



CORPORATE PARENTING

Annual Report 2024/25

Abstract

Corporate Parenting is 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. This report provides an update on how our Corporate Parenting responsibilities and activities are being delivered.

Steve Ladd, Service Manager



1. Introduction

Shropshire's Corporate Parenting Board brings together elected members, senior agency representatives and practitioners, and representatives of our children looked after and care leavers, to ensure children and young people in our care, and those who are care leavers, are supported to have high aspirations and achieve their full potential. The Board has a key role in ensuring that the Local Authority and its partners are discharging their responsibilities towards children and young people who are looked after and who are leaving our care to become adults.

The Annual Report 2024/25 highlights the work of the Council and partners and of the oversight of the Board in support of our children and young people looked after and care leavers, charting progress made alongside barriers and plans for the year ahead.

We are all Corporate Parents, and this report ensures the needs and voice of our children and young people is heard and taken into account in the plans we make and resources we use as a Council and with our partners.

We continue to work hard to hear and respond to the voice of our Looked After Children and Care Leavers and continue to apply the test of *"would this be good enough for my child....."* when considering our Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

2. Executive Summary

The term 'Corporate Parent' encompasses the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, all working together to provide the best possible care and safeguarding for children looked after and care leavers up to the age of 25. This report outlines our commitment, strategies, and achievements in fulfilling these responsibilities.

3. Corporate Parenting Principles

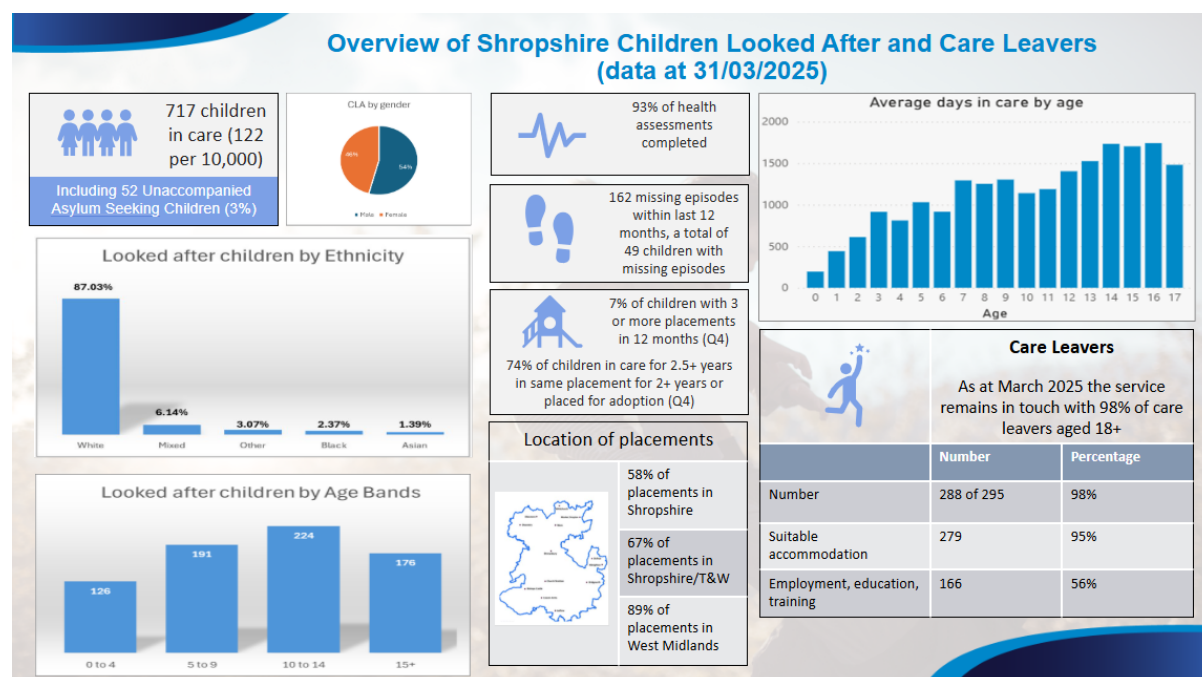
The statutory framework for Corporate Parenting is established in the Children and Social Work Act 2017, which outlines seven principles:

- Act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.
- Encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes, and feelings.
- Take into account the views, wishes, and feelings of children and young people.
- Help children and young people access and make the best use of services provided by the local authority and its partners.
- Promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for children and young people.
- Ensure children and young people are safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships, and education or work.
- Prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

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4. Overview of Shropshire Children Looked After and Care Leavers (Data as of 31/03/2025)



5. Key Achievements and Initiatives

5.1 Corporate Parenting Strategy

- The strategy was refreshed and outlines key considerations and plans for Shropshire Council and its partners. (Appendix 1) This strategy outlines key considerations and plans for Shropshire Council and its partners in our role as corporate parents of children in care and those leaving care.
- Emphasis on bringing love back into the system, shaping and delivering services with care and compassion.
- Presented to full Council on 12th December 2024 by the Lead Member and care experienced young person (Co-chair of Corporate Parenting Steering Board)

5.2 Corporate Parenting Steering Board

- A well-established Corporate Parenting Steering Board that acts 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. (see corporate parenting strategy for terms of reference)
- It also Provides robust challenge to improve outcomes and life chances for children in care and care leavers.
- Co -Chaired by care experienced young person alongside the Lead Member for Children

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5.3 Care Leavers Local Offer and Care Leavers Covenant

- Updated to provide comprehensive support and services to care leavers.
- Compared with neighbouring local authorities to ensure it meets the needs of Shropshire's care leavers. This confirmed that the proposed offer to Shropshire Care Leavers is appropriate, in line with comparable neighbours and that it meets the needs of our Care Leavers, supporting them towards independence.
- Also presented to full Council on 12th December 2024 by the Lead Member and care experienced young person (Co-chair of Corporate Parenting Steering Board)
- Reconfirmed commitment to the Care Leavers' Covenant (appendix 2 signed), demonstrating ongoing support for care leavers.
- In March 2024, Full Council carried the motion that care experienced people would be a protected characteristic. Resolving:
 - That it recognises that care experienced people are a group who are likely to face discrimination.
 - That it recognises that Councils have a duty to put the needs of disadvantaged people at the heart of decision-making through co-production
- In March 2025 we progressed the post of Care Ambassador apprenticeship out to recruitment and appointed to the post in May 2025.

5.4 Independent Charitable Trust 'Above and Beyond'

- Established to enable young people looked after and care leavers to fulfill their aspirations as they move into adulthood.
- The first meeting of the Board of Trustees took place in December 2024.

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**We believe
that every
care
experienced
young person
deserves the
opportunity
to thrive**



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5.5 Participation and the Voice of our Children and Young People

- 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.
- Advocacy and Independent Visiting service is in place and utilized
- Corporate Parenting Steering Board is Co Chaired by a **care experienced young person**
- **Shropshire Virtual School Student Council** presentation to Corporate parenting Steering Board



Corporate parent
board Presentation yf

5.6 Stability of Care Arrangements

Permanence

Ensuring children and young people in care have stable, appropriate placements that meet their individual needs is fundamental to achieving positive long-term outcomes. Stability in care supports emotional well-being, educational progress, and the development of secure relationships.

A key component of this is planning for permanence—a principle embedded in all our work with children. Early and proactive permanence planning helps avoid unnecessary delays and ensures that all potential options are explored thoroughly.

All legal avenues are considered with a focus on the least intrusive intervention necessary to safeguard the child and meet their assessed permanence needs. Wherever possible, the goal remains to support children to remain with, or return to, their birth families and siblings. When this is not feasible, alternative permanent solutions are pursued without delay.

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The Permanence Forum plays a central role in this process. It brings together the Strategic Lead for Permanence, the Permanence Coordinator, and representatives from Stepping Stones, Kinship Fostering, Adoption, Special Guardianship Order (SGO) services, and the Principal Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

Since its establishment in April 2018, the Permanence Forum has been instrumental in supporting social workers across Shropshire in developing robust and timely permanence plans. Newly looked-after children are scheduled for discussion at the Forum as soon as they enter care and before their second Child Looked After (CLA) review.

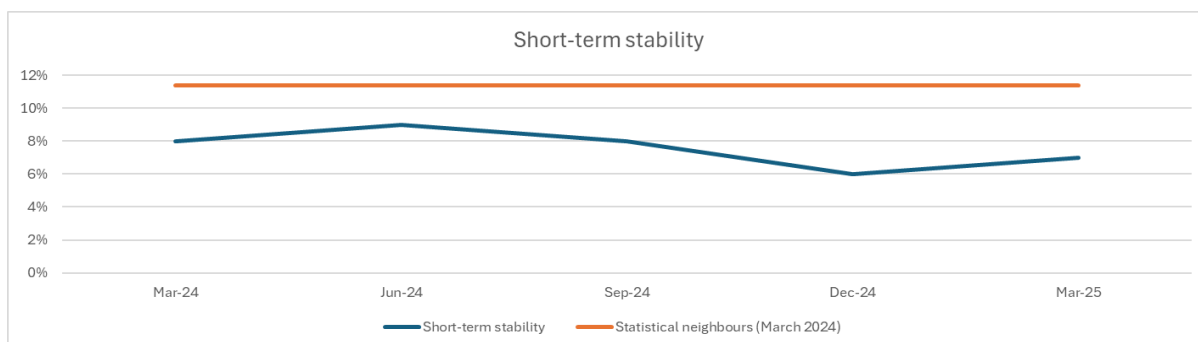
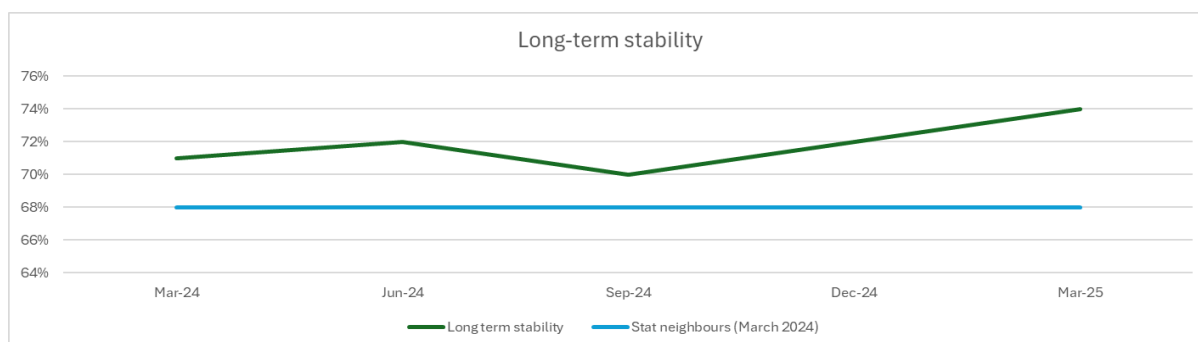
In 2024/25, all children under the age of 16 who entered care had their permanence plans reviewed by the Permanence Forum. In the reporting year, 102 children attended Permanency Forum. 75% were within timescale, being heard before their 2nd CLA Review. Many of these children had multiple parallel plans in place. The Forum provided critical support in prioritising actions, identifying appropriate pathways, and coordinating the professionals involved.

Stable Homes

Stable Homes (Placement stability) is an area that that is closely monitored.

The following charts for 2024/25 tell us that a higher percentage of our children are secure in their homes (long-term stability) and experience consistency of care and home environment.

On the other side it shows a low percentage in disruption \ moves of home occur during the first 12 months of a child be cared for, which when combined with long term stability means we are sustaining good performance, Stable Homes, that enables our children and young people to experience and build good relationships from a secure base.

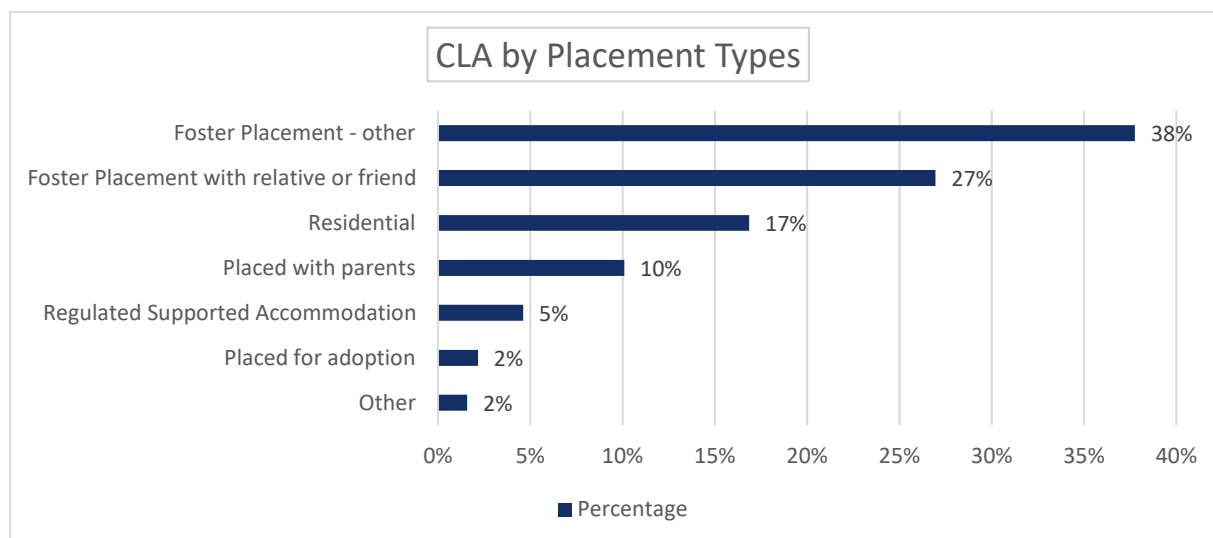


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Where our Children Live

77% of our children looked after population are cared for in a family setting – placement with parents, connected foster carers, foster carers, prospective adopters etc.



- We have 72 foster carers approved to offer care to over 140 children
- We have 118 connected carers offering care to 185 children
- We increased we recruited 16 new fostering households compared to the previous year

Shropshire own and operate 6 residential children's homes. One of these is a short-break home

- All our homes are rated Good or Outstanding and are providing excellent quality of care
- Children are making exceptional progress and achieving significant outcomes.
- We have increased internal residential capacity from 2 children's homes to 6 children's homes in 5 years.

What else have we 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.
 - 39 children stepped down from their care arrangement through stepping stones involvement
 - 17/39 children stepped down from residential setting to foster care, return home or to connected carers

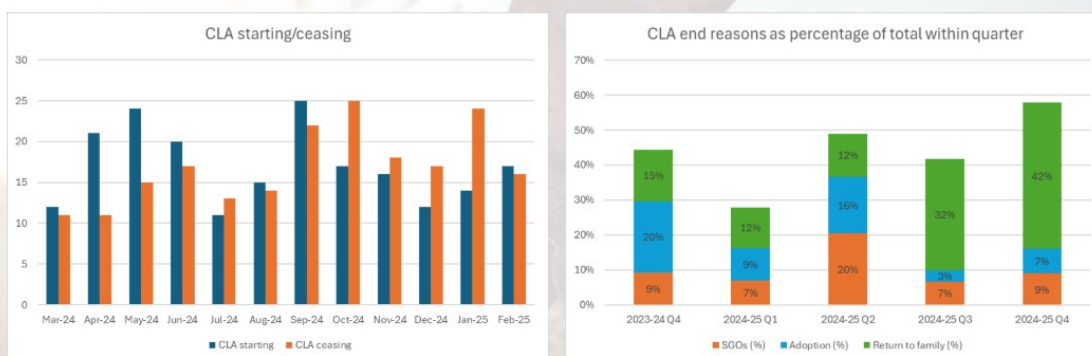
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- Refreshed our **Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy**, including Council approval for a significant uplift in fees for foster carers.
- Opened **4 new Children's Homes** since 2020, including a home for 16/17-year-olds and 1 for children aged 8-12 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.
- Launched 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.

CLA outcomes

The trends highlighted on the last slide can be seen here over the last 12 months, with a particular increase in positive outcomes such as children returning to family.



- We updated our **Sufficiency Strategy** (2024).
- Increased IRO headcount by 5 full time equivalent to bring capacity to the IRO function

5.7 Education and Virtual School

[Virtual School Annual report](#)

Key highlights of this year's report are:

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- No Permanent Exclusions for any of our Children who are Looked After (CLA) for three years in a row – and 23 prevented with the help of partnership working.
- Completion and Quality of PEPs has shown an upward trajectory with 97% completion and 97.2% good quality by the end of the summer term. Additionally - following preparation through the year, our new Key Stage 5 and Early Years Shropshire PEPs launched in September 2024.
- A significant increase in the numbers of Children who are Looked-After that we have supported this year. This is particularly marked in years -2 to 11 with a +17% change through the academic year.
- Planning and preparation for a significant reduction in annual funding with the loss of Recovery and National Tuition Programme Grants from September 2024. This is in the context of budget austerity in schools and the council.
- Excellent attendance outcomes for indicators against statistical neighbours and national for both CLA and Children with a Social Worker. However, challenges have increased around securing swift education for CLA with EHCPs who move out of county – and a new Escalation process is being piloted.
- At the end of KS4, significant gains were made in Maths outcomes this year for both indicators of grades 4 and 5 or above and 13% achieved 5 GCSEs at grades 9-5 including English and Maths, compared to 4.2% last year. End of KS2 outcomes for Combined were lower than regional/national unverified outcomes, but progress indicated to be good – and for Reading/Writing outcomes were close to national CLA averages.
- The VS Head Teacher has recently moved into a new post and is now Head of the Virtual School and Access to Education. This will necessitate a new look at how best to meet service needs in alignment with this change.
- Early evaluation of Phase 1 of the Hearts & Minds and Nurture projects are beginning to evidence good impact. The VS training offers are very well received and attended.

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This year, we are particularly proud of our young people because:

17 Shropshire CLA students achieved 8 GCSEs or more. One young person with neuro-diverse challenges attending a specialist hub achieved triple 9 in science plus high grades in 5 other subjects. He is going on to 6th form to study science.*

Our young people from School Council who 'took over' the SVS Conference, positively disrupting and challenging adults to make Stable Schools Built on Love!

11 young people starting A levels and 2 going to university this Autumn! Congratulations to those students who achieved robust A level grades and 1 student who achieved 3 Distinction Stars!

K received a SVS Award for making cakes for a local home for the elderly & volunteered there. He said hello to every resident, served them drinks & one of his cakes, also played games. The manager of the home has asked if Kane can make this a regular visit as it brought so much joy to the residents.

Our children achieved better attendance than statistical neighbours and national with absence at only 6.9% at 31st March 2023 (*DFE data*)

K who demonstrated exceptional dedication, talent & leadership - including her involvement with the Kidderminster Harriers, participation in the Silver Duke of Edinburgh Award program, achievements as a referee, mentorship of younger pupils, and her trials for the Lionesses Team.

The young people who engaged so well with their Aspire mentoring for careers, taking risks to think about the future so that 100% of them said they now have a clearer vision of their future.

5.8 Health and wellbeing

- Implemented the new Mental Health Pathway with BeeU.
- Provided 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
- ICB continues to offer free prescriptions to care leavers.
- As at 31/03/25 93% of children had completed health assessments.
- 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.



- 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.

5.9 What our care experienced children and young people tells us

Social Workers are important

Message to current social worker J and previous social worker P

- *“hey J, it’s only C, obviously I leave care this year will I be able to see P one last time as she has been by my side for half my life and it’s the only thing I wish for is to see her one last time as well as you!!.”*

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”.*
- *“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?*

6. Summary of Corporate Parenting Strategy Priority Actions for 2024-2026

- New **Participation Strategy** to be implemented.

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- 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**. **Completed**
- 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. **Established**
- 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**. **In place**
- 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**. **Completed**
- 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. **Completed**
- We are updating our **Sufficiency Strategy** (2024). **Completed**
- 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. **Completed**
- The Corporate Parenting Steering Board will monitor **Shropshire's 'Stability Index'** through these measures for our children looked after:
- 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. **Completed**
- Housing and Care Leaver **Joint Protocol** to be developed **Completed**
- Corporate Parenting Induction sessions for new elected members – July 2025



Corporate Parenting
Induction for Elected I

6.2 Conclusion:

Significant developments have occurred over the last 12 months and we are committed to being ambitious for the next coming year and beyond.



Through our structures, like the Corporate Parenting Steering Board, we will continue to 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.

We will:

- 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.
- Provide High Support and High Challenge to ensure effective undertaking of the Corporate Parenting Responsibility – holding to account on behalf of the council.
- Provide clear line of sight on practice and what good practice looks like and assure selves it is delivered, including the role of the IRO.
- Provide 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.