of Ofsted findings
- National Care Leavers' Week- Celebration of achievements and promotion of opportunities for Shropshire's care leavers
- Update on Stepping Stones project
- Update on Care Proceedings and the use of the Public Law Outline

The Corporate Parenting Board also had sight of the following reports:

- A report was presented to Cabinet to provide an update on the National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (September 2021)
- A report was presented to Full Council to approve Shropshire's Care Leavers' Covenant Offer (February 2022).
- A report was also received by the Shropshire Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Functions of the Corporate Parenting Board (November 2021).

### Core Performance Data April 2021-March 2022

#### Headlines

- The number of children looked after has risen in Shropshire since the onset of the Covid pandemic and we are now above the national and statistical neighbour average:
  - 31 March 2020 there were 399 children looked after
  - 31 March 2021 there were 504 children looked after
  - 31 March 2022 there were 609 children looked after
- The number starting to be looked after has increased faster than the number ceasing to be looked after, even though the number ceasing has risen faster than in previous years before 2020:
  - 2020-21-total starting 213; total ceasing 94
  - 2021-22- total starting 241; total ceasing 130
- The 3 main reasons for the rise in the number of children looked after are:



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- The rise in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking (UASC) young people via the National Transfer Scheme. At the outset of 2020 Shropshire had 8 UASCs and by the end of March 2022 there were 33.
- The rise in the number of children needing to be looked after due to significant harm. This rose through 2020/21 during Covid. 212 children were subject to care proceedings at the end of March 2021 but through 2021/22 this has started to see a decrease again to 178 by March 2022.
- The rise in the number of children living with connected foster carers. Since 2020 the number of children looked after with a connected carer has risen from 91 households (119 children) in March 2020 to 137 households (193 children) in March 2022.
- The stability of our children looked after remains in line with national average and statistical neighbours, although, as in previous years, there are a small number of children who have experienced too many moves (3+).
- We remain in line with national average and statistical neighbours in respect of the majority of our children having their annual health assessment in timescale (92%).
- Our Personal Advisors continued to keep in touch with 97% of our care leavers, and supported them to be in suitable accommodation. The number in Education, Employment and Training (EET) dropped slightly from 65% 2020 to 55% in 2021, although, as this is data taken as a snapshot on a particular date, numbers can fluctuate. We remain in line within the national average and statistical neighbours.

**See Appendix 3 for data charts**

### Progress in 2022

- With the input of Stepping Stones and pro-active social work, alongside partner agencies resuming 'business as usual', we have started to be able to support an increased number of children to return safely home to a parent.
- We have started to 'turn the curve' with children living with their connected carers as we enter 2022 with a higher number of connected carers being supported to be Special Guardians.

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### Summary of Annual Reports

#### Independent Reviewing Service



The Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Service was presented to The Corporate Parenting Board in September 2022 and provided contextual information, emerging trends and themes. It highlighted good practice and areas for improvement.

The service maintains a level of appropriately qualified, skilled and experienced permanent staff to deliver a high-quality service. IROs and social workers have been innovative in ensuring that CLA reviews take place in a timely way during COVID-19 and more CLA reviews have taken place as a series of meetings rather than a single meeting.

Children and their parents and carers continue to be encouraged to participate and share their views with their IRO to ensure their care plans reflect their wishes and feelings, even if this is not the agreed way forward for the child.

As part of the Quality, Performance and Assurance service the IRU provide robust Quality Assurance, reporting any individual issues through the Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) and any thematic issues through the IRU line management. IROs and Child Protection Chairs meet on a weekly basis with the Principal IRO for Group DRP Supervision. All formal (red), informal (amber) and unresolved DRPs are discussed, to ensure that scrutiny is being carried out and close the loop. A quarterly DRP report is completed to ensure that the loop is closed on this quality assurance and any thematic issues from DRPs are identified.

#### Core data for Children Looked After Reviews

- All children had an allocated IRO for their 1<sup>st</sup> Review.
- A total of 1393 Reviews were held for children looked after in 2021/22 compared to 1251 in 2020/21.





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- Children contributed to their Review in person (face to face or virtual), feedback using Mind of My Own or paper consultation feedback forms, or through an independent advocate provided by Coram Voice.
- The majority of Reviews were held in timescale.
- Children had their proposed permanence plans in place by their 2<sup>nd</sup> Review.
- Escalations were made to progress care plans for children when IROs noted drift or delay or a gap in services.

### Developments in 2021-22

The service has now gradually moved towards face to face Child Looked After reviews, in line with current removal of COVID restrictions and the location of the meeting is reviewed on a child by child basis. Supervision for IROs will begin to be face to face in Q1 of 2022 to 2023 and team meetings will take place face to face.

IROs have promoted the use of Mind of My Own, an online resource for children to express their views. In 2021/22 152 Mind of My Own statements were received by children and young people contributing to their voice about their care.

### Fostering Service

The Annual Fostering Service Report (2021/22) was presented to the Corporate Parenting Board at the meeting in June 2022.

The purpose of the service is to provide a comprehensive range of safe and stable foster placements with approved foster carers to meet the needs of children who are looked after by the local authority.

To achieve this, the service aims to recruit, assess, train, support and supervise foster carers who have the appropriate skills or experience to provide quality placements.

The pool of Shropshire foster carers continues to include placements for a wide range of children and young people, from pre-adoption babies, through to the more challenging teenagers, and respite carers and placements specifically for children with disabilities called Family Based Shared Care.

In addition to assessing and supporting in house mainstream foster carers, the service also assess Family and Friends connected person's foster carers. To do this, the work is timetabled and completed within Public Law Outline timescales and court directions.

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The service also assesses potential Special Guardians and produces Special Guardianship reports for Looked after Children and Non-Looked after Children, as well as managing private fostering referrals and assessments.

### Key messages:

When Shropshire was inspected by Ofsted in February 2022 the Fostering Service was judged as Good.

- 7 mainstream Foster Carer households were presented at Fostering Panel during this time compared to 39 Connected Person Foster Carer households.
  - There were **182** Fostering Households on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 (including in house foster carers and Connected Person foster carers). This is divided into 70 mainstream fostering households and 112 connected person households. This overall number did not include 26 connected persons foster carer households which are under Reg 24 temporary approval.
- The number of new connected carer viability requests for this period is 230 which is a 15% increase on last year's number of 200 viability referrals and a 142% increase on 2019/20 figure of 95 viabilities.
  - During this period 12 (11 for specific young people/transferred from foster carers) households were approved at panel to become Supported Board & Lodgings (SBL) providers.
- In the year 2021-2022, 20 young people who were looked after turned 18 in this period, 4 males and 16 females. 9 of these remained as 'staying put' or SBL with their former Foster Carers.
- In this period, 9 children were matched with their carers. Out of these 3 children were matched with in house foster carers, and 6 children were matched with external foster carers.
- During this period, there were 17 children who had experienced more than 2 placement moves, although some of these moves were for positive reasons such as a move to an adoptive family.
- By the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, there were 4 private fostering arrangements on-going from the previous year, and a further 2 new private fostering arrangements assessed between 1st April 2021 and the 31st of March 2022.



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- Between 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022 18 Special Guardianship Orders were granted and of these 14 were for children looked after.

### Developments in 2021/22

**Recruitment-** There have been ongoing developments to the fostering recruitment process over the last 12 months. The digital approach to information events has been maintained and enhanced as this proved successful through COVID restrictions.

We have enhanced new digital mediums, new access-points to engage with the prospective carers and increased child specific recruitment and step-down campaigns for children needing to move out of residential care.

**Mockingbird-** Together4Children Regional Adoption Agency are piloting Mockingbird in all four partner agencies. Mockingbird is a new way of supporting foster carers and empowering them to support each other through the development of constellations with 8-10 families in each with one hub carer and one liaison worker supporting them all.

**Special Guardianship-** Post Order support is available for all Special Guardians, this year we have grown the support offer to include access to 'Kinship' organisation and have recruited to a permanent senior practitioner to support the existing social work post.

**Shropshire Foster Carers Association (SFCA)-** The SFCA was not able to meet face to face during COVID restrictions but has started to again this last year. They continue to meet regularly with the service management team to contribute to developments and advocate for the carers. The SFCA representatives will also be involved in new projects that are emerging bringing the foster carer voice to the fore.

### Actions going forward include

- New training has already been agreed for the 2022/2023 training and development programme
- Business Case for new Kinship to Permanence Team approved and is now in place

### Appendix 4 Full Annual Fostering Report 2021/22

### Adoption

Shropshire is a member of the Together4Children Adoption Service alongside, Telford & Wrekin, Staffordshire and Stoke. Adoption Services are delivered from a joint Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire Hub.



## LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Together4Children is responsible for the recruitment, training, approval and support of prospective adopters and adoptive families, finding and matching of prospective adopters for children needing an adoptive family, and adopted adults/birth parents counselling and support.

Shropshire Children's Services remain responsible for identifying our children who may need an adoptive family, preparation of Child Permanence Reports and Agency Decision Making to determine whether adoption is the right plan for a child, taking the legal action necessary to secure permanence through adoption when this is the right plan and supporting children and birth families through the adoption process up to the making of the Adoption Order.

The numbers of children that are referred to the service has continued to increase as has the number of Shropshire children placed for adoption and ultimately had adoption orders granted. Together4Children has continued to evidence some good work in placing children with prospective adopters the majority of which have been sibling groups which indicates their effectiveness as a team in ensuring that sibling groups are, where they can be, placed together.

An Annual Adoption Report was presented to the Corporate Parenting Board at the meeting in June 2022 from Together4Children -Annual Adoption Report Part 2 – Partner LA  
Additional Annual Report Information to Shropshire

### Key messages:

When Shropshire Council had an Ofsted inspection in February 2022, the Adoption Hub Team had the opportunity to showcase the good work that they have done with Shropshire children this year and have maintained the judgement as Good.

- The numbers of Shropshire children in need of adoption have been rising over the last three reporting years as can be seen in the data. This year there have been significantly higher numbers of Shropshire children placed for adoption.

Children	19/20	20/21	21/22
No. of Children for whom an ADM Decision (Plan of Adoption) was made	21	26	28
No. of children Placed for Adoption	12	13	20
No. of Children for whom an Adoption Order was granted	7	8	12

# SHROPSHIRE

## LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- Out of the **20** children that were placed for adoption during this year **16** were placed with a sibling.
- Due to delays with the Courts during COVID restrictions, at the end of March 2022 there were still 19 Shropshire children placed and waiting for adoption orders.
- There has been an improvement in timeliness for Shropshire children from the date they became looked after to adoption over the last 12 months.
- There has been a significant increase during the last 2 years in the average time it takes to place a child for adoption once we have the legal order in place to do so
- There were 13 Shropshire children at the end of Q4 2021/22 with a Placement Order who had not yet moved into a prospective adoptive home. However, only 1 child had not been matched with prospective adopters.
- The children who we were actively family finding for at the end of March 2022 were all single children. Most of these children were of white British ethnicity with only 1 child being from an ethnically diverse background.
- Fortunately, Shropshire children have not experienced any adoption disruptions in 2021/22.
- Plans changed away from adoption (following the Agency Decision) for a total of 15 children in 2020-21.
- 7 Shropshire children were placed under early permanence arrangements (Foster to Adopt) in 2021/22.



### Developments in 2021/22

The reasons for there being a longer time to place a child with their adopters are an indication of the higher numbers of children in need of an adoptive family than previously and indicates the ambitions of Shropshire Council to make adoption a viable permanency option for more children.

There is also a longer time to wait to get a match onto Adoption Panel than in previous years -this is currently on average around 4 months, and waiting for the ADM decision now takes longer than previously due to the complexities of being part of a Regionalised adoption agency.

# SHROPSHIRE

## LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Together4Children has continued to work closely with the permanence coordinator to have a collective understanding of the children in need of adoption and so she understands the profiles of adopters coming through.

### Actions going forward include:

- Increase the recruitment and approval of prospective adopters to increase the choice of match for a child/sibling group
- Develop an Adoption Pathway so that social workers are clear on the actions required and timescales to increase the timeliness and quality of decision-making and matching

### Health:

The quarterly reports from the Health sub-group were presented to the Corporate Parenting Board in June, September and December 2021 and March 2022. The following key issues and risks were highlighted regarding:

- Initial Health Assessments (IHAs)

In Q.1 & 2 IHA timescales were between 60-90%. The target is 80%. A new process for requesting initial health assessments was introduced in 2021 in Shropshire. There were 'teething' issues that resulted in a significant dip in performance in Q.3 and 4. However, this has now been addressed.

- Review Annual Health Assessments

Performance for Review HAs remained high at around the target of 90%.

There can be delays in completion of Health Assessments for children placed out of area.

Consent for IHAs can be problematic if not gained at the point the child becomes looked after.

There is a challenge in gathering information to inform an Initial Health Assessment for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people being transferred directly from port due to the speed and lack of assessment of needs at that time.



# SHROPSHIRE

## LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- Dental checks

There has been a decrease in the number of children able to access a dentist post-Covid, although this was gradually increasing by the end of Q.4

- Immunisations

The Looked After Children Health Team now record all children who are fully immunised, those partially immunised and those with an unknown immunisations status which more accurately reflects the cohort immunisation status.

The Community immunisation team are restoring the service, delivering and administering Immunisations to school age children. Immunisations for the under 5s are administered by the GP.

Looked After Children Nurses provide training to Foster Carers which promotes understanding, raises awareness and compliance of Immunisations.

With agreement from the Designated Nurses, HPV data is now collated within the overall data for Immunisations.

- Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs)

These are sent on an annual basis to the carers of children looked after. The responses are scored to provide a measure of a child's emotional and mental health as experienced by their carers. SDQs should be shared with the Looked After Children Nurse to inform the Annual Health Assessments. There remains a historic low rate of return in Shropshire and so the completion was promoted in 2021. There was an increase in Q1 and Q2 to 60% but this declined dramatically in Q.3 and Q.4 with no obvious reason found.

- Access to Child Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

This did not form part of the Health LAC Dashboard in 2021/22, although data had been requested by the Health sub-group.

In Shropshire the CAMHS is known as BeeU. Referrals to BeeU for children looked after are made through Space for Conversation which is a consultation between a BeeU representative and the specialist therapeutic social worker in our Fostering Services, with the child's social worker and sometimes also their carer.

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## LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

In February 2022 it was established that there had been 100+ Space for Consultation conversations in 2021, with a small % resulting in referral to BeeU.

- Health Passports for care leavers

The Looked After Children's Nurse and Designated Dr offer a final health appointment to all young people looked after before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to discuss their health history and ongoing health needs. Even if the appointment is declined, a letter is sent to each young person as they approach their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday with their health history as recorded. for them to keep.

- Feedback from children and carers

236 children and young people and their carers gave feedback to the Looked After Children health professionals in 2021/22 using the Meridian feedback tool. Some comments:

'first assessment so didn't know what to expect. felt relaxed and comfortable'

'Brilliant! Thank you'

'felt listened to and supported'

'it was good and a relaxed assessment'

'Excellent timing and supportive!'

'I enjoyed talking to Sarah about training as a Paramedic'.

'Talking to the Nurse about my health and emotional wellbeing - I felt listened to'.

'talking about potty training (Carer)'

'The Nurse answered all my questions – thank you'

### Developments in 2021/22

- From December 2021 all Health Assessments completed by SCHAT LAC Nurses are offered in person (face to face) appointments for RHA. All Care Leavers are contacted directly by a Looked After Children's Nurse and offered face to face appointments for both RHA and Health Passports.
- A risk assessment tool was developed by the Named Nurse Looked After Children in order to support decision making when appointing to virtual/in person assessments. This is no longer in use as all Looked After Children are offered in person assessments.
- The Team have developed and implemented electronic Audit tools to quality assure Review Health Assessments and Health Passports – quality standards are categorised as GOOD or REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT. All RHAs and Health Passports completed by the SCHAT LAC Team have been rated as GOOD through Quality Assurance and Audit process.





## LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- Face to face Foster Carer training is scheduled for Shropshire Foster Carers from March 2022 to March 2023.
- The Team are now offering additional after school/early evening appointments for RHAs to minimise disruption to education for Care Leavers and young people aged 14 years plus (year 10-13).

### Looking Forward:

Looked After Children Health Team:

- Checklist developed as aide memoire for social workers to complete all tasks needed to ensure children looked after have a timely and informed health assessment

Led by the newly formed Integrated Care Board (ICB) and jointly between Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin:

- Working group to progress a Crisis Care Mental Health Pathway for children and young people
- Working Group to review the Mental Health of Looked After Children using the I Thrive model

Children's Services:

- SDQ improvement action plan

Regional:

- Intensive Residential Outreach Care (IROC) consultation

This service is being rolled out to Shropshire from October 2022 to support the avoidance of admission to inpatient care for children looked after or 'on the edge of care' and to support their rehabilitation to community-based residential or other form of care in the community from hospital.

### Education:

The last Annual Report from the Virtual School covers the academic year September 2020-July 2021.



### Key Messages:

#### Attendance:

Overall attendance for all key stages for the 5 half terms is 88%.

By key stages this is:

# SHROPSHIRE

## LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- KS1 – 92%
- KS2 – 90%
- KS3 – 88%
- KS4 – 77%

During the first half of summer term 2021 14% of pupils missed time in school due to covid requirements.

### Inclusion:

- 20 pupils (6%) received Fixed Term Exclusions. This is lower than in previous years however not comparable due to Covid.
- 2 of these were permanently excluded with 2 further permanent exclusions avoided.
- In September 2020 there were 14 pupils on part time timetables. 12 of these pupils had an EHCP. 7 of these pupils had been on reduced time in education during the whole period. 5 of these were appropriate due to emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils are only briefly on the monitoring list while waiting for a placement at TMBSS or during a transition period into a new school or setting.
- 8 pupils were without a school placement during this period including the 2 pupils who received permanent exclusions. All were secondary age.
- Only 1 pupil has been in unregistered provision this year.

### Attainment

Shropshire children looked after achieved just below the National CLA indicator for Combined for those predicted to achieve Expected Standard or above – but in progress Shropshire children in care progressed better than other children in care in the West Midlands and nationally.

There were 32 out of 36 young people in year 11 who had Teacher assessed grades for GCSEs. This was a national response to the COVID restrictions to ensure fairness across the UK.

Indicator	Level 4+ in English	Level 4+ in Maths	Level 4+ English & Maths	5 or more Level 4 and above
Total number	14	13	13	16

# SHROPSHIRE

## LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Percentage	43.7%	40.6%	40.6%	50%
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### End of Key Stage 2 'Predicted Performance Outcomes' for SSD903 cohort \*

Indicator and predicted outcome	Reading	Writing	Maths
Average progress score	+2.8	+2.81	+2.69

\*Children did not undertake SATS in summer 2021

### Education, Employment and Training post 16

- Successes include - one young person progressing to University to study Law, two young people going onto Access to Higher Education programmes, 19 young people progressing onto or have completed Level 3 courses and 9 young people progressing onto Level 2 programmes
- In June 2021, 81% of the post 16 cohort had full or part time education, employment or training. The overall NEET figure at this time was 17.7% for 16-18 year olds.
- Of the 36 young people in year 11, 94% were forecast to be EET

### Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

- Every looked after child of school age has a PEP within their first term of being looked after
- The Virtual School supported social workers to complete PEPs through COVID restrictions and most PEP meetings were still being held virtually through the 2020/21 academic year.

### Cultural Entitlement

**Band Hive Summer 2021-** Eight young people aged 14-15 attended a music workshop at the Hive over 4 days which culminated in a performance on the last day. This was well attended by Foster Carers, Social Workers and VS staff. I was able to attend - and it was a joy to see the young people perform the songs they had written, as well as some covers and a drumming piece.

# SHROPSHIRE

## LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

**Outback to Basics day lead by Smash Life**-The children who attended this 'forest school' day thoroughly enjoyed it and engaged fully with the activities and the 'youth work' aspects of the day. The day was supported by VS staff and there is potential for similar activities in the future.

### Developments in 2021/22

**Cornovii and Morris** – <https://shropshire.gov.uk/looked-after-children/shropshire-virtual-school/future-career-insights-for-the-virtual-school/>

This has been successfully launched and we are now tracking uptake and use of these resources. This collaborative effort has been part of Cornovii putting in place a social contract as part of the wider Corporate Parenting response. We see this as a legacy resource and will continue to encourage all our young people to access it.

**Early Years PEPs** -were a high priority for development in terms of improving completion and quality. In terms of PEPs in general, we set a target for 60% of PEPs being of good or outstanding quality for the new academic year 2021-22.

**Use of Pupil Premium + (PP+) Government funding**- PP+ was used to buy in allocations from the Educational Psychology Service for individual assessments, longer term work to support children and the attachment/trauma aware training. It was also used to commission Aspire who mentor our year 10 and 11 students when they need additional personalised support to work towards a robust post 16 EET plan.

### Looking Forward

- Establish clear data baselines and reporting templates/processes for attainment and progress (including end KS2 performance predicted outcomes and SSD 903 reporting), attendance, progression and PEPs.
- To enhance data integrity for attendance, attainment & progress and PEPs.
- Use data analysis to further inform draft School Development Plan – and create Task and Finish groups.
- Fast track recruitment to PLAC/CIN posts and to establish baseline data for CIN and CP indicators
- New VS HT to meet key leaders in the LA
- Seek Virtual School Twitter account
- Begin development of participation, including competition for young people to design Shropshire VS logo.
- Revisiting the Terms of Reference for the Governing Body

# SHROPSHIRE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

## Conclusions

This year 2021-22 has been challenging as the country emerged from COVID 'lockdown' with families and professionals in a less resilient place than before and trying to come to terms with the impact of the loss of loved ones, reconnecting with family and friends, financial pressures and services gradually resuming 'Business as Usual'.

As Corporate Parents we have tried to support our children and young people and their families and carers, but have continued to respond to safeguard more children through legal intervention and children needing to become 'looked after', although there are signs this is reducing as we enter 2022-23.

There have been increasing pressures to find safe and suitable homes for children with reduced choice as numbers increased. Despite these pressures our evidence in terms of data and feedback from Ofsted shows we continue to care for our looked after children and young people and care leavers to a GOOD standard.

Feedback from our children and young people tells us where we need to improve and we are listening.

## Corporate Parenting Developments planned for 2022-2023:

### Reducing the need for children to become looked after and returning children back to birth families when possible:

- The 'Stepping Stones' project has received Council support for significant investment and development to prevent more children from needing to be looked after;
- Shropshire is part of a West Midlands Regional development to improve the Public Law Outline pathway, to prevent the need for families to experience undue legal intervention in their lives;
- Develop further the 'pathways to permanence'

### Increasing support for children and young people who have experienced trauma and poor mental health:

- Development of a 'Crisis Pathway' with health partners for young people experiencing poor mental health



## LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- Progress the Action Plan to improve mental health services to children and young people looked after with health colleagues

### **Increasing options and support for young people moving to adulthood:**

- The new registered provision for 16/17 year olds to support them towards adulthood is now planned to be open in January 2023
- Develop a specific Joint Housing Protocol for care leavers
- Shropshire is part of the West Midlands development of a Regional Offer to care leavers;
- A base for our care leavers to meet together and with their Personal Advisors and to deliver Preparation for Adulthood training, support and advice
- Relaunch of the Care Leavers' Covenant with partners across Shropshire