



LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Shropshire Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-27

DRAFT

Revised Draft January 2024, August 2024

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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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Foreword

Kirstie Hurst-Knight-Lead Member

Corporate Parenting is one of the most important parts of my role. Making sure that council services and our corporate partners across Shropshire are working together to support children in our care and our young people moving into their adult lives is a responsibility we share and one that I take most seriously. Every child and young person deserves an opportunity to lead a fulfilling life. That means we have to pay attention to the care they receive, their health, education, emotional wellbeing and in pursuit of their interests. I stand by our pledges that are set out here and I will continue to be committed to holding ourselves and our partners to account to deliver our ambitions for our children.

Andy Begley-Chief Executive

The role of a Corporate Parent is very important, and one we take seriously and personally in Shropshire. We are parents, with our partners in the Council and beyond, to over 700 children and young people in our care, and over 250 care experienced young people. This strategy links with our Shropshire Plan and is supported by our Sufficiency Strategy to provide the right homes in the right places to meet the needs of our children and young people looked after and care leavers. This strategy frames how we will achieve this, informed by the voices of children and young people in care and care leavers. We know that children, young people, and young adults will tell us when we're getting things right and when we aren't. We are determined to go on being better parents and to care for our children looked after and those leaving our care as our own children. Through our partnerships and the Corporate Parenting Steering Board we will support our children and young people to take advantage of the range of opportunities our Council has to offer and help them realise their potential. We are committed to being the best parent we can be.

Tanya Miles- Strategic Director of People-Director of Children's Services

Children who are looked after and those leaving our care are among the most vulnerable in our society. As corporate parents we are charged with a responsibility to make sure that they are supported, safe, happy, and thriving. To do this we must work together and collaborate effectively with a range of partners across Shropshire. We work on the principle of 'Nothing about you without you' and we have listened to our children and young people and what they have told us is central to the pledges we set out here. We are committed to enabling children in care to return to or remain within their families when this is safe and meets their needs. When this is not possible we want them to grow up in safe, secure, and caring environments without frequent changes of home, carer, or social worker; ensuring as they grow that they get access to the right help and support, to good schools and opportunities to learn and to train; maintaining contact with important people in their lives and having every possible opportunity and support to become independent, socially connected, economically active, safe, happy adults.

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Introduction

This Strategy sets out Shropshire Council's vision and commitment and explains how we, as the Council, will be an effective and trustworthy corporate parent for every child or young person who is in our care, respecting their unique individuality and valuing their diverse needs and views relating to their age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, faith or disability.

Hearing and responding to the lived experience and voices of our children and looked after young people will be the 'Golden Thread' driving our Strategy.

The Strategy sets out our priorities over the next 3 years against the Corporate Parenting Principles, taking account of the voices and experience of our own children and young people looked after and care leavers, our Children's Charter and the Council's Pledge.

Every professional who works with children and young people looked after and care leavers has a responsibility as a corporate parent. This can be a social worker, councillor or other professionals who work in police, health, housing, probation and education.

Shropshire Council has a statutory corporate parenting responsibility.

"The role that councils play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do. Local authorities have a unique responsibility to the children they look after and their care leavers"

(Children and Social Work Act 2017)

Being a corporate parent means providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by the council.

We intend to be ***the best parent that we can be*** to every child and young person we look after.

As a good corporate parent, we will listen to and include children and young people in plans about them and for them and our children looked after, and care experienced young people and those who care for them will be integrally involved in progressing this Strategy.

Children and young people told us that they wanted to be shown love, and know that they are cared for and loved and that they are important to us as their corporate parents. We are committed to putting **LOVE** at the heart of what we do. We will do this by treating our children and young people with respect, love and trust and with the right amount of encouragement. In doing so 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.



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1. The Voices of our Children & Young People Looked After

What You Told Us

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

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

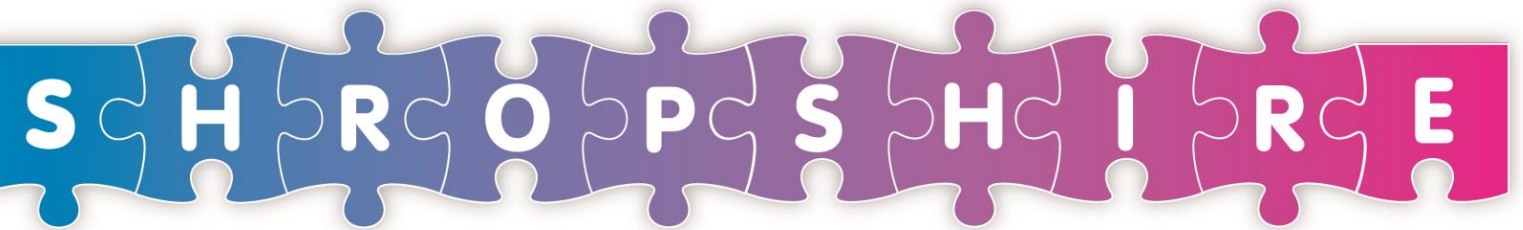
Extracts of presentations by 2 young people to our Staff Conferences 2022 & 2323

Feelings

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

What would help

- ✚ *"Don't move kids as far away, our families are important and just cos its not going well at the time we need support to make it better. I needed my family, especially my mum".*
- ✚ *"For anyone working with these kids to understand it takes loads for us to talk to you and tell you stuff – that is almost scarier than what we are living through. If you don't get that then don't work with us".*
- ✚ *Having "One person that follows you through your whole journey, in whatever role, someone that understands".*



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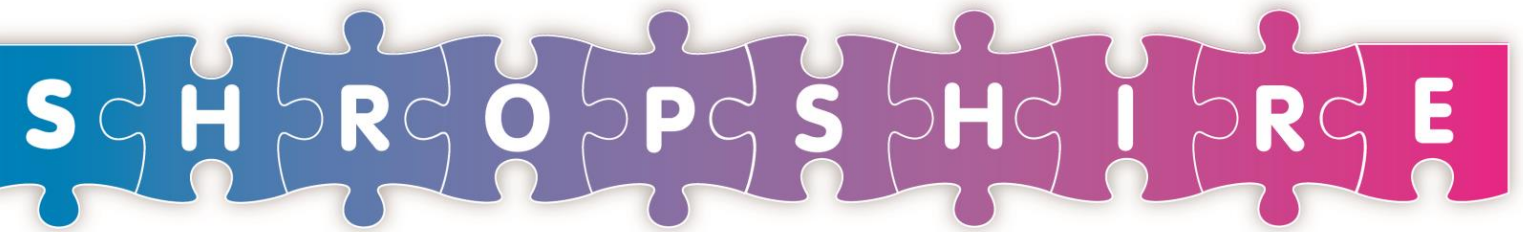
- ✚ *“Carers and Social Workers should be able to give a proper explanation for why something happens or can’t happen”.*
- ✚ *“Because it’s a regulation” or “because it keeps you safe” is not an explanation - What is the regulation? How does it keep you safe? Is there anything we can do to make it better?*

Feedback from Children in Care Council-What would you put in a Job Description for Social Workers?

- ✚ *“To help and take my thoughts into consideration, also to understand me”*
- ✚ *“Listen, get on and do things straight away”*
- ✚ *“Kind, respectful, caring; safe around people, relevant and co-ordinated”*
- ✚ *“Listen, cares, someone you can talk to, someone who’s there for you”*

How We Have Listened

- ✚ Our Children’s Homes have relooked at their procedures to remove unnecessary restrictions -always asking ‘*why is that even a thing?*’.
- ✚ We have a new Fostering Recruitment Strategy, and a new home for young people moving on to adult life and we are developing another children’s home in Shropshire to have more homes in our area for children to live in.
- ✚ Some of our young people have been involved in the development of our new homes and are involved in training for foster carers.
- ✚ Our Staff Conference has been centred on ‘Putting Love in the System’.
- ✚ We have updated our Care Leavers’ Local Offer in consultation with care leavers and it is about to be published. We have committed to supporting the development of a West Midlands Regional Care Leavers’ Offer.
- ✚ Our Council has committed to a Care Leavers’ Covenant offer and a new Joint Children’s Services and Housing Protocol for Care Leavers is being drafted.
- ✚ We have an End-to-End Permanence Strategy to ensure that our priority is always to seek a safe, secure, loving, and permanent home for children who we look after, including moving from our care back to the care of their family or another family, or



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stepping from a residential home to family care or stepping on to be supported to move to their adult life.

- ✚ We have introduced tools to help social workers to record children's stories with them when they start to be looked after and when they move.
- ✚ We have had a focus on making and maintaining lifelong links with family and friends and in communities.
- ✚ We have a service called 'Stepping Stones' to support children to remain with or return to the care of their family or, when this is not possible, to 'step down' from a residential home to a foster family or 'step on' to adult life with our support.
- ✚ We have celebrated your successes with celebration events.
- ✚ We will show love and put love at the heart of what we do

Your Priorities

- ✚ Having a voice that is listened to, heard, and has influence, we want the power to make change
- ✚ Being and feeling safe
- ✚ Feeling understood by professionals in our lives, and those professionals remaining consistent where possible
- ✚ Experiencing stability, at home and at school
- ✚ Remaining in contact with friends, family, others who are important in our lives, being connected with our communities across Shropshire.
- ✚ Being able to take part in social and extra-curricular activities and celebrations like other children and young people
- ✚ Having safe and regular time with our birth family
- ✚ Having the time and support to prepare for changes that need to happen
- ✚ Knowing what services and support are available
- ✚ Learning 'real-life' skills

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2. Shropshire's Vision and Values

Our vision mirrors that in "Care Matters: Time to deliver for children in care" DCSF 2008:

"Our aspirations for children in care reflect those we would have for our own children. We know they are often in much greater need than other children and we must ensure they obtain all the help they require. We aim to create a home and community environment that provides every child with a safe, happy, healthy, secure and loving childhood, nurturing their aspirations and enabling them to meet their full potential."

Children and young people in care are all individuals, coming from all walks of life and have different aspirations and ambitions. We value their unique identity and characteristics and will ensure they are not disadvantaged or discriminated against in any way in respect of their cultural heritage, ethnicity, faith and beliefs, sexuality, disability, or gender.

We value what our children and young people looked after, and care leavers tell us about their lived experiences and will ensure they have the opportunity to shape and influence the parenting they receive.

The National Corporate Parenting Principles

Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 states that local authorities must have regard to the **seven Corporate Parenting Principles** identified in the Children and Social Work Act when exercising their functions in relation to children and young people looked after and care leavers:

1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people;
2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
3. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
4. To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;

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6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Shropshire's Children's Charter

There is a Children's Charter in place which was first co-produced with our children and young people in 2013. This Charter is in the process of being reviewed again with our children and young people. The Children's Charter is widely available across the Council and relates to 9 key areas that are important to children who are looked after:

- ✚ Health
- ✚ Education, work and training
- ✚ Social life
- ✚ Support
- ✚ Inform me
- ✚ Moving on
- ✚ My home
- ✚ My voice
- ✚ General issues

The Corporate Parenting Steering Group, the council and elected members have signed up to the Children's Charter.

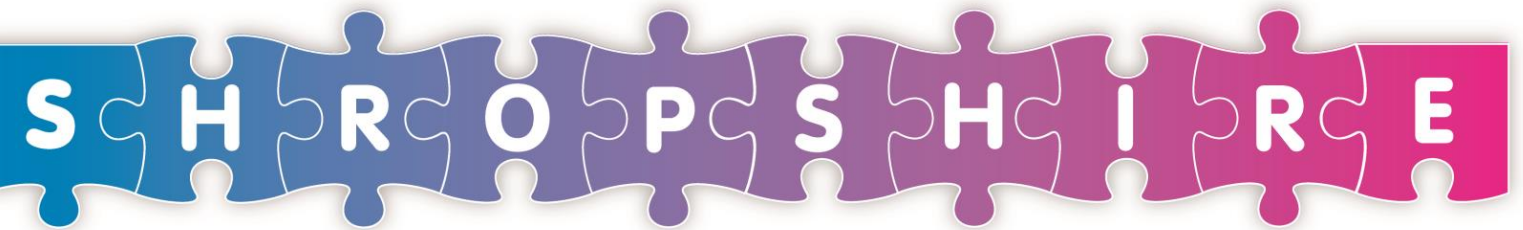
Shropshire's Corporate Parenting Pledge

Every good parent knows that children require a safe and secure environment in which to grow and thrive. As parents we want to protect and support our children against the dangers and risks of life. Parents are ambitious for our children and we want them to reach their potential. As good parents we celebrate and share in the achievements of our children and, for our young people, we want to set them on the road towards adulthood with all the guidance, support and opportunities we can provide.

A child who is cared for by the Council has the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that would be expected from a good parent.

This means as a Council we will:

- ✚ Know our children, their needs, talents and aspirations and promote their interests.
- ✚ Hold high aspirations for their future and expect the best for and from them.
- ✚ Take an interest in their successes and problems and show our pride in their achievements and celebrate them.



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- ✚ Listen to their views and ensure they influence practice, service developments and policy.
 - ✚ Ensure they are consulted about their own lives and plans.
 - ✚ Recognise, support, and respect their identity in all aspects.
 - ✚ Ensure our children attend their education regularly.
 - ✚ Promote and support high academic achievement by working with our schools and carers to ensure that the needs of our children are understood and met.
 - ✚ Support their health and emotional well-being and resilience.
 - ✚ Support transition to adult life and promote their economic prospects & prepare them to become responsible citizens .
- ✚ **and most importantly....** as Corporate Parents we will preface all our thinking, planning, actions and decisions with:

“would this be good enough for my child.....?”

3. Shropshire’s ‘Whole Council’ commitment

For Corporate Parenting to be effective it needs a commitment from all elected members and council employees in a council-wide approach as well as from partner agencies who work to support the best interests of our children and young people looked after and as care leavers.

This involves the whole council and its partners acting as a good parent, committing resources, and working together to create permanence in a safe and loving home environment and improving the lives of all children and young people in care and care leavers.

As a Council we will prioritise their needs, listen to and value their views based on their lived experience, and support them to make the most of their lives.

Professionals with responsibility for our children looked after meet on a regular basis to the discuss the important issues involving children looked after and care leavers in Shropshire and to identify what further work or action is needed to support and help our children looked after to succeed in life.

In Shropshire this is the **Corporate Parenting Steering Board**. Young people from the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum report directly to the Board on issues impacting directly on children and young people looked after and care leavers. This ensures all corporate parents fully understand the key issues for all children and young people looked after and care leavers so that they can consider what action they themselves or their agency can take to promote their best interests.

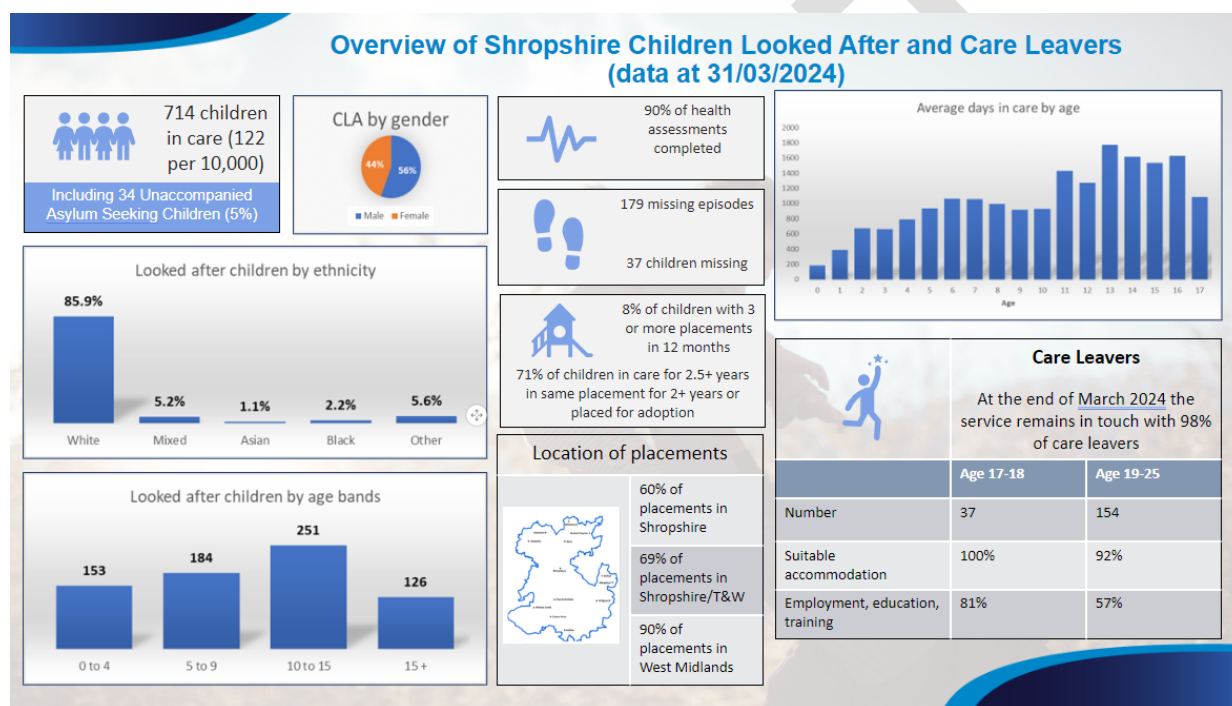
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The Corporate Parent Steering Board will identify actions to be taken, set priorities and will hold agencies to account to ensure all agencies are effective corporate parents. (*Corporate Parenting Steering Board Appendix 1.*)

4. Context

Overview of Shropshire Children Looked After and Care Leavers (data 31/03/24)



5. Aims of this Strategy

Shropshire Council aims to support most of its children and young people within their own families and communities. However, for a small number of children and young people this is not possible, and they require alternative care, sometimes only for a short time, but also for some children and young people, this can be until they are young adults.

Many children looked after are at greater risk of social exclusion than their non-looked after peers, both because of their experiences prior to becoming looked after, and because they are often separated from their birth parents, and from their extended birth families and the community they grew up in.

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It is essential, therefore, that the Council, as a Corporate Parent, ensures that their experience of being looked after is a positive and supportive one and maximizes their full potential.

As a good corporate parent, we must address the challenges and difficulties children and young people looked after experience and the challenges of parenting within a complex system of different services.

While good parenting requires continuity, organisations by their nature are continuously changing. Elected members and employees move on and structures, procedures and partnerships are modified and refined. One challenge of being a good corporate parent is to manage these changes and ensure each individual child and young person can maintain a sense of stability.

The aim of this Corporate Parenting Strategy is to make sure that when children and young people are looked after by Shropshire Council they feel we are working together as a family and as a 'Village Around Our Children' with our partners so they can be safe and secure and cared for, have stability in their lives and that we help them to achieve their full potential by supporting them in fulfilling their ambitions and aspirations as they either move on to their adult lives or move out of our care back to their own family or an alternative permanent family.

6. Objectives of this Strategy

- ✚ **Elected members** have a clear understanding and awareness of the needs of our children in care and care leavers and ensure their responsibilities as corporate parents are reflected in all aspects of the Council's work.
- ✚ **All services delivered by the Council play a part** in delivering Corporate Parenting and continually monitoring and reviewing what their services contribute to improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers.
- ✚ **The Corporate Family activity** leads to measurable improvement in the life chances of children in care and care leavers, so these are in line with their peers.
- ✚ **Communication** between elected members, council officers, those who care for them, and children looked after and care leavers ensures they have a say in how decisions are made about services affecting them and can influence those decisions.
- ✚ **Partnership working and joint planning** and commissioning is promoted as an effective means of delivering effective services.
- ✚ **We deliver on our Corporate Pledges.**

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7. Our Strategic Priorities

On behalf of the 'Whole Council', we have **6 main priorities** for the Corporate Parenting Steering Board:

1. Enabling Participation
2. Promoting and Progressing Aspirations
3. Promoting Health & Wellbeing
4. Publishing our New Care Leavers' Local Offer
5. Enabling Stability
6. Supporting Education, Employment & Training

Our 6 Priorities

Priority 1

Enabling Participation-Taking account of the voice of looked after children and young people

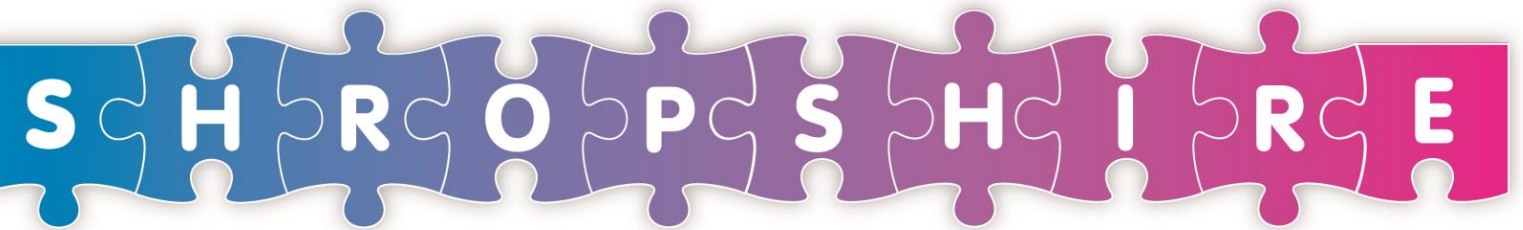
As Corporate Parents we are committed to listening to and taking account of the experiences, wishes and feelings of children looked after and care leavers.

We understand that they have first-hand experience of what it is like to be 'looked after' and that we have a duty to plan **with** them for services that will directly impact on them and their outcomes.

Shropshire's Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers' Forum seeks to represent and promote the views, opinions and experiences of Shropshire's children and young people looked after in order to influence the development of services provided by Shropshire Council and its partners.

The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum brings together representatives of Shropshire's children and young people looked after and care leavers to share their views, opinions, ideas and experiences in order to improve services provided by Shropshire Council and its partners. The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum works in partnership with Shropshire's Corporate Parenting Steering Board, Shropshire Council and providers of services to develop and shape policies and proposals that affect Shropshire's children and young people looked after and care leavers.

What we have done



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

What we plan to do

- ✚ We will implement a new **Participation Strategy** across Children Social Care with a Participation Lead.

Priority 2

Promoting & Progressing our Children's and Young People's Aspirations

We want every member of the Council and partners to have high aspirations for our children and young people and to ensure we have the right services and support to make them a reality.

There are 3 main aspirations we have prioritised:

- Promoting Elected Members', employee, and partner engagement

What we have done

- ✚ There is an **Induction Programme** in place for all Elected Members (**Appendix 2**). It is mandatory for elected members to take part in this Induction Programme as this enables each elected member to understand the context for children looked after and care

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leavers, their own role and the role of the Lead Member and the Corporate Parenting Steering Board and that of Council Officers and departments and partner agencies.

What we plan to do

- ✚ In February 2024 Shropshire Council will be asked to approve a Motion **to accept individuals with care experience are treated as if it were a Protected Characteristic.**
- ✚ We are starting up **an independent charitable Trust 'Above and Beyond'** for young people looked after and care leavers to enable them to fulfil their aspirations as they move into adulthood.

ii. Promoting education, employment, and training opportunities

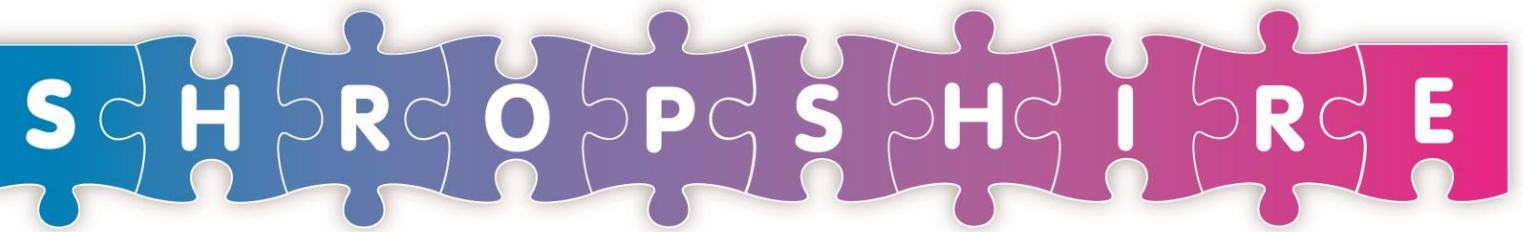
One of the most important contributions that Shropshire Council can collectively make to Corporate Parenting is how they, as the “family firm” can deliver better employability opportunities for children and young people in care and care leavers. “Employability” refers to a wide range of activities and includes apprenticeships, work experience, and work placements.

These activities depend on cooperation and strategic and operational planning between Council services creating opportunities through further training and skills, apprenticeships, and work experience, alongside the Job Centre and local businesses and colleges/the University.

The Council is committed to ensuring that children and young people with additional or complex needs have the same access to the education, training, and employment opportunities.

What we have done

- ✚ The Council gives additional support to care leavers and looked after young people age 16+ to enable them to develop their CV and preparation for interview.
- ✚ Opportunities for work experience and apprenticeships within the Council and with partner agencies will be promoted.
- ✚ The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will use the Aspirations sub-group to develop further opportunities in line with the wishes and views of looked after young people.
- ✚ These opportunities are designed to:
 - Help young people meet their potential and achieve their abilities, hopes and aspirations.
 - Help them become confident individuals.
 - Give them a taste of the world of work.
 - Broaden their horizons from little or no experience of employment options.



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- Help them become economically and socially positively contributing citizens.
- ✚ The **SEND Local Offer** is widely promoted, alongside the development of closer transitioning arrangements to adulthood.

What we plan to do

- ✚ Further develop the Council's apprenticeship and work experience offer across all Council services and with our partner agencies.
- iii. Promote our Care Leavers' Covenant

What we have done

- ✚ In February 2022 Shropshire Council approved a Motion to adopt a **Care Leavers' Covenant** offer by the Council and to promote this with partners and businesses across Shropshire.

As corporate parents Shropshire Council has committed to meet the requirements of the **Care Leavers' Covenant**. Over the next years the Council plans to build on the success of the event with local businesses and partners in November 2019, to promote this initiative.

Shropshire has made good progress with its offer to care leavers and has published what it makes available, the Care Leavers Covenant is in addition to the existing Care Leavers' Local Offer.

What we plan to do

- ✚ Host an event to promote the Care Leavers' Covenant again with businesses and partners.
- ✚ Each department in the Local Authority will be looking at what it can pledge specifically to our care experienced young people. The Council can then officially pledge its offers of support available to care leavers through "MyCovenant" which will then be published on the MyCovenant App.

Priority 3

Promoting Health and Wellbeing

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The Council works with health partners to ensure the health needs of looked after children and care leavers are met. Health partners include the local Integrated Commissioning Board (ICB), MPFT and Shropshire Community Hospital Trust.

- ✚ The Council will work in partnership with the ICB to oversee commissioning arrangements to promote and meet the health needs of children looked after and care leavers.
- ✚ The health needs of children looked after, and care leavers is monitored and reported to the Corporate Parenting Steering Board by the Health sub-group and also to the ICB.
- ✚ The Designated Doctor and Designated Nurse for Looked After Children will take the lead for ensuring all children looked after having their health assessments completed in timescale and for the provision of a Health Passport to all care leavers at age 18.

What we have done

- ✚ Every looked after young person has the opportunity for a final health appointment before they are 18 and will have a **Health Passport** to take with them into adult life.
- ✚ All care leavers have access to **free prescriptions**.
- ✚ Provided **training and guidance for social workers** on completion of health assessments.
- ✚ Reviewed our **Mental Health Pathway** for children and young people looked after.
- ✚ Supported care leavers to access mental health support through **Ask Jan**

What we plan to do

- ✚ Implement the **new Mental Health Pathway with BeeU**.
- ✚ Provide **additional Business Support** to social workers to complete the information for Initial Health Assessments in timescale and to a high standard to inform their Health Plans

Priority 4

Shropshire's new Care Leavers' Local Offer

The Council has a Care Leavers' Local Offer, published on the Council's website. This ensures all young people are aware of their entitlements as a care leaver from their corporate parents in respect of:

- Having an allocated Personal Advisor.
- Having somewhere suitable to live.
- Access and opportunities for education, training, and employment.
- Support to meet their health and emotional needs.
- Support to access community, leisure, and social activities.
- Support to stay in contact with their family and friends.

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What we have done

- ✚ The Local Offer was co-produced with our young people and was reviewed in 2021 and 2023 in consultation with young people and other stakeholders.
- ✚ We are part of the Regional Care Leavers' Local Offer Project.

What we plan to do

Shropshire's new Care Leavers' Local Offer

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- Having somewhere suitable to live.
- Access and opportunities for education, training, and employment.
- Support to meet their health and emotional needs.
- Support to access community, leisure, and social activities.
- Support to stay in contact with their family and friends.

What we have done

- ✚ The Local Offer was co-produced with our young people and was reviewed in 2021 and 2023/24 in consultation with young people and other stakeholders.
- ✚ We are part of the Regional Care Leavers' Local Offer Project.

What we plan to do

✚ The updated Local Offer will be published by the end of December 2024. We will implement any actions agreed as an outcome of the Regional Care Leavers' Local Offer Project.

Priority 5

Stability of Care Arrangements

Having a stable home for children and young people who are looked after, where they are in the right care arrangement for them that meets their needs, is an important element in helping them to secure positive outcomes.

Where children live is often referred to as their 'placement' for children who are looked after. Our children and young people have indicated they do not like the word 'placement' to define where they live. We refer to '**care arrangements**' in Shropshire.

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What we have done

- ✦ Commissioned **Stepping Stones** to reduce the need for children to be looked after by supporting children to remain living safely within their family or stepping back to their family, and to support children to be in the right care arrangement for their needs by 'stepping-down' into foster families from residential care.
- ✦ Refreshed our **Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy**, including Council approval for a significant uplift in fees for foster carers.
- ✦ Commissioned **3 new Children's Homes** since 2020, including a home for 16/17-year-olds to support them on their journey to adult life.
- ✦ Commissioned an **End-to-End Permanence Project** to update our Permanence Strategy. The aim of the Strategy will be a shared understanding from the beginning of Children's Services involvement to the end of what 'permanence' looks and feels like for a child and what we need to do at all stages to find the right pathway to permanence, not just in the 'here and now', but through their childhood and beyond.
- ✦ To help support improved stability in our care arrangements Shropshire has adopted the **Stability Index** advised by the Children's Commissioner to measure how well we are offering stability for our children and young people looked after.

What we plan to do

- ✦ We are commissioning **an additional children's home** for young children who are not ready to live within a family setting yet. This will enable the children to remain living locally.
- ✦ We are updating our **Sufficiency Strategy** (2024).
- ✦ We will have a new **End-to-End Permanence Strategy** in 2024 to reflect our priority to enable most children to remain living within their family, either with a parent or a connected carer, without needing to be looked after. Where children need an alternative family, we will make decisions and take actions swiftly. Where children's needs are best met by being looked after, we will ensure they are cared for in a stable home where long-term needs are met.
- ✦ The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will monitor **Shropshire's 'Stability Index'** through these measures for our children looked after:
 - Number of changes in care arrangements (placement moves)
 - Number of education moves/periods out of education
 - Contextual safeguarding risk factors- children missing from care/missing from education
 - Emotional and Mental Health-numbers referred and open to BeeU/Crisis Team and SDQ scores
 - Criminalisation-numbers open to Youth Justice/in custody
 - Number of changes of social worker

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- Direct feedback from children and young people and their carers

Priority 6

Promoting the Education of Looked After Children & Young People

This is overseen by the Virtual School and the Virtual School Governing Body. The Virtual School Head reports on progress and attainment of all looked after children to the Virtual School Governing Body and then to the Corporate Parenting Steering Board.

What we have done

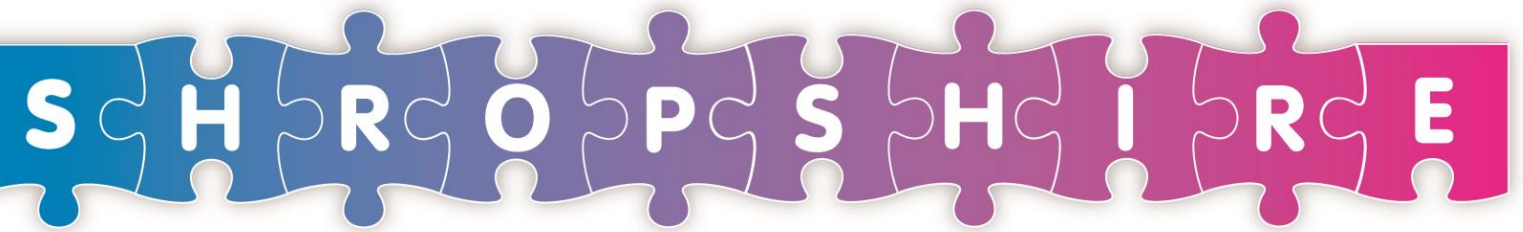
- ✚ Developed a multi-agency Virtual School Governing Body.
- ✚ Review of the Virtual School including additional capacity to support young people moving on to adult life or leaving care to return to their family or an alternative family.
- ✚ The Virtual School has hosted annual Celebration events for children looked after and for care leavers.
- ✚ A success last year was our collaboration with Aspire & Seeds of Change to provide a careers mentoring programme for year 10 and 11 students. We have created a personalised goal system for the young people to see their progress and this helps us to capture data on the project's impact. Some outcomes of note are:
 - 90% of the young people who took part increased their self-assessment scores
 - 100% felt their vision of their future is clearer now
 - 75% felt they had improved in taking action to help themselves and asking for help when they need it
 - 63% are more motivated.

One young person who was at risk of permanent exclusion said, "*I didn't give up...and I feel I can aim higher.*"

Another young person wrote "*I feel like I'm more certain of things, I know what I'm going to do in the future...and I have more self-belief now*".

What we plan to do

- ✚ The Virtual School has a new School Development Plan for the year with significant training roll outs to support Inclusion and Attendance, including for Children with a Social Worker. This will be overseen by the Virtual School Governing Body and progress reported to the Corporate Parenting Steering Board. This includes:



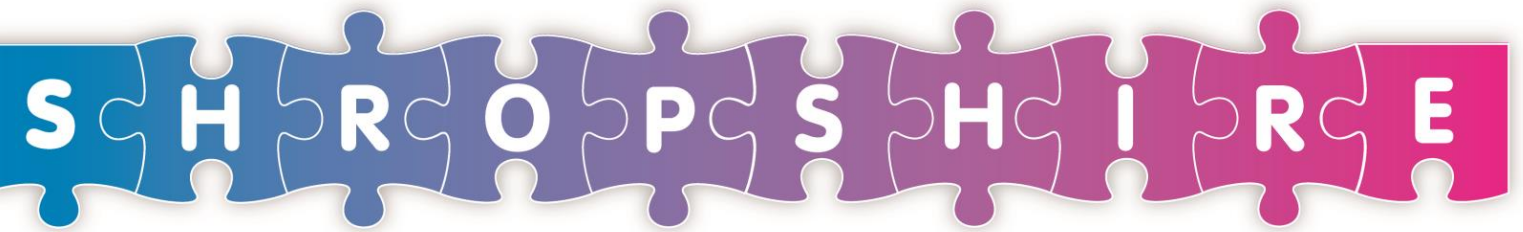
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- The Emotion Coaching Train the Trainer project started in October 2023 with 30 schools and 19 LA practitioners taking part. Once the Trainers have completed the course, they will be rolling out whole school training to 30 schools in Phase 1. This supplements the Emotion Coaching Training that Foster Carers have received so we can form a common culture and language around supporting vulnerable children either at home or school.
- Three key developments for the year will be the drive on projects to support Attainment and Progress (especially in Maths), decreasing the number of Reduced Timetables and closing them earlier - plus developing our Post 16 offer with the arrival of the Pupil Premium + Grant

8. What We Will Do Next

Summary of Corporate Parenting Strategy Priority Actions for 2024-2027

- ✚ We will implement a new **Participation Strategy**.
- ✚ In February 2024 Shropshire Council will be asked to approve a Motion (*accepted in March 2024) to accept that **having care experience is treated as if it were a Protected Characteristic**.
- ✚ We are starting up **an independent charitable Trust 'Above and Beyond'** for young people looked after and care leavers to enable them to fulfil their aspirations as they move into adulthood.
- ✚ Further **develop the Council's apprenticeship and work experience offer** across all Council services and with our partner agencies to offer more employment and training opportunities for our children looked after and care leavers.
- ✚ Host an event to **promote the Care Leavers' Covenant** again with businesses and partners.
- ✚ **Each department in the Local Authority will be looking at what it can pledge specifically to our care experienced young people**. The Council can then officially pledge its offers of support available to care leavers through "MyCovenant" which will then be published on the MyCovenant App.
- ✚ Implement the **new Mental Health Pathway with BeeU**.
- ✚ Provide additional Business Support to social workers to complete the information for **Initial Health Assessments in timescale and to a high standard to inform their Health Plans**
- ✚ The updated **Care Leavers' Local Offer** will be published by the end of December 2024.
- ✚ We will implement any actions agreed as an outcome of the **Regional Care Leavers' Offer Project**.
- ✚ We are commissioning **an additional children's home** for young children who are not ready to live within a family setting yet. This will enable the children to remain living locally.
- ✚ We are updating our **Sufficiency Strategy** (2024).



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- ✚ We will have a new **End-to-End Permanence Strategy** in 2024 to reflect our priority to enable most children to remain living within their family, either with a parent or a connected carer, without needing to be looked after. Where children need an alternative family, we will make decisions and take actions swiftly. Where children's needs are best met by being looked after, we will ensure they are cared for in a stable home where long-term needs are met.
- ✚ The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will monitor **Shropshire's 'Stability Index'** through these measures for our children looked after:
 - Number of changes in care arrangements (placement moves)
 - Number of education moves/periods out of education
 - Contextual safeguarding risk factors- children missing from care/missing from education
 - Emotional and Mental Health-numbers referred and open to BeeU/Crisis Team and SDQ scores
 - Criminalisation-numbers open to Youth Justice/in custody
 - Number of changes of social worker
 - Direct feedback from children and young people and their carers
- ✚ The **Virtual School Improvement Plan** aims to improve attainment and to increase inclusion and reduce exclusions. This will be overseen by the Virtual School Governing Body and progress reported to the Corporate Parenting Steering Board.

9. How this Strategy will be taken forward

Role of Elected Members

All elected members must ensure that public services used or required by children and young people looked after are of a high quality, integrated and take account of need. They must ensure they are fully informed of the issues facing children looked after by understanding their characteristics and by knowing how well services are performing in meeting their assessed needs. This requires an awareness and understanding of:

- ✚ The voice of children and young people in planning services with them that are about them and for them.
- ✚ Care and placement arrangements.
- ✚ Child protection and safety policies and procedures.
- ✚ Education performance and achievements in school.
- ✚ Further and Higher Education, training, and employment achievements.
- ✚ Responsiveness of health services.
- ✚ Preparation for leaving care arrangements and housing need.
- ✚ Arrangements to prevent children in care from getting into trouble.

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Elected members will be supported in meeting their responsibilities by relevant council officers. They will provide leadership that will encourage and support partnership and joined-up working. This will ensure that funding, commissioning, and priority setting deliver the best combination of services for children and young people in care and care leavers.

The Lead Member for Children's Services and members on the Corporate Parenting Steering Board have a particular responsibility to ensure all members are aware of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the role of members to promote this.

Role of Council Departments and partner agencies

All employees of the council are corporate parents and need to understand how their role can support and enhance the lives of the children and young people who are looked after by the Council and engage partners to also fulfil their duties to our children looked after and care leavers.

The Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive have specific responsibilities to have oversight of the needs of children looked after and care leavers, to ensure they are safely cared for and that there are sufficient resources to provide a safe, secure home throughout their childhood and beyond.

The Children and Safeguarding Service fulfills the Council's main duties to our children looked after and care leavers, but they cannot do this without a 'Whole Council' response.

Shropshire Council Plans and Strategies

These are the main underpinning Council strategies in place or in progress that supports our Corporate Parenting Strategy:

- ✚ **The Shropshire Plan** sets out how the Council will support Healthy people, economy, environment, and organization outcomes.
- ✚ The **Shropshire Permanence Strategy (Appendix 3)**. We will enable children to live within their family whenever this is possible and aim to ensure children have an alternative permanent home and a secure base when this is not possible. We will promote brothers and sisters remaining together where possible and to facilitate family contact where this meets their needs.
- ✚ The Council has invested in '**Stepping Stones**' to support children to remain or return to their birth family or 'step down' from residential care to live with a foster family.
- ✚ The Council has a '**sufficiency duty**' to ensure there are sufficient services to support children looked after to have a 'secure base' in a safe, loving and caring home and



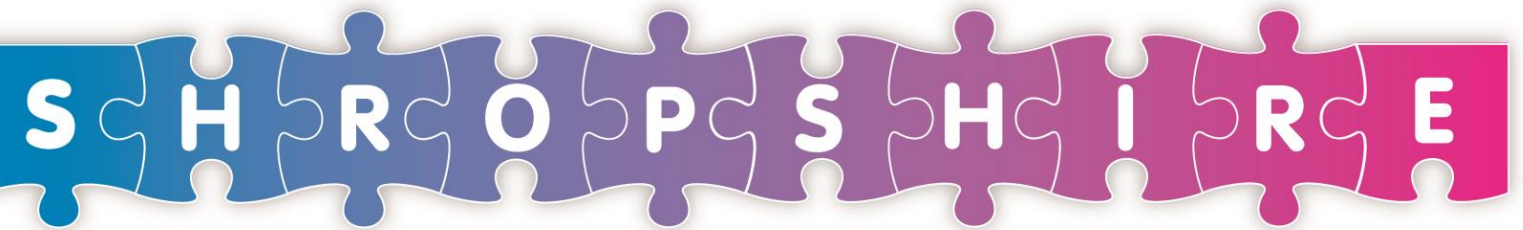
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sufficient places for looked after children and young people to live within the local authority where possible.

- ✚ The **Sufficiency Strategy** sets out the Council's statutory responsibilities, the assessment of need and strategic planning in all these areas. (**Appendix 4**).
- ✚ The Council has invested in a **Kinship to Permanence Team** to support more children looked after to move to or remain with a connected person (extended family or friend) when they are unable to live with a birth parent.
- ✚ **The Special Guardianship Support Policy** has recently been revised to enable more connected carers to offer a permanent home to the children in their care without the need for unnecessary state intrusion.
- ✚ The Council has a **Foster Care Recruitment Strategy** to increase the number of Shropshire fostering households and support them, including developing the **Mockingbird** model, and a plan to develop our internal residential estate and internal **Supported Board and Lodgings Provision** to enable more Shropshire children and young people to be cared for locally and to meet their assessed needs in respect of disability, culture, ethnicity and language, religion and beliefs, sexuality and gender.
- ✚ **Together 4 Children** (T4C) is the regional **Joint Adoption Service** has a priority to ensure there are sufficient adoptive families for children who are unable to live with their birth family and for whom adoption is the right plan for them.
- ✚ The Council uses the government grant available to ensure there is sufficient support and housing in a suitable location and environment to meet the needs of our unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. A UASC peer support ambassador, a former UASC experienced young person, is in post.
- ✚ The Council Housing Service has a duty to prevent homelessness and ensure care leavers live in suitable accommodation. There is a **Joint Housing & Children's Services Protocol to Prevent Homelessness for 16/17s and Care Leavers which is being reviewed**. The Council is investing in accommodation and a Care Leavers' Hub to aid transitions to adulthood for care leavers and provide them with a safe meeting space.
- ✚ We are Corporate Parents to our young people who have been looked after by Shropshire Council and are eligible for ongoing advice, support and assistance from the age of 16 up to their 25th birthday if they request this.

The Council has a **Care Leavers' Local Offer**.

The key elements of our Local Offer are:



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- To maintain our Corporate Parenting Pledge
- To prepare our young people for adult life, ensuring they have an up-to-date and relevant Pathway Plan
- To offer support with their health, education, training and employment, safe and secure accommodation, managing money, enabling safe relationships and lifelong links

✚ **The Care Leavers' Covenant** is a government initiative borne out of Keep on Caring, the care leaver strategy 2016. It seeks to create practical, specific offers, by organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors, to support care leavers aged 16-25 in living independently.

The 'mission' of the Covenant is to promote five key outcomes, in order that care leavers:

- are better prepared to live independently.
- have improved access to employment, education, and training.
- experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure.
- have improved access to health support.
- achieve financial stability.

However, there is an overarching ambition at the heart of the Covenant: namely, for society – civic, civil, and business – to be the lifelong 'universal family' to those who have not enjoyed the love and support that comes from having devoted birth parents to fall back on.

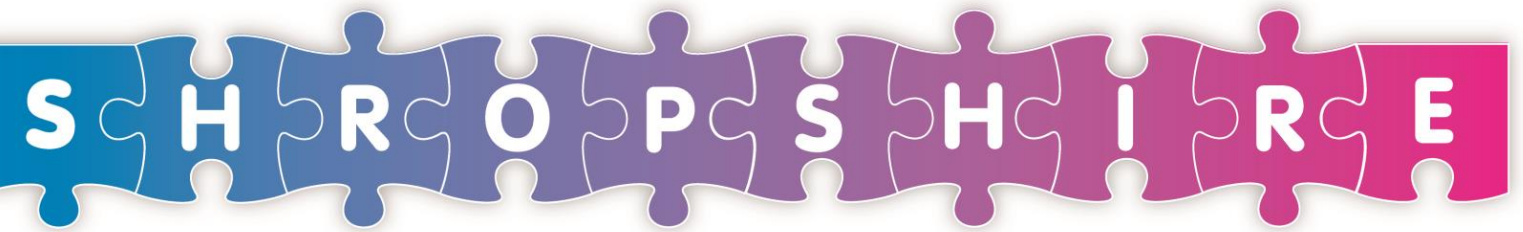
The Council signed up to the Care Leavers' Covenant in 2022 and revised our Care Leavers' Local Offer to reflect our support for our care experienced young people as they move into adulthood.

10. Supporting Structures

The Virtual School for Children in Care

The Virtual School is responsible for providing strategic direction, targeted support and securing successful educational outcomes for all children and young people in care and will:

- Support the Council in the governance and action plan for the Virtual School Governing Body
- Support children and young people in care in School Years 1-13 which will include working with carers, Social Workers, Schools, Special Educational Needs, other Council teams and external agencies.
- Monitor performance of educational attainment and progress across all Key Stages and assist and support with the statutory completion of Personal Education Plans
- Facilitate Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings



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- Advise, monitor and report on all matters regarding admissions, attendance and exclusions of children and young people in care. No looked after child should be permanently excluded without consultation with the Virtual School Head Teacher.
- Provide training for carers, designated teachers and designated governors.

And above all, promote and improve the educational attainment of children and young people in care.

The Corporate Parenting Steering Board

The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will act as an advisory and consultative body to the Council, its partners and its committees and other strategic groups and will provide robust challenge to ensure that Corporate Parenting duties are carried out effectively and consistently. It will ensure that the outcomes and life chances of children in care and care leavers are improved so they are in line with their peers and will act as the champion for these children and young people.

It is the role of the Corporate Parenting Steering Board to set the priorities for children in care and to monitor and scrutinise service delivery.

It will also:

- ✚ Ensure that the commitments outlined in the Shropshire's Charter for Children in Care and Care Leavers are delivered.
- ✚ Oversee the implementation of this strategy with delegated responsibilities to Heads of Service or Senior Managers within all Departments and partner agencies.
- ✚ Monitor the delivery of good, safe, high-quality services through quality assurance and performance management frameworks.

The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will provide:

- ✚ High Support and High Challenge to ensure effective undertaking of the Corporate Parenting Responsibility – holding to account on behalf of the council.
- ✚ Clear line of sight on practice and what good practice looks like and assure selves it is delivered, including the role of the IRO.
- ✚ Scrutiny and oversight of performance, outcomes and impact for children and young people of the work of the Local Authority and key partners.
- ✚ Lead the culture and share the message about Corporate Parenting responsibilities.
- ✚ Lead the narrative – these are our children, who deserve parenting that would be good enough for our own children.

In addition to progressing **the 6 priorities** on behalf of the Council, the Corporate Parenting Steering Group also has a responsibility to ensure children looked after and care leavers are safeguarded and that their progress is monitored so that early action can be taken

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when gaps are addressed, and successes can be celebrated as we would for our own children.

Ensuring safety

The Council works closely with the police, the Local Community Safeguarding Partnership and Youth Offending Service to reduce the risks for children and young people living in Shropshire and looked after away from Shropshire to ensure:

- Coordinated actions are taken to prevent the need for children to become looked after, and to enable them to live safely when they are looked after, or as care leavers, through making the local community and environment in which they live safe from criminal or sexual exploitation.
- Coordinated actions are taken to identify children at risk of harm, including those who go missing from care or are at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation, and ensure plans are in place to protect them.
- Coordinated actions are taken to enable children looked after to feel safe and be safe with the people caring for them and in their local community and environment.

Oversight and Scrutiny

The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will receive and scrutinize the following reports at each Board:

- Sub-group progress reports inc. data in respect of education, health, and stability indicators

The Board will also receive Annual Reports:

- IRO Annual Report
- Adoption Annual Report
- Fostering Annual Report
- Children Looked After and Care Leavers' Annual Report
- Independent Advocacy Annual Report
- Virtual School Annual Report

Corporate Parenting Steering Group Action Plan for 2024-2025.



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Appendix 1

Corporate Parenting Steering Board



ITEM 4 - Corporate
Parenting Steering



Corporate
Parenting Sub Group

Requirements

The leadership and governance of the Corporate Parenting Steering Board must be clear in relation to the Steering Group's power to deploy resources and hold officers to account.

Individual Steering Board members must be trained and prepared for their task, and be clear about the authority they carry.

The relationship of the Corporate Parenting Steering Board to other Boards, partnership arrangements and scrutiny committees must be clear.

The Corporate Parenting Steering Board must have access to robust qualitative and quantitative management information in order to effectively monitor performance against outcomes and track delivery of Pledge commitments.

The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will, therefore, receive reports from the sub-groups and officers on a range of local and national performance indicators in relation to children in care e.g., health, education, participation, and inspection outcomes.

Steering Board Membership

The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will be chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Young People, and will meet quarterly

Membership will consist of Councillors, Director of Children Services, Assistant Director Children Services, Senior Officers, representatives for Children and Young People in and leaving care, and partner agencies such as Health and Police.

The engagement of young people with the Steering Board, on their terms, will be essential to inform current and future priorities and decisions relating to children in care.

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Terms of Reference:

- ✚ Provide a forum for Children in Care to influence policy, service developments, practice, etc. so that there is continuous improvement;
- ✚ Take a strategic overview of Shropshire Council's and partner agencies responsibilities towards Children in Care;
- ✚ Scrutinise service delivery in order to satisfy ourselves that there is joined up, effective and holistic approach to meeting the needs of looked after children and care leavers.
- ✚ Commit to listen to the views of looked after children, young people and care leavers.
- ✚ Ensure looked after children, young people and care leavers are considered in the development of all policy and service provision that might impact on them.
- ✚ Attend events that recognize and celebrate the achievements and successes of looked after children, young people and care leavers.
- ✚ Meet with children and young people through participation groups
- ✚ Ensure that relevant new initiatives, plans, policies and service developments are presented to the Panel for consultation.
- ✚ Challenge practice and ways of working and the delivery of services where required
- ✚ Understand the needs of Shropshire's looked after population, including data relating to:
 - How many looked after children, young people and care leavers there are
 - How many the local authority is looking after
 - How well we are achieving permanency for children in a timely way
 - How well looked after children, young people and care leavers are doing at school, college or university and what needs to be done to improve educational outcomes
 - What the health needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers are and how these are being met
 - What advocacy or children's services are available
 - What are the housing needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers and how are these being met?
 - What support is available to care leavers

Support to the Corporate Parenting Steering Board: will be provided by the PA to the Head of Service

Accountability: Chair to report to the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive or DCS



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Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee: will be represented on the board by elected members. Board will receive relevant reports and Recommendations for information, planning and monitoring purposes.

Relationship with the Safeguarding Partnership: The work programme of the Corporate Parenting Board and reports should be provided to the Safeguarding Partnership– Reports are for information only

Appendix 2

Corporate Parenting Councillors’ Induction Programme (new dates)

A programme has been revised to enable every Councillor to understand the context for looked after children and care leavers, and the role of councillors to fulfil their statutory duties



Elected Member
Induction Program



Shropshire
Councillors' Inducti

Appendix 3

End to End Permanence Policy & Strategy February 2024



End to End Pathways
to Permanence V.2 1£

Appendix 4

Sufficiency Strategy Under Review



3.02 2020-2025
Sufficiency Strategy -

Appendix 5

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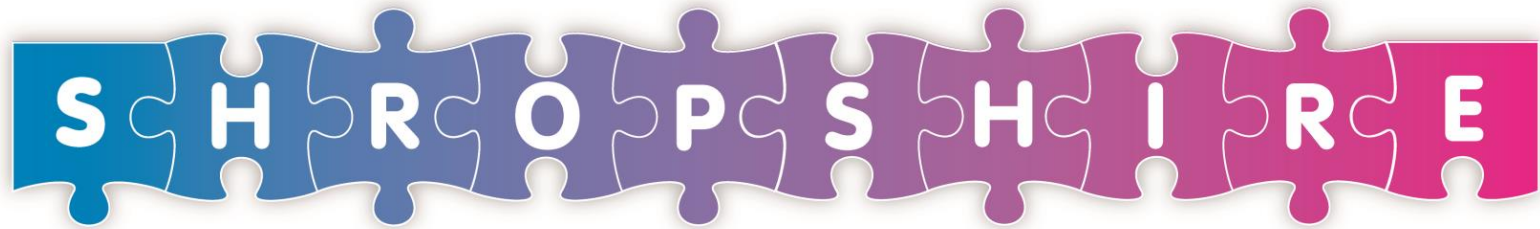
Key Structures

- ✚ **Children in Care Council.** Local authorities are required to establish a Children in Care Council to represent the views of looked after children to those responsible for the service.
- ✚ **Corporate Parenting Steering Group.** Although not a statutory requirement, most local authorities have established a group of elected members to oversee the corporate parenting function of the local authority.
- ✚ **Safeguarding Community Partnership.** The Safeguarding Community Partnership is a wide range of partners who come together to prevent and tackle Child and Adult abuse and Community Safety (with scrutiny from the Independent Chair). Each partner organisation retains its own existing lines of accountability and responsibility. The Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership acts to seek assurance, scrutinise, challenge, and ensure agencies are enabled to work together to achieve the aims of the Partnership.
- ✚ **Integrated Commissioning Board.** The ICB and the local authority should agree joint action on the health needs of looked after children in their area and develop a joint commissioning strategy.
- ✚ **Health and Well-Being Board.** A forum for key leaders from the health and social care system to work together to improve the health and well-being of the local population and reduce health inequalities. As a group at risk of poor health, it will be important to ensure that the needs of looked after children and care-leavers form part of their remit.
- ✚ **The Virtual School.**
- ✚ **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).** Dedicated provision is required for looked after children. In some authorities this has led to the creation of specialist teams; in others it has been interpreted more narrowly. In Shropshire this is called BeeU.

Appendix 6

Key Posts/Roles

- ✚ **Lead Member for Children's Services.** This individual has *political* responsibility for the leadership, strategy, and effectiveness of local authority children's services.
- ✚ **Director of Children's Services.** This person has *professional* responsibility for the leadership, strategy, and effectiveness of local authority children's services.
- ✚ **Director of Public Health.** The Director should be examining the health outcomes of looked after children to ensure that steps are taken to reduce inequalities.



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- ✚ **Independent Reviewing Officers.** IROs are responsible for reviewing and monitoring each looked after child's case and care plan and challenging poor practice. They must be qualified social workers and independent from the line management of the child's case.
- ✚ **Social Workers.** Each looked after child must have a qualified social worker allocated to them, responsible for developing and implementing their care plan.
- ✚ **Residential and foster carers.** Each looked after child should be provided with a placement to live in that is best able to keep them safe and meet their needs. This can be with foster carers, in residential care or a more specialist setting if their needs are complex.
- ✚ **Kinship carers.** Some looked after children are placed with family or friends, sometimes known as 'kinship carers' or **Connected Person Carers.**
- ✚ **Adopters.** Where it is decided that a child cannot be cared for by their own family, it is important that a permanent alternative home is provided. This may be through adoption, where the adoptive family acquires full parental responsibility and the child ceases to be looked after once an adoption order is made.
- ✚ **Special Guardians.** Where a child has significant ties with someone other than a parent who is looking after them, such as a relative or foster carer, that person can be given parental responsibility through a special guardianship order. This means that they will bring the child up, and the child is no longer looked after, but the child is not part of their family in the same way as an adopted child.
- ✚ **Independent Visitors.** Every looked after child is entitled to have an independent visitor – an adult completely outside the care system who can befriend them. This is especially useful for children who have little or no contact with their family.
- ✚ **Advocates.** An advocate has a more specific role than that of an independent visitor, in that they support the child's participation in decision-making and make sure that their voice is heard. They may accompany children to review meetings if the child requests it.
- ✚ **Personal Advisors.** Young people entitled to services as a care-leaver must be allocated a personal advisor to act as a focal point for planning their transition to adulthood. The role is not the same as that of a social worker and personal advisors will continue to offer support after the young person has left care.
- ✚ **Participation workers.** Many local authorities have created specific posts, or contracted local voluntary sector partners, to support children's participation in the Children in Care Council or to seek their views in other ways.
- ✚ **Virtual School Head.** The Children and Families Act 2014 made it a statutory duty for all English Local Authorities to appoint a SENIOR OFFICER (Virtual Head Teacher) with the responsibility and purpose of promoting the educational attainments of looked after children. This will involve working with a range of partners including schools, social workers, carers, members and senior local authority officers to strategically and operationally promote the educational opportunities and attainments for looked after children in Shropshire. The virtual



LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

school head or equivalent will collate information about the attainment of looked after children as if they were in a single school, and to provide challenge and support to help them make progress.

- ✚ **Designated Teachers.** Every maintained school is required to appoint a designated teacher to promote the educational achievement of looked after children.
- ✚ **Designated Doctors and Nurses for children looked after.** These individuals have a strategic role that is separate from the direct service they may offer to individual children. Different local areas operate different models, but it is important that, whichever model is used, arrangements are in place to enable the designated professionals to have an impact on the commissioning of health services for looked after children.

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