

Shropshire Council Children's Services

DRAFT Participation and Impact
Strategy (awaiting comms branding
and agreement)

2025-2027





Context

- At Shropshire we are ambitious for children and young people.
- We can achieve the best possible outcomes through co-production, meaningful participation, consultation and engagement at all levels, with mutual respect and regard for the voices and experiences of children, young people, parents and carers, valuing them as equal partners and working ‘with them’ rather than ‘doing to them.’
- We now have a ‘statutory duty’ to involve children and young people in the development of services.
- We want to make sure that all children are consulted, including children with additional needs.

YOUR
VOICE
MATTERS



Purpose

This strategy is part of the Shropshire Plan, which is a strategic approach to improving the lives of Shropshire's residents. It is designed to -

- Inform staff across all levels of service, to create an understanding of what participation is, and how we can embed it across all of Children's Services in line with best practice.
- Set out our values, commitment and aspirations, for how we will work in direct partnership with children, young people, parents and carers, and how this will impact positively on outcomes for them.
- Co-produced with staff, parents, carers, children and young people within Shropshire, with a range of ages, abilities and backgrounds including children with additional needs

'Turning words into actions for a brighter future and a better Shropshire.'

The Shropshire Plan



The Shropshire Plan 2022 – 2025 is a strategic vision that sets out how we are working towards a healthy and sustainable Shropshire. Participation across all of our services is at the heart of the agenda and key to its success.



The four areas the Shropshire plan focuses on are:



Healthy People



Healthy Economy



Healthy Environment



Healthy Organisation



Participation is key to all of these areas. It involves communities, businesses, health partners and the public sector all working together to address challenges, propose solutions and make informed choices that drive positive change for the benefit of all.

A Vision for Shropshire – in the words of those we support

(Early Help service users and Children in Care)

"We want to be treated with respect love and trust. We want you to value our differences and encourage us with kindness regardless, build relationships and connections with us that create a sense of belonging so we can dream big and go on to do great things."

We want to be allowed to share our ideas and experiences from our lives, with adults, and for them to use those to learn about how they can improve services for us as well as other children and young people."

"It is important that all children and young people in Shropshire can share their views and opinions, be properly listened to and for adults to act on what they have been told and then feedback about the actions they have taken."

"Adults should help children and young people to understand what their rights are."

"The views, experiences and expertise of parents and carers should be listened to and used to make things better for others in similar situations."

"Participation must be meaningful, or else it is pointless. The right culture, commitment, support and resources must be in place to ensure it is available for everyone."

What is Participation?

At its heart, Participation is about involving the children, young people and families we support in the designing of services relevant to them. This promotes empowerment and autonomy and a sense of control, where support is adapted to their individual needs by 'creating it with them,' rather than 'doing it to them.'

Slay and Penny's Participation Ladder illustrates the different levels of involvement for children, young people and their families in decision-making processes and helps to remind and inform workers about the difference between only consulting people to fully involving them, ensuring their voices are heard and valued at every step, leading to autonomy and empowerment.



Why do we encourage Participation?

We have a duty to ensure that the voices of children, young people and their families are listened to properly and taken seriously. Active Participation allows the individual to feel empowered when making decisions about their future and allows us, as an organisation, to be able to maximise the level to which we meet the needs of those we support.

Children and Young People in Shropshire make up approximately one fifth of the entire population of the county. Therefore, it is important their voices are heard regarding the services that affect them.

This is what some of them and their families had to say about why we should do Participation in Shropshire.....

Why Should we Encourage Participation?

"You should participate for the experience of doing something new. You might find something you are good at that you didn't know".
(Virtual School pupil)

"Taking part and having an opinion, so my opinions can benefit me as well as other parents. When this happens, I feel euphoric." (EH Parent)

"Participation means being able to have a say for everyone. There are lots of parents with SEN children who are just left to get on with it. Until you speak up nothing changes. I know the struggles my family have had, and I want to make a difference. Families and individuals shouldn't feel like they are just another number." (Member of SEN Parents group)

"A safe space is especially important to participate. If I feel comfortable in a space this means I can talk more easily."
(Virtual School Pupil)

"Having my voice heard, not just heard or being used as a tick box exercise but valuing my views or suggestions enough to act on them. It is a waste of time and pointless if this doesn't happen, it becomes tokenism and a box ticking exercise and I feel let down." (EH Parent)

"If children and young people are struggling with their mental health they go straight to social media. Instead it would be good to have more contact with a person." (Virtual School pupil)

The Benefits of Active Participation

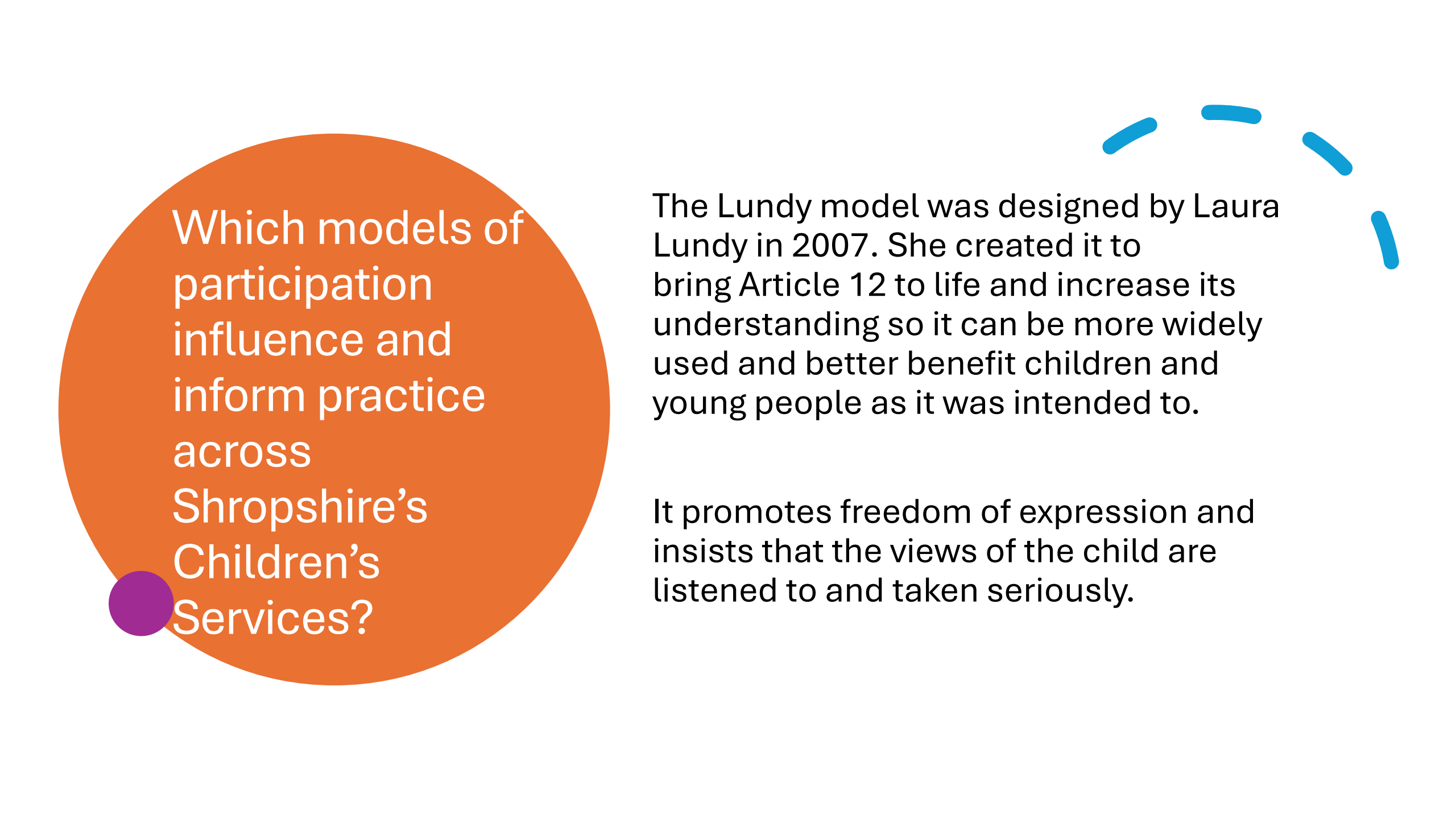
Active participation is not just a buzzword, but a fundamental shift towards creating person-centred support across Shropshire's Children's Services. It has a wide range of benefits for children, young people, their parents and carers as well as our organisation and the staff that deliver the service. Some of these benefits are:

To staff and organisation

- Improved job satisfaction through creating more meaningful relationships with children, young people and families, and witnessing the positive impact this has on their well-being.
- Planning, creating and shaping better quality services that meet the needs of children, young people and families.
- Improving the quality of life for children, young people and families, by services recognising, understanding and responding to their needs.
- Improving decision making.
- Making practice more inclusive.

To the child, young person, their parents and carers:

- Improving services to meet their needs.
- Feeling respected and listened to.
- Increase in independence, self-confidence, self-esteem and a greater sense of autonomy. These feelings are enforced through positive relationships that encourage increased self-belief and the ability to successfully overcome obstacles.
- Increase in ability to make informed decisions about care plans, leading to improved management of long-term conditions.
- Decreasing feelings of helplessness, poor mental health and dependence on others by promoting control over their lives.
- Creating a sense of purpose, through engaging with, and playing an active role in their community.
- Gaining new skills such as problem solving, decision making, negotiation, listening and communication.



Which models of participation influence and inform practice across Shropshire's Children's Services?

The Lundy model was designed by Laura Lundy in 2007. She created it to bring Article 12 to life and increase its understanding so it can be more widely used and better benefit children and young people as it was intended to.

It promotes freedom of expression and insists that the views of the child are listened to and taken seriously.

The model consists of four key elements:

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

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

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

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



How will we incorporate the Lundy Model into our practice to ensure the children and young people of Shropshire can participate?



Space – We will create a safe space for you by listening to and acting on any concerns you have.



Voice – We will encourage you to communicate your opinions and perspectives and provide you with the necessary tools and support to do so regardless of your background, age or ability.



Audience – we will do our best to identify appropriate partners who can act on your input and implement positive change in line with your voices.



Influence – we will feedback how your input was considered and what changes took place as a result. We will always be transparent and tell you honestly when we are not able to implement changes.

Values of Good Practice

To ensure participation is happening throughout Shropshire's Children's Services there are four simple values we will always endeavour to follow when working with children, young people and families.

Respect – we will always show you respect by providing you with the time and space you need to express yourself as well as actively listening to you. We will respect your wishes, unless it means that you or another person may be harmed.

Honesty – we will always tell you the truth, even if it is bad news. We will always be honest and transparent about what support we can provide and will not tell you we can do/provide something if we cannot. We hope that always striving to be honest, open and transparent will help us to create a trusting relationship with you.

Inclusivity – we will always be inclusive, promoting your right to be involved in an activity or to have your say in decisions that affect your life, regardless of your age, ability and diversity. We will work with you to make any necessary adjustments to ensure this can happen and be honest if we cannot.

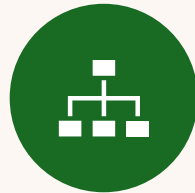
Support – we will always support you in a person-centred, holistic way, and strive to make you the author of your own plan. We will work with you, and those close to you, building on your strengths and helping to make changes important to you so you can develop the tools to shape your own future. We will strive to provide you with continuity of support, only changing workers when there is no alternative and communicating any changes at the earliest opportunity.

We will promote inclusivity, ensuring that our children, young people and parents/carers are able to participate

Participating in different ways



Individually – participating in decisions that relate to your own life where the outcome primarily affects you, yourself. Examples of this are being involved in decisions about day-to-day activities or having meaningful involvement in your support plan.



Operationally – participating in decisions, planning and activities aimed at improving the quality of our service and where the outcomes affect others as well as yourself. Examples of this are when you provide us with feedback about our service or sit on interview panels to help us recruit the right staff.



Strategically – participating in decisions that involve long term planning where outcomes influence policies and practice within Shropshire's Children's Services. Examples of this are meeting with and influencing Elected Members, contributing to commissioning activities or having a seat on Partnership Boards.

Building on Good Practice - Space

The Virtual School have created more spaces for children and young people to be heard. This includes the Virtual School Council of Looked After Children. They are already influencing practice locally, regionally and nationally by presenting at Education Conferences on their experiences.



Building on Good Practice – Voice

Our Detached Youth Team carried out the Youth Survey to hear the voices of our young people to help inform the Youth Strategy. The Strategy heard from over 2000 young people in schools across Shropshire . This included children with Special Educational Needs. They had a strong voice regarding where they live.

The voice of young people is clearly recorded on children’s case files and within the review of their individual plans.

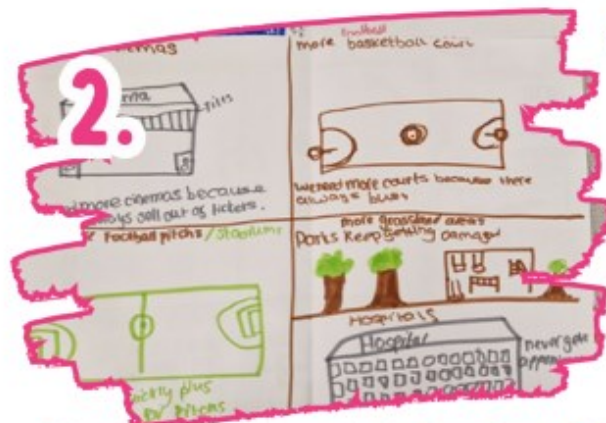


WHAT MATTERS TO YOUNG PEOPLE:



Safety in community: 'We want to feel safe in our communities'

This included aspects of traffic safety, having access to safe spaces that are well lit and consider prohibiting the use of alcohol in the areas they like to be in, feeling safer on public transport, having more police presence with better understanding of young people and being able to have responses to how their concerns have been dealt with.



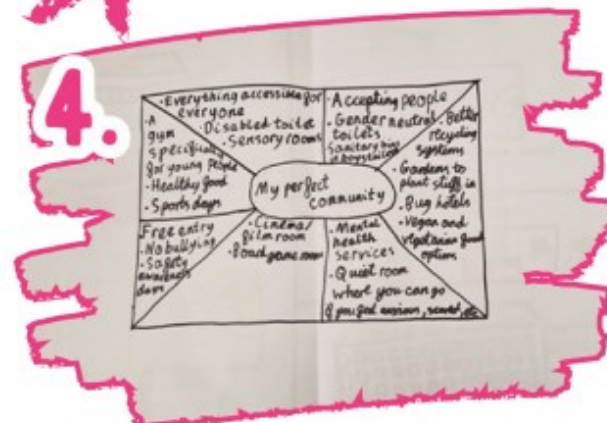
Health and well-being support: 'We need people we can trust to talk to us about our emotional well-being'

This includes having the right trusted people at the right time to talk through how they are feeling, better training for other professionals to enable conversations, development of spaces to enable young people to get out into the community, having free or discounted accessible opportunities to engage with exercise or just being outside.



Empowering Young People: 'We want to be involved, included and empowered to make decisions and plans for our future'

To shape their own ideas and initiatives, be part of decision making and planning about what matters the most to them, create opportunities for young people to be involved because their opinions are important and they don't often feel heard, to empower them to take ownership of their youth offer because it's an offer for them and enable young people's voices to work with adults views to ensure priorities are achievable and realistic.



Being part of shaping their communities: 'We want to be part of shaping our communities to make them better for everyone living in it'

This includes working on local plans, projects and initiatives that develops social value within their communities that are reflective of what young people need to live their best lives. Develop restorative relationships with the whole community and work collaboratively with local partners to understand how young people play a vital part in enhancing their own communities.

Building on Good Practice – Audience

We have ensured that the voice of children and young people who are looked after are heard by the right people by utilizing the Mind of My Own Tool and by young people's involvement in the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Our corporate parenting panel has been co-chaired with a Care Leaver, who has also presented at Full Council.



Building on Good Practice – Influence

We have worked in partnership with young people to influence decisions in the area they live.

This includes joint working between the Young People, the Town Council and the detached youth team to influence the erecting of a shelter and lighting in the Market Drayton Skate Park.

We have also developed ‘language that cares’ with our young people in residential, which is part of the induction for residential workers.





Priority Area 1 – Creating More Spaces

- We will build on our existing range of activities to create more spaces for children and young people to participate including those with special educational needs.
- We will create a clear pathway for young people to choose which space is right for them to share their views.
- This will include a full review of existing spaces, including the Children in Care Council to align it with the Virtual School Council.
- We will create a democratic Youth Parliament for all young people in Shropshire.



Student
Council

The logo for Student Council features the words "Student" and "Council" stacked vertically. Each letter is a different color: S (blue), t (purple), u (pink), d (red), e (orange), n (green), t (light green) for "Student"; and C (green), o (red), u (orange), n (blue), c (purple), i (light blue), l (red) for "Council".



Priority Area 2 – Voice

- We will ensure that young people receive information by creating communications that they can understand including those with special educational needs
- We will ensure that all children have access to the pathway to participation.
- We will ensure that children and young people's voice is communicated widely through the Participation and Impact Project Board.
- The voices of young people will continue to influence our youth strategy and youth services.



YOUR
VOICE
MATTERS

Priority Area 3 – Audience

- We will ensure through the Participation and Impact Project Board, that the voices of children and young people are heard by the right people.
- We will promote the use of Mind of My Own, developing our tools with those with special educational needs.
- By involving young service users on the Project Board, we will work with them to develop processes.
- We will work with young people to recruit our workforce, prioritising the skills that they think will help.



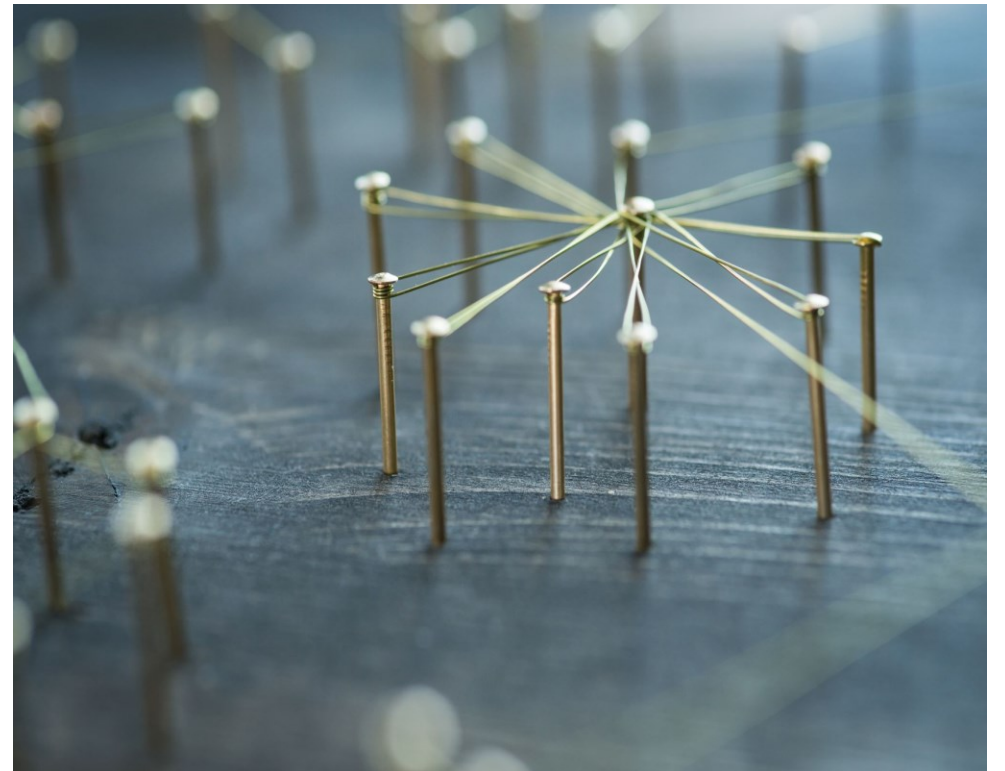
Priority Area 4 – Influence

- Through the participation pathway, we will ensure that children and young people are able to influence at the right level.
- We will adopt our ‘language that cares’ developed by residential across the organisation.
- Our Youth Parliament will link directly to our Executive Management Team and Council driving decisions.
- Our Children in Care/Education Council will continue to influence the Corporate Parenting Panel



Aspirations - Partnership Approach

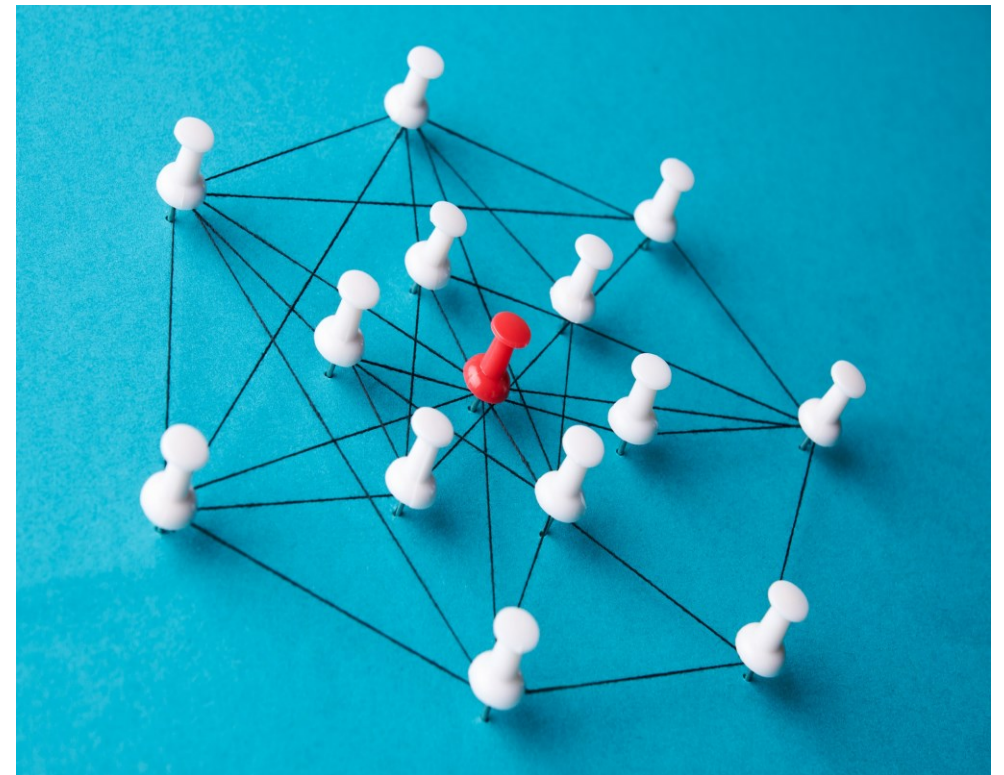
At Shropshire, partnership working is our strength. We want to work with partners to expand the scope of the Participation Strategy during 2025/26 to include a wider range of partners, to enable a consistent system wide approach to adopting the principles outlined in the strategy. This will include the voluntary sector and will ensure that the voices of children and families who have difficulty communicating, are heard. This will enable greater impact for children and young people in Shropshire, whatever support or services they are accessing.



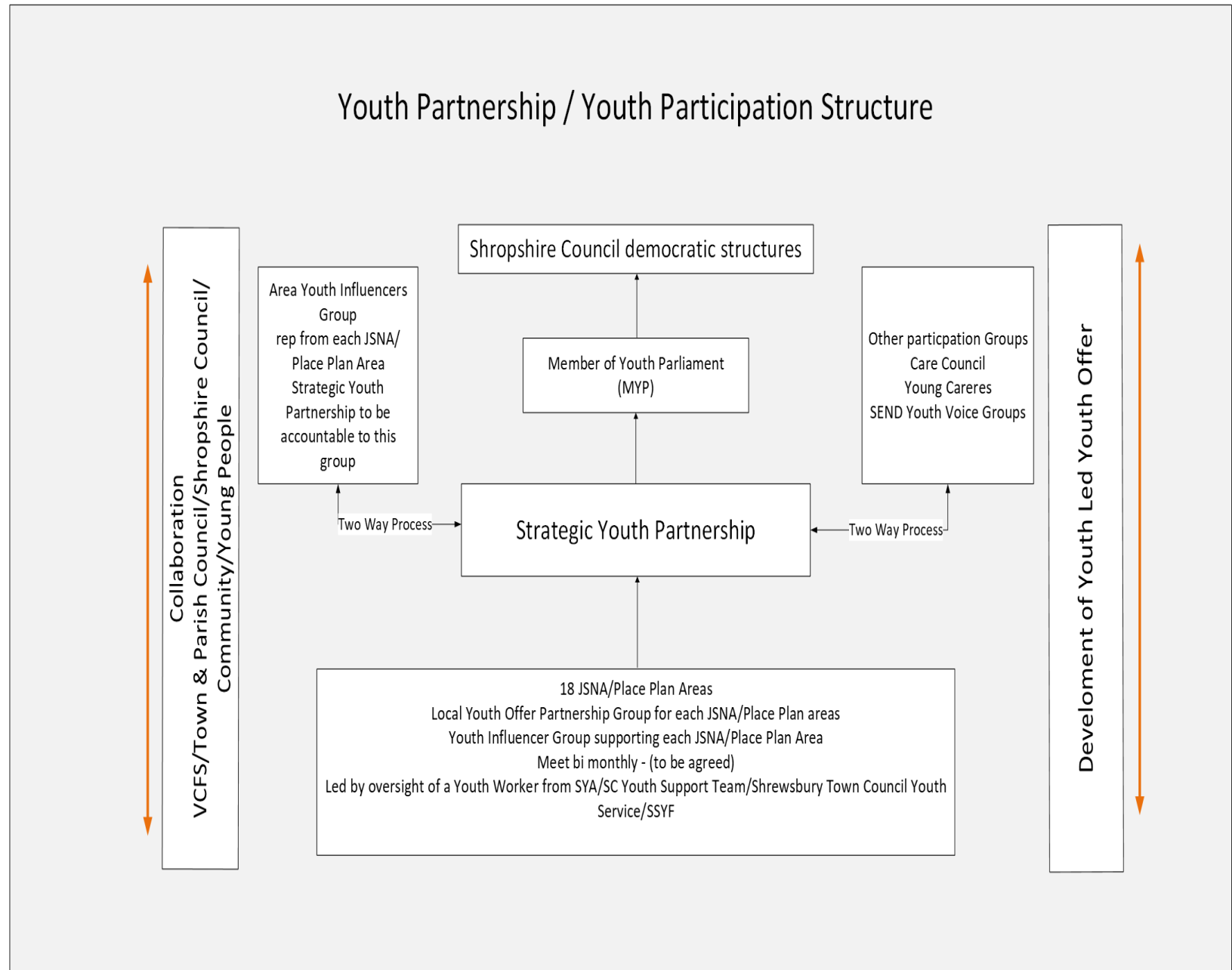
Aspirations – A Youth Parliament

We have aspirations to create a democratic Youth Parliament in Shropshire. This would enable young people from across Shropshire to come together to-

- Represent the views of children across Shropshire.
- Advocate on behalf of their peers and contribute to positive change for all young people.
- Run campaigns about important issues, holding regular events and consultations.
- Build their negotiating and leadership skills



Governance:
We will align
with our Youth
Strategy
working



Measuring Success
How will we know
we are making things
better?
Children, Young
People and Families
will:

See:

improvements made due to their ideas.

more children and young people taking part in activities and enjoying what is on offer in the community, including those with special educational needs.

Say:

how their thoughts and ideas have helped to make positive changes.

they have lots of different things to do that they enjoy.

they feel confident in their ability to make good decisions and know where to go and who to ask if they need help.

Feel:

they are listened to and that their thoughts and opinions matter.

safe, welcome and included.

they get the right help and support, when and where they need it.

they have lots of opportunities available locally to help them socialise, learn, achieve and be healthy.

All children will feel that their voice is heard – including those with Special Educational Needs