

**Committee and Date****Cabinet****3 December 2025**

Item

Public



Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Services Annual Reports 2024-25

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1. Synopsis

This report summarises the Annual Reports 2024–2025 for Children and Young Peoples Directorate, highlighting council roles, statutory duties, and corporate parenting for children in Shropshire, including those in care.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report includes as attachments the Annual Reports for 2024 – 2025 for Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Services. A full suite of reports is provided so there is a clear 'end to end' picture of the work undertaken across the services. It enables Cabinet Members to evidence their governance and oversight, whilst also enabling questions to be asked, and the breadth of the statutory functions to be acknowledged.
- 2.2 The list below is ordered chronologically, and it is recommended they be read in the order laid out below.

Early Help Annual Report 2024 – 2025 – our early help services.

Local Offer Annual Report 2024-2025 – children with Special Educational Needs

Compass & Assessment Annual Report 2024 – 25 - The 'front door' to children's social care.

Trees Annual Report 2024 – 2025 – Councils Response to Child Exploitation

Court and PLO Annual report 2024 – 2025 Overview of court work and pre-court intervention

Parenting Team Annual Report 2024-25 – work of the team that undertake parenting Assessments

Stepping Stones Annual Report 2024 - 2025 – the team that work to stop children coming into care and support children who have come in to return home.

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2024/2025 – the work of the teams that work with the children we look after who can't live with their parents.

Independent Review Unit Annual Report 2024-2025 – child protection conferences and Looked after children's reviews.

Quality Assurance Annual Report 2024-2025 – learning from audit and QA work

LADO Annual Report 2024 – 2025 – Statutory role of the Local authority Designated Officer in managing allegation against those in a position of trust.

Children's Workforce Annual Report 2024-2025 – our workforce overview

Principal Social Worker (PSW) Annual Report 2024-2025 – overview of practice and work with the Safeguarding Board.

Shropshire Virtual School Annual Report 2024 – 2025 / Executive Summary

Shropshire Virtual School Annual Report 2024-25 – work of the Virtual school with children looked after and those with a social worker.

Fostering Annual Report 2024-25 – work of our fostering teams.

T4C (Adoption) Annual Report 2024-2025 – work of T4C our regional arrangements for Adoption.

Residential Service Annual Report 2024 – 2025 – an overview of our children's homes.

2.3 The Early Help Annual Report 2024–2025 sets out to:

- Align with key priorities from the Shropshire corporate plan, Economic Growth Strategy, and the Shropshire Plan.
- Describe how Early Help works with partners and communities to deliver the vision and priorities for Shropshire, focusing on enabling residents to live their best lives.
- Provide an overview of the transformation and realignment of Early Help Services, following an independent review, to address systemic issues, funding challenges, and improve service delivery.

2.4 The Shropshire SEND Local Offer Annual Report:

- Fulfills the statutory duty set out in the SEND Code of Practice. Local authorities must publish a Local Offer and annual report, providing:
- Clear, comprehensive, accessible, and up-to-date information about available provision across education, health, and social care for children and young people with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities).
- A mechanism for making provision more responsive to local needs and aspirations by involving disabled children, young people, parent carers, and service providers in its development and review

2.5 **The Compass & Assessment Report 2024–2025 is designed to:**

- Provide an overview of the work and outcomes of the Compass and Assessment Teams for the year. These are the Front Door Services that support the community, families and partnerships to deliver their statutory duties in relation to safeguarding children and early help provision.
- The two teams on receipt of the information assess and identify the right service at the right time, including early help, child in need, child protection and children looked after.
- Information is received from children, young people and their families, partners, the community and any other stake holders
- A robust Front Door is crucial to support demand management and ensure that children and their families are accessing the right service at the right time.

2.6 **The TREES Annual Report** documents the work of the TREES Team, which focuses on reducing and addressing child exploitation and missing children. The report aims to:

- Provide an overview of staffing, operational developments, and partnership working.
- Analyse trends and outcomes in exploitation and missing children cases.
- Inform senior leaders and members, as well as partners about progress, challenges, and priorities for the coming year.

2.7 **Public Law Outline and Care Proceedings** annual report explains how Shropshire Children's Services applies the Public Law Outline (PLO – pre court proceedings work) and Care Proceedings and the outcomes achieved during 2024 – 2025. Its aim is to:

- Outline the significant changes made to both processes in the service to improvement timeliness, compliance and outcomes for children and young people.
- Demonstrate the positive impact on children and families, ensuring timely and appropriate outcomes with less delay.
- Provide transparency and accountability for practice and outcomes achieved.

2.8 **The Parenting Team Annual Report**

- outlines service delivery to parents/carers and professionals, evaluates performance against previous years, and highlights the impact of staffing changes on service capacity and delivery.

2.9 The Stepping Stones Annual Report sets out to:

- Provide an overview of the Stepping Stones Service, which delivers individualised, intensive, wrap-around support to children and parents in Shropshire.
- Align with the Shropshire Plan's goal of "Breaking Generational Cycles," focusing on a trauma-informed approach that addresses the impact of adverse early life experiences.
- Demonstrate how the service aims to break cycles of abuse in families, reducing the number of children and grandchildren entering care.
- Report on the service's expansion, including increased capacity to support children on the edge of care, those at risk of exploitation, and those in need of reunification with families or step-down from residential care to foster or family settings.
- Evidence the service's contribution to cost avoidance by preventing children and young people from needing to become looked after, and by supporting timely, safe reunification or step-down from residential care.

2.10 The Corporate Parenting Annual Report provides an update on how Shropshire Council's corporate parenting responsibilities and activities are being delivered. Its core purpose is to:

- Demonstrate the collective responsibility of the local authority to actively promote the life chances of children in care and care leavers, treating them as if they were our own children.
- Update on delivery and progress: The report details how the council and its partners are supporting children and young people in care, and care leavers, to have high aspirations and achieve their full potential.
- Evidence oversight and accountability: The report highlights the role of the Corporate Parenting Board, which brings together elected members, senior agency representatives, practitioners, and representatives of children looked after and care leavers. The Board ensures that the local authority and its partners are discharging their responsibilities towards these young people, including those transitioning to adulthood.
- Chart progress and challenges: It provides a record of achievements, barriers, and plans for the year ahead, supporting transparency and continuous improvement in corporate parenting practice.

2.11 Independent Reviewing Unit (IRU) Annual Report

- Purpose is to review and summarise the work and impact of the IRU in ensuring effective oversight, safeguarding and improved outcomes for children in care during 2024- 2025. Work focuses on the Child Protection process and the IRO's (Independent reviewing officers) who independently oversee the progress of children's care plans when they are looked after.

2.12 Quality Assurance Annual Report

- Purpose is to summarise quality assurance activities across children's services, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement, and ensure services for children and young people are effective, safe and continuously improving.

2.13 LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) Annual report

- Purpose is to review how allegations made against adults working with children are managed in Shropshire, ensuring compliance with safeguarding standards, and highlight key activity and improvements made during the year.

2.14 Children's Workforce Annual Report

- Purpose to review workforce development, highlight achievements and challenges, and support continuous improvement in practice and service delivery and outcomes for children and families.

2.15 PSW Annual Report

- Purpose: To review and report on the quality, consistency, and development of social work practice, highlight workforce trends and achievements, and support ongoing improvements in line with national and local good practice frameworks.

2.16 Shropshire Virtual School Annual Report

- To review and illustrate the achievements, challenges and impact of Shropshire Virtual School in supporting the education, progress, and wellbeing of children in care, previously looked after children, and those with a social worker, ensuring they have excellent opportunities to fulfil their potential during the year.

2.17 Fostering Annual Report

- This report provides an overview of the fostering service activity, highlighting progress and ongoing challenges, and informing future service developments and improvements to support children in care that require stable homes in a variety of potential settings, including with their family and friends.

2.18 T4C (Adoption) Annual Report

- Purpose of this report is to review the activity and performance of the Together4Children (T4C) Permanency Partnership Adoption Agency. Including progress in adoption recruitment and support and demonstrate how the partnership improves outcomes for children needing adoption across the region and specifically for Shropshire's Children.

2.19 Residential Service Annual Report

- The purpose of this report is to: Provide an overview of Shropshire Council's Children's Homes for the year 2025.

- Summarise the operation of six children's homes, each with its own Statement of Purpose, as part of a broader strategy aligned with children's services and the local authority's key priorities for Shropshire children.
- Explore key areas for each home, including vision, mission, values, and the interdependency framework (Prevention, Planning, Permanency, and Progression).
- Highlight how the service aspires to ensure all children have the opportunity to live in a home that enables them to achieve their full potential, with nurturing environments and a focus on care, achievement, and positive outcomes.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet acknowledge the content of the reports attached and the positive impact and outcomes that services are achieving for children and young people.
- 3.2 That Cabinet acknowledge the breadth of statutory requirements being successfully delivered and achieving good outcomes for the children and young people in Shropshire.
- 3.3 Where Cabinet wish to influence progress and development opportunities this can be incorporated into the plans of the Ambitions Board which will be driving forward the services continuous improvement plan.
- 3.4 That cabinet recommend to Council that it receive the Annual Report and resolve that Childrens Safeguarding training becomes a mandatory requirement for all elected Members in order that they are well equipped to fulfil their role as corporate parents.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1 Children and Safeguarding Services is continuously improving, this ensures that risks in the system can be quickly identified, responded to quickly and can be addressed timely and collaboratively across the service areas.
- 4.2 The risks outlined below are consistent focus areas for the reasons identified below.
- 4.3 Risk table

<i>Risk</i>	<i>Mitigation</i>
Potential deterioration of capacity if demands increase on the system.	Children's Services current operating model of increasing early help capacity, secure threshold application, appropriate referrals from partners and timeliness of intervention, securing children and young

Placement capacity and homes for children and young people not meeting need. Outcomes for children and young people deteriorate. Practice standards and statutory timeliness (the activity of the service), deteriorate.	people's long-term homes quickly including adoption was evidenced through the inspection. Performance and demand tracking that is embedded across the system evidence reduced numbers of open cases (per child) monthly, there are 699 children looked after as @ 04/09/25, including 32 unaccompanied asylum seekers through the government scheme in place. This is a reduction overall from 2023/24 and to date numbers of children requiring care for their safety is less than those leaving care month on month. The service is monitoring and tracking these areas of demand weekly/monthly with clear management oversight and service manager check and challenge sessions in place. Benchmarking data will be available in October 25 re numbers of Children looked after per 10.000 and Local Authority spends; the service will be evaluating its position against that when available. Our vision is to reduce the numbers of children in our care, secure the right placements/homes for them quickly and exit children from the system as quickly and safely as we can with family and friends, if possible, for them. If not long-term fostering or adoption are applied. The implementation of the Families First Programme nationally, should also enhance further the principle and practice of right service, right time, building on prevention and early intervention to prevent families escalating into children's social care going forward. Building our internal capacity will be crucial to avoid the impact of placement breakdowns on costs and impact on children and young people's well-being. The fostering transformation programme and work related to building on our children's homes is in place. Adoption is supported alongside the regional adoption agency and we have evidenced good practice in this area including sibling groups being placed together in the forever homes and family. A continuous improvement approach of high expectations, high challenge and high support is embedded as business as usual across all areas of Children's Services. Performance weekly check and challenge sessions, audit monthly process, learning events and quality assurance activity underpinned by management oversight supervision and leadership overview of decision making and spend
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5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 Shropshire Council continues to manage unprecedented financial demands and a financial emergency was declared by Cabinet on 10 September 2025. The overall financial position of the Council is set out in the monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. Significant management action has been instigated at all levels of the Council reducing spend to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all reports to Members provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers and/or Portfolio Holders review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. All non-essential spend will be stopped and all essential spend challenged. These actions may involve (this is not exhaustive):
- scaling down initiatives,
 - changing the scope of activities,
 - delaying implementation of agreed plans, or
 - extending delivery timescales.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1 The rural nature of Shropshire and the statutory requirement to ensure children and young people are safe, is for the majority of children's practitioners visits to be face to face. In the hub and/or at other locations like community venues or even school depending on the families and the situations circumstances. This does place a demand of workers across the service to travel to family homes.
- 6.2. Where the service can use the Teams function is used for meetings to reduce the impact of our workforces use of their cars, However some of the service's statutory functions require face to face time to be secured: including child protection multi agency case conferences, legal meetings, direct work sessions with children, young people and their families, court directed events and family time being some examples. Where the service can, and it is appropriate, we do use the Teams function comprehensively across the services. Of course, this is also reliant on the families access to a laptop and internet in their own homes too.

7. Background

- 7.1 In recent years the Annual reports have been presented to Cabinet each Autumn to ensure that there is a clear line of governance, accountability and oversight of work of Children's Social Care and enabling Members to act as Corporate Parent in line with their duties as Council Members. These reports are being presented to ensure members are undertaking their Corporate Parenting role and are aware and assured about the impact they can have as Corporate Parents and the services impact for 2024 – 25 for children and young people.
- 7.2 Every member as corporate parents has a duty to engage actively with corporate parenting and children's safeguarding training annually to ensure they have accessed the skills and knowledge required to effectively undertake their roles.

- 7.3 These reports should enable members to ensure themselves that services are being effective.
- 7.4 Where services have developed through investment (spend to save initiatives) annual reports evidence the impact on children's outcomes as well as financial savings.
- 7.5 Statutory functions being discharged affectively are evidenced through the Annual Reports of each area, these are wide ranging. High performance being achieved and maintained relies on each part of the system working effectively and the interface between teams and services being efficient to ensure that performance is maintained across the system.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 Shropshire Children's Services have demonstrated the positive impact of collaboration with partners (external and internal) and council services to achieve the outstanding judgement following the recent ILACS inspection, July 2025, report published August 2025. These reports above both inform and corroborate those findings and will ensure the services have clear next steps identified to ensure continuous improvement is sustained.
- 8.2 The service is continuously striving to maintain the high standards of practice achieved and looks forward to the impact of the significant national agendas for change further enhancing the outcomes for the children and young people of Shropshire. This is achieved through child focused decisions that demonstrate value for money and cost effectiveness. The focus is that children live in family settings wherever possible and where it meets their needs.

Background Papers:

These are attached as appendices.

OFSTED ILACS report 12 August 2025 gives the inspection overview of the service.

Local Member: All

Consultation with Local Member – Please consider the Local Member Protocol (see page E60 onwards of part 5 of the Constitution) and determine whether it is necessary to consult with the local member over the proposal set out in this report. This may not always be applicable (eg where the proposal affects all of Shropshire) but it should always be a consideration and in some cases a necessity so as to comply with the spirit of the Protocol.

Appendices [Please list the titles of Appendices]

- Appendix 1 - Early Help Annual Report 2024 – 2025
- Appendix 2 - Local Offer Annual Report 2024-2025
- Appendix 3 - Compass & Assessment Annual Report 2024 – 25
- Appendix 4 - Trees Annual Report 2024 – 2025
- Appendix 5 - Court and PLO Annual report 2024 – 2025
- Appendix 6 - Parenting Team Annual Report 2024-25
- Appendix 7 - Stepping Stones Annual Report 2024 - 2025
- Appendix 8 - Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2024/2025
- Appendix 9 - Independent Review Unit Annual Report 2024-2025
- Appendix 10 - Quality Assurance Annual Report 2024-2025
- Appendix 11 - LADO Annual Report 2024 – 2025
- Appendix 12 - Children's Workforce Annual Report 2024-2025
- Appendix 13 - Principal Social Worker (PSW) Annual Report 2024-2025
- Appendix 14 - Shropshire Virtual School Annual Report 2024 – 2025
- Appendix 15 - Fostering Annual Report 2024-25
- Appendix 16 - T4C (Adoption) Annual Report 2024-2025
- Appendix 17 - Residential Service Annual Report 2024 – 2025