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Item

Public



Annual Report of the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education

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1. Synopsis

This report provides an update on key achievements and developments within Early Help, Children's Social Care & Safeguarding and Education & Achievement from April 2022 to March 2023. This includes updates following recent Ofsted inspections and some early indications of education achievement during the summer term 2023.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report provides an update on key achievements and developments within Early Help, Children's Social Care and Safeguarding and Education and Achievement from April 2022 to March 2023. This includes updates following recent Ofsted inspections and some early indications of education achievement during the summer term 2023.
- 2.2. Children's Social Care and Safeguarding was last inspected in November 2018 when a Joint Targeted Area Inspection was undertaken. The most recent Ofsted Inspection was undertaken in February 2022 when the Service was graded Good overall.

- 2.3. Ofsted and CQC completed the Area SEND revisit inspection in November 2022 identifying 3 out of 6 areas had improved to a sufficient level. The 3 remaining areas are subject to an Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) monitored by the DfE and NHS England.
- 2.4. In 2021 the Local Government Association (LGA) undertook a test of assurance following the formation of the People's Directorate. The outcome was positive. The LGA were invited back in November 2022 and gave feedback that they were assured in all areas and significant impact could be evidenced.
- 2.5. The Council's vision for every child in Shropshire is that *"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."*
- 2.6. This vision is at the heart of the Shropshire Plan, if we support families at the earliest opportunity, tackle inequalities, breaking generational cycles through changing historical patterns of behaviours should enable, where possible, children to:
 - a) Live safely within their birth families or with connected carers without intervention from Services.
 - b) Lead the best life they want to live.
 - c) Be part of a healthy, safe community where they have a sense of belonging.
- 2.7. The last Portfolio Holder's report was presented to Council in 2020 less than two months into the first national lockdown. No one could have imagined the impact of the pandemic on the Country at national and local levels. In Shropshire, Covid 19 placed significant pressure on children and families with many staff directly affected by the virus. Despite the impact, our social workers continued visiting children, following government PPE guidance and prioritising the most vulnerable children as well as those in need of immediate safeguarding.
- 2.8. As we have moved further away from those unprecedented times, we have seen what would appear to be a lasting impact nationally on the mental and emotional wellbeing of children and families, and in Shropshire we have not been exempt in experiencing those same issues. We have seen: -
 - a. An increasing in demand for statutory support particularly children experiencing physical harm.
 - b. An increase in request for assessment and support for our disabled children.
 - c. Experienced workforce challenges, some workers have left, but our rate of retention is improving. We have for the first time focussed on converting our long-term agency staff to permanent contracts.
 - d. Undertaken a review of our Early Help Service which has highlighted that the impact of reducing investment has led directly to the increase in demand on statutory services. An Early Help Transformation programme has been launched.

- e. Evidenced that CHAST (Compass Help and Support Team) launched in September 2022 has started to reduce the number of children requiring a Social Work Assessment and therefore a Statutory Service.
- f. Children looked after numbers have increased by 8% in year.
- g. Stepping Stones has achieved a total of 55 children avoiding becoming looked after and 20 children have stepped into a home setting, resulting in a saving to the Council £6.83 million and better outcomes for those children.
- h. More children ceased to be looked after than became looked after in year.
- i. With the foster carers fee uplift, we have seen a significant increase in enquiries & applications giving us the potential over time to be less reliant on external placements.
- j. Children placed for adoption and placements through early permanence has increased.
- k. All our Children's Homes in Shropshire are Ofsted rated Good or Outstanding.

2.9. The key highlights of services provided within Learning and Skills are identified below:

- a. High parental preferences for primary and secondary applications for school places, both above national average.
- b. High uptake of Free Early Education at 2, 3 and 4 for eligible families, all above the national average.
- c. Maintained strong provision across the Early Years providers with more than national averages being judged Good or Outstanding.
- d. Maintained strong school age provision (primary and secondary) with the percentage being judged Good or Outstanding in line with national averages.
- e. Emerging 2023 primary school outcomes data indicates that educational standards have risen in a number of areas, compared to 2022.
- f. Significant increases in attendance at primary and secondary, c.5% higher than 2021/22, and both above national average. Continuing to reduce persistent absence at primary and secondary with fewer children and young people persistently absent than national averages.
- g. Since September 2022 increased specialist provision in Shropshire by commissioning more than 100 additional places in pre-16 state-funded special schools. This is more than a 25% increase in places.
- h. Introduced 'Developing Inclusive Practice' days to bring together leaders from the education, health and social care system to share opportunities and challenges to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- i. Co-produced the Shropshire Ordinarily Available Provision (SOAP) framework to develop a clear and more consistent expectation of what support should be provided to all children and young people through high quality teaching and SEND Support. This will be implemented from the start of the 2/23/24 academic year.
- j. Educational Psychology capacity continues to grow as the impact of our recruitment and retention strategy strengthens our team. This is enabling further support to our education settings and children and young people.
- k. The percentage of 16 and 17 year olds in Shropshire who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is 2.3%, lower than the national average of 2.8%. More young people with an EHCP are accessing a Supported Internship in Shropshire than the West Midlands average.
- l. The Shropshire Virtual School continues to provide strong support to children looked after (CLA) by Shropshire. Attendance has improved for

children looked after and there have been no permanent exclusions for this group.

- m. The quality of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) continues to increase and support the development of children supported by the virtual school. Good quality PEPs are in place for all year groups now, from our youngest children through to our young people studying in Post 16.
- n. Shropshire Music Service is more inclusive, offering a range of free ensembles weekly at various locations around the county, resulting in attendance trebling and more new engagers in music.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That the report is accepted in its entirety.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

(NB This will include the following: Impact on Children and Vulnerable Adults, Risk Management, Human Rights, Equalities, Community and other Consultation)

- 4.1. Children's Services and Learning and Skills hold risk registers to identify the key risks, and mitigations, associated with the services provided.
- 4.2. Children's Services, Early Help and Learning and Skills are all actively engaged in service improvement and continuous improvement. This is being supported by the Office of the Chief Executive and wider teams.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. Children's Services, Early Help and Learning and Skills are all featured within the MTFS programme. The progress towards the delivery of the MTFS are monitored and reported separately.
- 5.2. Updated demand forecasts are in development across Children's Services, Early Help and Learning and Skills to inform financial modelling and future MTFS work. The output of this activity will be reported separately.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. Energy and fuel consumption – as children's social work has a statutory requirement to see children in their own home, service delivery relies on social workers using their own cars. Similarly, Educational Psychologists, Education Welfare Officers and other front line services visit homes and schools.
- 6.2. Learning and Skills is actively working with the Passenger Transport Group to reduce and minimise the impact of travel across Shropshire. This is challenging given the increases in demand experienced by the service.

- 6.3. Renewable energy generation – no effect
- 6.4. Carbon offsetting or mitigation – no effect
- 6.5. Climate change adaptation – no effect

7. Background

7.1 Children's Social Care and Safeguarding

- 7.1.1. Leadership has been in the main stable throughout the year at both Senior and Team manager levels. Management capacity has increased to reflect growing demand in particular areas of the Service e.g. the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Transitions Team or as an invest to save through piloting new ways of working e.g. Compass Help and Support Team (CHAST).
- 7.1.2. Caseloads and complexity have increased with more children requiring a higher level of statutory intervention. There has been a significant rise in assessments for children aged 0–4. There are several causal factors including the ongoing economic crisis, parental neglect, and access to and availability of health services post pandemic, additionally, we are seeing a very worrying increase in harm, particularly physical injuries to our most vulnerable children.
- 7.1.3. We have seen an overall 78% increase in requests for assessments within our Disabled Children's Team, however, access to and availability of community resources for disabled children post pandemic have not fully recovered, resulting in a budgetary impact with Social Care funding the gap to support children to remain safely at home.
- 7.1.4. Despite the ongoing challenges of recruiting Social Workers nationally, our Social Workers tell us that Shropshire is a good place to work. Although our vacancy rate is 13%, we have a strong retention rate. In year our sickness rates have reduce from 4.2 to 3.8% and despite 17 leavers, we had 26 new starters including 14 agency Social Workers who converted to permanent contracts. We also continue to grow our own through our successful Trainee Social Worker Programme of which 6 successfully passed their Social Work Degrees in the last year.
- 7.1.5. With the closure of Mount McKinley, all Children's Services moved to the West Wing in Shirehall between February and March 2023.

Early Help.

- 7.1.6. For over 10 years there has been a national decline in investment in Early Help. An external Review of our Early Help service was commissioned in 2022 which highlighted the impact of how reducing the service had significantly increased demand within Children's Services. In the last 2 months it has become increasingly obvious that an opportunity had been missed to support families at the earliest opportunity to divert them away from statutory services. I am therefore pleased that there has been a renewed investment of £900K in Targeted Early Help increasing the budget to £3.1 million providing much needed additional capacity across Early Help.
- 7.1.7. Also, with the retirement of the Head of Early Help in March 2023 a decision was made to align Early Help with Children's Social Care and Safeguarding for a period. The purpose of aligning the two areas is to develop a whole systems approach to

working with the right children, at the right time and at the right level as well as a collaborative approach to ensuring that the new Supporting Families Criteria is known and embedded by all partner agencies. This work will continue throughout 2023 into 2024. [OBJ]

Children in Need of Help and Protection

7.1.8. In September 2022, the Compass Help and Support Team (CHAST) was launched as a single point of contact for professionals and the public to be able to access immediate support and help for families and ultimately signpost away from statutory services. In the first six months since launch the impact of CHAST has resulted in:

- Only 5% of the 448 families stepped back up for a Social Worker Assessment.
- A stabilisation in the number of repeat contacts to Children's Services, we have turned the curve there is no longer an upwards trajectory.
- There has been a significant reduction in the number of contacts leading to no further action.
- There has been a reduction in the number of Social Work Assessments leading to no further action.
- An estimated cost avoidance to the Council of £850k having diverted families away from an assessment. Thereby the pilot paying for itself through cost avoidance.

7.1.9 TREES Team (Together Reducing and Ending Exploitation in Shropshire) has seen a steady increase of referrals in the last twelve months. In total 408 referrals were received of which only 19% had previously been known to the Team. The total referrals are a significant increase on the previous year. There has also been a significant increase in the number of children being assessed as high risk of child exploitation going from 7% in 2021 – 2022 to 17% in the last year, this is likely due to the number of vulnerable children now being tracked compared to previous years. Our main exploitation hotspot in Shropshire is Shrewsbury Centre which appears to be the focal point for criminal activity but there are other hotspots around the County including areas of Market Drayton, Whitchurch, Oswestry, and Ellesmere.

7.1.10. The most recent Ofsted Inspection took place between 7 and 11 February 2022 and followed the new inspection framework introduced in 2019, the inspection took place over 4 days and judged Shropshire Council Children's Services to be 'Good' overall. The previous inspection in 2018 had also judged the Service to children to be 'Good'.

The inspectors' key findings included:

- a. Children in Shropshire are benefiting from the high aspirations of senior leaders for their services to continue to improve children's lives.
- b. During the pandemic children's services continued to provide a high level of support to children, including ongoing face to face visits.
- c. When Social workers know that children are at risk of harm, they make decisions that are in children's best interest to make sure they are safe. Including when children may be experiencing exploitation.

- d. Social Workers are good at listening to children and parents to work out the best way to improve their lives. They make sure that children can live with their parents wherever possible.

The Inspection also found that some children in need of help and protection were not benefitting from robust application of the Public Law Outline (PLO) and that some children were waiting too long before a decision was made to enter a legal process. We responded quickly by:

- a. Creating a PLO toolkit providing clear guidance for practitioners through the process.
- b. Ensured that referrals for Family Group conferences are made at the earliest point to support the creation of a family-led plan.
- c. Firmed up management oversight at key points.
- d. Aligned Stepping Stones with PLO to provide intensive support to families to divert families away from court proceedings.

Corporate Parenting

7.1.11. Councillor Judith Blake (Chair, LGA Children and Young People Board) said: - ***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 cannot stay safely 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 responsibility is not only for the Lead Member, CEO or Director of People, it is all of our responsibility to look 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.***

7.1.12. In Shropshire we use the secure base model to ensure children develop and maintain secure attachments in order to thrive and be enabled to have opportunities, life-long links and a network of support that will last into and throughout their adult lives.

7.1.13. We have seen an 8% increase in our Children Looked After numbers from 609 on 31st March 2022 to 659 on the same date in 2023. There are 3 reasons for the increase in our numbers:

- a. The rise in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people via the National Transfer Scheme, at the end of March 2022 there were 22 UASC and at end of March 2023 we had 45 young people.
- b. An increase in the number of children needing to be looked after due to significant harm.
- c. An increase in the number of children living with connected carers (extended family or friends).

However, in the same period we have seen our numbers starting lower and numbers ceasing increased.

In 2021 we had a total of 241 children come into care with 139 ceasing.

In 2022 we had a total of 205 children come into care with 159 ceasing.

- 7.1.14. The Stepping Stones Project was developed as an invest to save project going live in July 2021. The purpose of Stepping Stones is to provide intensive wrap around support to families with the purpose of avoiding the need for a child to become looked after. The Project is unique in that it not only works therapeutically with children but also their parents.
- 7.1.15. Within the first 8 months the team successfully avoided 26 children from becoming looked after by the Council and supported 6 young people to step down from residential or foster homes back to their birth families achieving an in year saving to the Council of £1.961million. In August 2022 Council fully supported the upscale of the Project from 2 to 6 teams, recruitment commenced in October 2022 with new recruits starting in employment between December 2022 and April 2023. In the 12 months to March 2023 the team exceeded the success of the previous year supporting 264 children, the Family Group Conferencing Chairs completed 174 FGC's supporting families to develop their own safety plans. Stepping Stones achieved 29 children avoiding becoming looked after by the Council and stepping down 14 young people into a family environment a saving to the Council of £4.87 million. Over the last two years Stepping Stones has achieved a total of 55 children avoiding becoming looked after and 20 children have stepped into a home setting saving to the Council £6.83 million.
- 7.1.16. Shropshire's Corporate Parenting Board brings together representation from elected members, senior leaders, and practitioners as well as our children looked after and care leavers. The purpose of the Board is to ensure that we as a local authority and our partners are discharging our responsibilities towards the children we look after and those who leave our care when they become adults.
- 7.1.17. The work of the Board has included working closely with health partners to address pathways for early identification of the emotional and mental health needs of children and young people leading to timely interventions put in place.
- 7.1.18. The Board has also continued to support the use of Mind of My Own a web-based App which allows children and young people to share their views and express themselves to professionals in over 100 different languages making sure their voices are heard and reflected in planning for their care. We have seen a 68% increase in children sharing their voice through the Mind of My Own App in 2022 from 57 in 2021 to 99 children in 2022, 15% of our looked after population making a total of 179 statements. There is more work to be done to increase the usage of this valuable tool to ensure our children's voices are heard.
- 7.1.19. In February 2022 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 number of Care Leavers in education, employment or training has increased from 50% in 2020 – 2021 to 58%, the Leaving Care Team have maintained links with 95% of our Care leavers in the last year.
- 7.1.20. In terms of educational achievements in 2022–2023, despite the challenges of Covid we have seen real progress, from a Cohort of 34, 12 young people achieved

between 8 and 11 GCSE's. Additionally, 3 of our Care Leavers graduated University successfully achieving a degree.

Placement Sufficiency

- 7.1.21. Over the course of the pandemic there has been unprecedented increase in demand for placements for children becoming looked after nationally with not enough placements to meet the demand. In Shropshire we saw an increase in the use of external fostering agencies and residential homes because there was no fostering capacity.
- 7.1.22. We have focussed on increasing our internal pool of foster carers and in 2022 Council agreed a business case to uplift our fostering fees bringing them in line with neighbouring councils. We have targeted our marketing focussing on a variety of digital platforms and in January 2023 we saw a 200% increase in fostering enquiries more than tripling the total number of enquiries in 2022. The increase to our fostering fees went live in April 2023. Increasing our pool of internal foster carers will reduce the need for high-cost residential placements and additionally reduce the number of children placed out of Shropshire.
- 7.1.23. The highest approvals within the fostering Service are connected person carers (a person with whom the child has an established relationship with including grandparents, aunts, uncles, close family friends). 28% of our looked after children live with a connected carer and at year end this totalled 129 families and overall, 42% of our looked after children are living in a family environment (not including foster home), living with a connected carer, placed with adopters, or live with their parents.
- 7.1.24. Shropshire is part of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) Together 4 Children along with our regional partners Stoke, Staffordshire and Telford. The Service launched in October 2020. We have seen a significant increase in the number of children adopted with 17% (27) in 2022 – 2023 in contrast to 8.7% (12) in the previous year. Of the children placed for adoption 50% were placed with foster to adopt carers as part of early permanence decisions. This reduces the need for children to have subsequent moves from foster carers to adopters so will have the benefit of a forever family from the day they are discharged from hospital.
- 7.1.25 All our Childrens Homes in Shropshire are rated Good or Outstanding. Ofsted say we are providing an excellent quality of care to our children. We have increased our internal residential capacity by almost 50% since 2020 we now own 6 homes. Our newest home Caer Bryn opened in March 2023 enabling 4 young people to transition to independence in a supported setting and includes a self-contained flat. Our 1 bed home is currently closed whilst we recruit staff and develop the model of intervention to care for a child in a solo home.
- 7.1.26. For the children living in our homes, their needs were such that no external residential placement options were forthcoming for them or the cost to care for them was significantly high. Placement stability in our homes is robust, children are making considerable progress and achieving positive outcomes, they move on as part of planned transitions. In the last year two children returned to the care of their

families and with support from Stepping Stones, there are plans for others to also be reunified.

- 7.1.27. Chelmaren is being repurposed to align with Stepping Stones as a short to medium term home where if a child cannot be supported to remain at home, there will be a planned period where they will become looked after for an intensive support package to both the young person and their parent / carers as part of an agreed plan of reunification within 3 – 6 months. It is hoped that this will lead to children becoming looked after for shorter periods and reduce the need for high-cost external residential placements.

Voices of our Children and Young People

- 7.1.28. Ending with an extract from the voice of a young person who lived in one of our homes as they left to move on to start life in their own home.

"... What a journey, I used to hate this place and look at me now, I don't want to leave. And that is because of the physical and emotional journey I have been through here. I have come so far. I used to hate all of you! And now I love you all. Ironically, thank you! Never thought I'd say it. This house has taught me everything I know. How to express. How to Cope, how to succeed. 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 knows that. You haven't done such a bad job after all. I will never forget this crazy house. Always, improve what can be improved! Speak out! Children and carers! You never know whose life you will change."

- 7.1.29. Key Priorities for the year

- Delivering on the MTFS savings plan and addressing in year budget pressures.
- Progressing the Early Health Transformation with a view to a new Early Help Front Door by September 2023 and a whole service transformation by April 2024.
- Reducing the number of families involved in statutory services.
- Increasing our internal pool of foster carers
- Stepping children down from residential homes into a family environment.

7.2 Education and Achievement

School admissions

- 7.2.1 Shropshire Council continues to meet a high number of parental preferences in applications for school places, performing strongly in both regional and national comparisons for primary and secondary applications.
- 7.2.2 Due to a high birth rate for the September 2023 Year 7 cohort, there was exceptional increased demand for secondary school places this year in Shropshire and across the West Midlands, with many secondary schools exceeding their PAN on National Offer Day to accommodate the bulge year. Parents were encouraged to submit three preferences of schools, although 52.51% only named one preference, with 16.67% naming three.

7.2.3. 89.72% of Shropshire parents were allocated a place at their first preference secondary school, giving a ranking of third highest of West Midlands local authorities and eighth highest for our statistical neighbours. This compares with 80.17% for the West Midlands, 91.37% for statistical neighbours and 82.58% for England. 96.5% of Shropshire parents were offered a place at one of their preferred secondary schools, in comparison to 95.0% in the West Midlands, 96.9% for statistical neighbours and 95.6% in England.

7.2.4 In terms of primary applications, Shropshire ranked second highest of all West Midlands local authorities and seventh highest for statistical neighbours. The DfE dataset shows that 95.68% first preference requests were met across Shropshire compared with 93.12% for the West Midlands, 95.43% for statistical neighbours and 92.5% for England. 99.04% of Shropshire parents were offered a place at one of their preferred primary schools, in comparison to 98.62% in the West Midlands, 98.94% for statistical neighbours and 98.61% in England.

7.2.5 To ensure that parental preferences for school places remain positive, and to improve our comparative position relative to our statistical neighbours in particular, we are launching the countywide School Place Planning Review, drawing on the data in the Local Plan Review, to ensure we continue to have a clear view on the number of school places required in line with planned housing development up to 2038. This work will inform the strategic School Place Plan across Shropshire to include early years, primary and secondary mainstream, with specialist provision included as a golden thread through all phases.

Early Years

7.2.6 Shropshire Council provides information support and guidance to Early Years providers in line with the statutory duties. The percentage of good and outstanding early year’s providers is above national and regional averages:

| Area | % of providers rated Outstanding | % of providers rated Good | % of providers rated Requiring Improvement | % of providers rated Inadequate |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| National | 16% | 77% | 6% | 1% |
| West Midlands | 19% | 76% | 4% | 1% |
| Shropshire | 20% | 77% | 2% | 1% |

7.2.7 2-year-olds from disadvantaged families can access 570 hours of free early learning each year to support their learning and development and readiness for school. Take up of the entitlement is above national averages:

| Area | % of children accessing some element of their entitlement |
|-------------------|---|
| National | 79% |
| West Midlands | 80% |
| Shropshire | 83% |

7.2.8 The integrated review for 2-year-olds was launched successfully in 2019 but was placed on hold as a result of the pandemic. Integrated reviews have now recommenced, and children and families are now benefitting from a joined-up review of their child's health and development with input from both Health Visitors and Early Years professionals. This has led to earlier identification of those children who may need some additional support.

7.2.9 From April 2024 free early years provision will extend to 2-year-olds from working families with the offer extending further to children from aged 9 months in September 2024. The Early Years team are working hard to ensure there is sufficient provision to meet demand as the entitlements roll out and that provision remains of a high quality.

7.2.10 Provisional data for the percentage of children having a Good Level of Development (GLD) in 2023 is above national average. Children are defined as having a good level of development if they are at the expected level for the 12 early learning goals within the 5 areas of learning relating to: communication and language; personal, social, and emotional development; physical development; literacy; and mathematics. The provisional data for 2023 is as follows:

| Area | % of children achieving GLD |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| National | 67.3% |
| West Midlands | 66.0% |
| Shropshire | 67.6% |

7.2.11 It is positive to see that the percentage of children achieving the communication prime goal at the end of reception was 83.3% in Shropshire compared with the national average of 79.7%. Communication development was an area significantly impacted by the pandemic and this data reflects the recovery that has taken place in Shropshire.

Schools

7.2.12 There are 151 schools across the local authority (LA): 127 primary phase schools, 19 secondary schools, 1 All-through school, 3 special schools and 1 Pupil Referral Unit. Notable changes have been the opening of Keystone Academy (Special School) in 2022 on a temporary site and the opening of Bowbrook Primary in September 2023.

7.2.13 Approximately 1/3rd of Shropshire primary schools are small or very small. There are currently 3 schools with under 30 pupils. Forecasts suggest that the number of schools in Shropshire with less than 30 pupils will increase in some areas over the next 10-15 years.

7.2.14 In September 2023, 45 out of 127 primary schools and 18 out of 19 secondary schools are academies. All 3 of Shropshire's special schools are academies. Only 1 school academised during 2022/23.

7.2.15. Ofsted data published at 31 July 2023 indicates that the percentage of good and outstanding schools is:

| | % of good or better (All schools) | % of good or better (Primary schools) | % of good or better (Secondary schools) |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| National | 89% | 90% | 81% |
| West Midlands | 87% | 87% | 82% |
| Shropshire | 86% | 89% | 85% |

(‘All school’ data also includes nursery schools of which there are 0 in Shropshire and state funded Special schools, which there are 3).

7.2.16. The emerging 2023 primary school outcomes data indicates that standards have risen in a number of areas:

- 89.5% of Shropshire pupils reach the expected phonics standard by the end of KS1 compared to a national average of 88.6%
- The percentile rankings of all LAs indicate improvements at KS1 for pupils achieving expected standards in each of reading, writing and maths with standards in reading being above the national average.
- Progress scores in reading and writing at KS2 show significant improvement with reading progress being above the national average.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEN support perform less well than similar groups nationally.
- In most, but not all, measures pupils with an EHCP achieved better outcomes than similar pupils at KS1 and KS2.

7.2.17. However, there remain areas where we would like to see standards improve further. These include:

- The percentage of pupils reaching the phonics standard by the end of Y1.
- The percentage of pupils achieving greater depth or high scaled scores in reading, writing and maths at KS1 and writing and maths at KS2.
- The KS4 Progress 8 indicator.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those who receive SEN Support.

2023 GCSE and Post 16 data will be available for comparison in the autumn.

NEET (Not in education, employment, or training)

7.2.18. National and local NEET data is published on DfE scorecards and is an average measure taken across December, January, and February. 7.9% of 16- and 17-year-olds were NEET or not known at the end of 2022 compared to a national average of 5.2%. 2.3% of 16- and 17-year-olds in Shropshire were classed as NEET against a national average of 2.8%, which demonstrates lower NEETs than national figures.

7.2.19. The factor that affects Shropshire data the most is the percentage of ‘not knowns’. The percentage of 16–17-year-olds in Shropshire whose activity is not known is 5.6% compared to a national average of 2.4%. There are many reasons for a student’s activity to be ‘not known’ with one reason being missing data sharing when pupils attend institutions outside of Shropshire. This will include institutions in Wales.

7.2.20. Support for students who are NEET comes from a variety of sources. This will include the work of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) advisers employed through Early Help and Enable. Enable deliver The STEP UP programme, a collaboration between Telford and Wrekin Council and Shropshire Council in partnership with The Department for Work and Pensions. The programme is available for free to individuals aged 15-24 who are living in Shropshire or Telford and Wrekin currently not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) or are in significant risk of becoming NEET. This programme offers each individual the opportunity to access bespoke, person-centred and holistic support towards a wide range of outcomes and achievements within Skills, Training and Employment

Virtual School

7.2.21. There has been a +11% change in the numbers of looked after children from year-2 to 13. (Year -2 refers to two years before Reception). The most significant upwards trajectory has been in Key stage 5 with a +22% change, most of this increase being due to the rise in the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People (UASYP), increasing from 42 in July 2022 to 72 by July 2023. The year 2022/3 saw a +79% change in the numbers of Looked after Children in years -1 to 11 with an EHCP, this has resulted in a +70% change in pupils attending state-funded specialist or independent schools; 33% of our pupils with an EHCP attend a mainstream setting.

7.2.22. The Virtual School has undertaken a significant restructure which has increased the overall number of posts. The restructure provides more all year working rather than term time only and reduces the caseloads of staff. It also allows the service to meet its extended duties around Children with a Social Worker.

7.2.23. Attendance of Children who are looked after (CLA) remains strong with attendance of 93% which is slightly above the average of all children nationally for the year (92.5%). The Persistent Absence Figure for Shropshire CLA was 16.5% for the year compared to 22.5% for all learners nationally. There have been no permanent exclusions for CLA for two years running with a number being averted through partnership working.

7.2.24. The trajectory on PEP improvement is very positive, with summer term 2023 outcomes as follows: 100% PEP completion, 89% Good Quality (Year -1 to 11), Post 16 was 80% Completion and 83% Good Quality.

7.2.25. The Virtual School organised an extremely well attended celebration event at Shrewsbury School in the autumn 2022 with a similar event arranged for this autumn. A Celebration Festival event has also been delivered for Post 16 and Care Leavers in August 2023 in collaboration with the Care Leavers Team.

7.2.26. A detailed report on Virtual School performance is submitted to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

SEND

7.2.27. The education offer for children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) across all types of education provision in Shropshire, including mainstream schools, continues to develop and evolve.

- 7.2.28. Additional specialist provision was introduced in Shropshire in September 2022, via the Free School, Keystone Academy, which opened in a temporary site with 40 pupils on roll initially.
- 7.2.29. Commissioning and development work with Woodlands Special School has also taken place leading to additional places at Woodlands School being available from Sept 2023.
- 7.2.30. The development of the mainstream SEND Hub/resource provision remains a strategic priority as the education Place Planning Review is underway to identify the school places, including specialist places, required to meet demand in Shropshire up to 2038. To support this work external reviews of each mainstream SEND Hub in Shropshire, with strengths and areas for development identified.
- 7.2.31. There has been a significant increase in demand of 187% over the last 12 months for Education, Health and Care Plan Needs Assessment (EHCNA) requests. This has resulted in significant increases in demand for places in special schools both specialist academies and specialist independent providers, particularly for those children and young people with a Social, Emotional and Mental Health profile of needs. This includes an increase in the number of children and young people with an EHCP presenting with Emotionally Based School Anxiety (EBSA) as well as anxiety linked to neurodiversity.
- 7.2.32. The proportion of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) completed within a 20-week period has fluctuated over the year due to the 187% increase in request for EHC Needs Assessment (487 requests received in 2022 compared to 261 in 2021). More requests for EHC Needs Assessment had been received by the end of June 2023 (over 487) than the entire 2022 calendar year.
- 7.2.33. Despite this level of demand the service continue to assess and issue more EHC plans within the 20-week timescale, close to the 2023 national average of 49.1%, and will continue to improve this further.
- January 2023 cumulative 20-week completion = 15%
- March 2023 cumulative 20-week completion = 41%
- July 2023 cumulative 20-week completion = 45%
- 7.2.34. The number of children and young people with an EHCP has increased, which is reflected in the increase in Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) requests. However, the number of appeals registered with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal Service (SENDIST) remains low.
- 7.2.35. The increase in the number of children and young people with an EHCP will also have a significant impact on the demand for assistance to travel to school. This is compounded by significant increases in inflationary cost pressures experienced during 2022/23.
- 7.2.36. The Area SEND revisit inspection by Ofsted and CQC that took place in November 2022 identified 3 out of 6 areas had made sufficient progress and improved. The report noted the many positive aspects of the work underway in Shropshire including that:

“The strong strategic leadership is successfully beginning to improve the provision, across education, health and social care, for children and young people with SEND in Shropshire.”

7.2.37. The remaining 3 areas which still required further improvement, are listed below:

- Significant wait times for large numbers of children and young people on the ASD and ADHD diagnostic pathways.
- Significant waiting times for those needing assessment and treatment from the speech and language therapy service.
- Inconsistency in the quality of input from education, health and care into EHC assessment and planning

7.2.38. An Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) to address the three remaining areas was developed by the SEND Partnership and approved by the DfE and NHS England in April 2023. The APP reinforces and strengthens the work already taking place to improve SEND services across Shropshire (0-25).

7.2.39. Shropshire fared well across the West Midlands in 2022 regarding the number of students accessing supported internships with 22 enrolments compared to the West Midlands average of 16.

7.2.40. Shropshire Council, Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital Trust (SATH) and Shrewsbury College formed a partnership to deliver a new exciting, supported internship programme in September 2023 for approx. 12 students who will be based at the hospital for their 1-year programme. The aim is for the students to move into paid employment opportunities within the health sector post their supported internship.

7.2.41. Capacity in the Educational Psychology service has continued to increase during the 2022/23 academic year, with Shropshire becoming a destination of choice for Trainee Educational Psychologists.

7.2.42. The first Trainee Educational Psychologist to be employed through our new approach joins the team in September 2023, following a 3-year Doctoral training course. We also have several new Year 2 and a Year 3 Trainee Educational Psychologists joining the Shropshire team from September 2023. This and a range of other capacity building approaches has enabled the service to increase the proactive direct traded work with schools by a further 14% from September 2023.

7.2.43. This year the service has directly supported all secondary schools, over three quarters of primary schools and almost all of our state-funded special schools, plus delivered a range of specialist training around Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) and Emotional Based School Anxiety (EBSA).

Education Access and Inclusion

Pupil Attendance

7.2.44. Based on the national DfE Attendance Data portal (87% return from Shropshire schools), overall pupil attendance for the 2022/23 academic year is above national average at 92.8% (national 92.5%) Primary school attendance is also above

national average at 94.4% (national 90%) Secondary school attendance is also above national average at 90.9% (national 90.7%). Persistent absence (individual pupil attendance below 90%) is also lower than national rates at primary and secondary. Whilst not yet back to pre-pandemic levels there has been an encouraging increase

Elective Home Education (EHE)

- 7.2.45. Arrangements for monitoring EHE on an annual basis was brought back within Learning and Skills in May 2022. Robust processes and procedures are in place to ensure appropriate contact is made with EHE families, more frequently if requested or if there are concerns. A De-registration Panel has been implemented to make sure there is oversight and action from partners where schools have noted concerns. Capacity to manage the numbers coming through remains a challenge with options being explored to address this.
- 7.2.46. Following the removal of the 'Y11' cohort at the end of June 2023, the number of children on the EHE register is 535. However, the figure during the academic year 2022/23 was consistently over 600. Primary aged children account for 36.5% and secondary aged children 63.5%. The number of pupils being withdrawn from school for EHE in Key Stage 4 is a concern; in September 2023 they will account for 38% of home educated children.
- 7.2.47. Compared with September 2022, the number of children with an EHCP who are listed as EHE on 1 September 2023 has increased by 13% but are considered by a multi-agency decision making panel for oversight. The number of children with identified SEN but no EHCP has decreased by 27%.
- 7.2.48. Parents/carers do not have to give a reason for de-registering their child to be EHE but the second highest recorded reason is 'philosophy' followed by 'medical - physical and mental health' then 'dissatisfaction' (general and SEN).
- 7.2.49. The EAS team have worked with EHE families to ensure that they receive the support they need to succeed, or where parents/carers are unable to fulfil their duty to provide a suitable education, children are supported to return to school. 127 children have been enrolled or re-enrolled at a school.

Inclusion

- 7.2.50. Increasing inclusive practice across Shropshire schools and Early Years settings continues to be key priority, with both support and challenge provided to via the Education Access, Educational Psychology and Education Improvement teams.
- 7.2.51. A key component of developing inclusive practice is the development of the Shropshire Ordinarily Available Provision (SOAP) framework for mainstream schools. This is a co-produced framework outlining what Shropshire schools expect to provide to all children and young people as part of the universal offer of high-quality inclusive teaching and SEND Support level across the four broad areas of SEND.

- 7.2.52. Over 90% of primary schools and 15% of secondary schools have made no permanent exclusions during 2022/23, which is a wonderful achievement whilst retaining high standards of education. However, permanent exclusions remain too high, particularly for our most vulnerable groups. A small number of schools account for a high proportion of these exclusions, with 1 primary school responsible for 29% of the total primary exclusions and 5 secondary schools responsible for 61% of the total secondary exclusions in 2022/23.
- 7.2.53. The most common reason given by headteachers for their decision to permanently exclude a pupil is 'persistent disruptive behaviour'. Work is underway with schools, alternative provision providers and multi-agency teams to develop new approaches that promote early intervention to avoid exclusion.
- 7.2.54. All schools are profiled for pupil inclusion, using available data, and where concerns (and good practice) are identified, the senior leaders, including CEOs, are invited to attend an Inclusion Review meeting with the local authority and DfE representative. The meetings have provided an excellent platform for discussion, robust challenge where necessary and further collaboration.
- 7.2.55. During the 2022/23 academic year, plans have been developed to commission new models of delivery from the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) known as the Tuition Medical Support Service (TMBSS). Commencing in September 2023, with more robust procedures in place to ensure that excluded pupils are swiftly assessed in centre and are placed in a new school, in a timelier manner, through the Fair Access Protocol (FAP).
- 7.2.56. Work has also been taking place to shift the focus to early intervention and prevention models that include the provision of direct support in the mainstream school, at both primary and secondary phases. This is in addition to developments that will enable schools to directly commission registered alternative provision through TMBSS and other providers. This work has also involved the application for a secondary phase Alternative Provision Free School for the north of Shropshire.

Shropshire Music Service

- 7.2.57. Shropshire Music Service has developed significantly during the 2022/23 academic year. The service now engages with 88% of Shropshire schools, above the Arts Council England national average of 86%.
- 7.2.58. Philanthropic donations from private entities have ensured activities can be offered free of charge: this has included 15 more schools engaging with the service, plus over 300 children now regularly engaging with our ensemble and workshop activities. Around 45% of these children are new engagers i.e. they are not currently in receipt of instrumental tuition. The service has also increased engagement with Shropshire Virtual School through a range of workshop activities.
- 7.2.59. We have also seen increased audiences attending public events: over 600 in attendance at most events. This direct engagement with performing live music is an excellent way of building the confidence, communication and team working skills of the children and young people participating.

7.2.60. The service is now more inclusive, offering a range of free ensembles weekly at various locations around the county, resulting in attendance trebling and more new engagers in music. More children are now engaging in the South and East regions of the county as a result of weekly ensembles.

7.2.61. The service will continue to develop the provision across the county and will be increasing the range of different musical activities available, including the development of music technology.

8 Additional Information

8.2 Further relevant links are included in the list of background papers.

9 Conclusions

9.2 Children's Service have had a challenging year, where demand and complexity have continued to have an impact on service delivery. Within that context, a lot has been achieved and progress made with service development. Cabinet and Councils continued support for children and families needs to be met mean that we are seeing many children achieve positive outcomes despite the adversity they face. Focusing the service on supporting a child to return to a family that love them and where they have made the changes needed to be able to care for that child safely is the best possible outcome we all, as a corporate parent, can hope for and achieve for the people of Shropshire.

9.3 Learning and Skills services have provided effective and cost-efficient support to children and young people in Shropshire that has led to improved outcomes as outlined in the report. This demonstrates positive impact towards delivery of the Shropshire Plan. Further developments and improvements across a number of services within Learning and Skills are underway to manage the increases in demand whilst maintaining or improving the quality of services.

9.4 Further improvement work is also underway across the Area SEND system in Shropshire, driven by the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board, and includes all partner agencies across education, health and social care in partnership with children, young people and their families. We are committed to enabling Shropshire children, young people and their families to live their best life.

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

Shropshire Ofsted/CQC Area SEND Inspection revisit report [50207192](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/50207192)
[\(\[ofsted.gov.uk\]\(https://www.ofsted.gov.uk\)\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

[The power of music to change lives: a national plan for music education - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100000/2020-03-16_music_education_plan.pdf)
[\(\[www.gov.uk\]\(https://www.gov.uk\)\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[Budget 2023: Everything you need to know about childcare support - The Education Hub](https://www.blog.gov.uk/2023/03/23/budget-2023-everything-you-need-to-know-about-childcare-support/)
[\(\[blog.gov.uk\]\(https://www.blog.gov.uk\)\)](https://www.blog.gov.uk)