


Committee and Date
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
14th January 2026

Item

Public



Performance Monitoring Report Q1

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1. Synopsis

- 1.1 This report provides an update to Scrutiny committee members on key areas of performance across Care & Wellbeing and Children and Young People services.
- 1.2 Adult Social Care were asked to report on three key areas for this report. Key information has been provided to detail the current position, how improvements have been made and future plans for further improvements. We have identified the challenges and how proposed transformation plans will help reduce these.
- 1.3 Children and Young People were asked to report on a range of key areas covering, education (SEND, alternative provision, Elective Home Education), children's social care (Fostering) and our work developing a Charity to support Care Leavers.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report presents the most recent performance data available for Children and Young People services across particular areas of interest requested by the Committee. We aim to highlight areas of work where we can see evidence of improvement and outcomes being met, but also the areas of challenge and actions being taken in addressing these.
- 2.2 Under Care and Wellbeing, the Adult Social Care data will move from its previous reporting data sources Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF) to the new Client Level Data (CLD). Performance data will now also embed the areas identified through the Towards outstanding action plan following the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection.

For the purpose of this report specific areas have been requested by Committee members to report on.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Committee considers the report and identifies specific areas of focus that it may want to explore in more detail to be included in their work programme.
- 3.2 Note the current position and associated risks.
- 3.3 Endorse the mitigation plans.
- 3.4 Continue oversight through quarterly performance and risk reporting.
Use collaborative working with partners on the inclusion offer to reduce demand for Elective Home Education (EHE) e.g. where there are reasons given by parents as 'dissatisfaction'
- 3.5 Consider forecasting data when exploring resource implications, should the mitigations prove to be unsuccessful in slowing the significantly rising numbers of EHE.
- 3.6 Note the revision of the EHE Policy for the Children's Safeguarding Partnership in January 2026, including building in learning from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review for Sara Sharif and increased joined up working with Early Help and Health (NHS and Public Health).

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. Under the Care Act 2014 care and support plan must be reviewed annually. We are currently at 62.3% reviews completed this year (target 70%) performance shows improvement from last year (56%) but remains below statutory expectations. Staffing capacity does not currently support the ability to be compliant with Care Act expectations; the report will identify the resource needed to ensure we are able to meet our statutory duty.
- 4.2. The provision of high quality, effective foster care families means children's needs are met well and their outcomes improved. It is also the most cost effective option when a child needs to enter local authority care. Should there be any material change to the fostering offer or a reduction in the number of foster carers, for whatever reason, then there would be a significant financial impact as the most likely alternative care provision would be residential care at a significantly higher cost, circa £5700+ / week per child.

4.3. Risk table

Risk	Mitigation
Expiry of the The Local Authorities Capital Finance and Accounting (England) Regulations that provides Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) statutory override would place too great a financial burden on core council budget	Operation, monitoring and scrutiny of the DSG management plan through Schools Forum and dedicated sub-group.
Block transfer from High Needs Block (HNB) to Schools Block DSG places Shropshire schools under further financial pressure	Modelling of 0.5% block transfer and ratification by Schools' Forum prior to completion of Authority Proforma Tool (APT). This modelling work will include analysing the impact of larger block transfers up to and including 5%.
Lack of awareness and ongoing scrutiny by the education community and elected members of the implications of DSG deficit and the actions to address this.	Development of DSG monitoring group as a focus group within Schools' Forum. Ongoing updates provided through reports to Forum for scrutiny and monitoring.
Schools are not challenged or supported to promote inclusive practice.	Development of Shropshire's first Education Excellence Strategy detailing the challenge, support and monitoring provided to all schools to ensure that all pupils, including those with SEND, achieve the best possible outcomes.
EHE numbers continue on the same trajectory.	Embed smart working around home visits and make use of teams where possible. Consider implications for resourcing in the EAS team
Schools do not purchase the Service Level Agreement with Outshine for 26-27 academic year leading to negative impact on exclusions and suspensions	Survey to be sent out to schools to consult. SLA being drafted and will be taken to Schools Forum.
Adult social care – risk of not being legally compliant. Section 27 of the Care Act 2014 the local authority must keep care and support plans under general review. The statutory guidance sets an expectation that a review should take place no less than once every 12 months.	Clear plans in place to reduce back log of overdue reviews, we have prioritised out of county reviews where people are outside of Shropshire and have least oversight due to distance and placed with providers we may not know or have experience of working with. We have performance dashboards to monitor overdue reviews and regular performance reports into SMT progress. We have implemented a risk-based prioritisation approach for e.g; prioritising those with complex needs or safeguarding concerns. Risks are escalated through the ASC risk register and reported into the DASS each quarter.
Financial expenditure exceeds the resources available to provide statutory services.	Review of all expenditure through the spend review system, external review and benchmarking via the LGA/other external organisations. Exploration and implementation of different ways of working to ensure as many children and young

people are supported as early as possible to remain within their family network, unless this is unsafe.

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 timescale.

6. Background

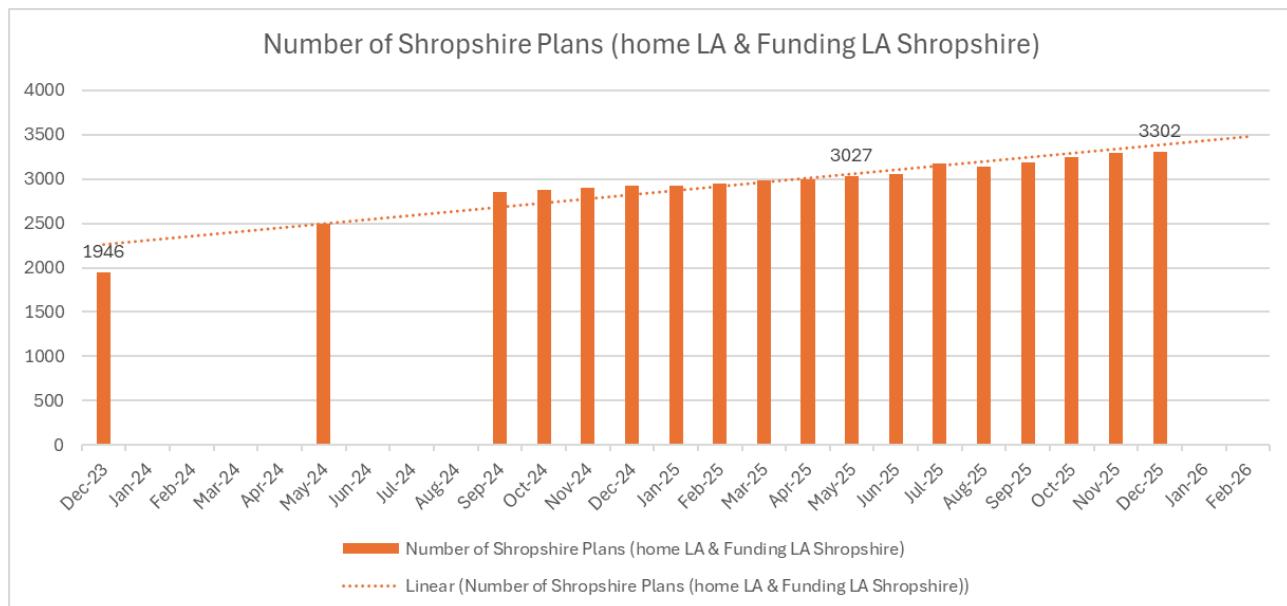
Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

6.1 The Council's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) financial position of a forecast cumulative deficit of £41.019m as at the end of the 2025-26 financial year reflects the continuing pressure on the total High Needs budget as expenditure has continued to increase sharply year on year.

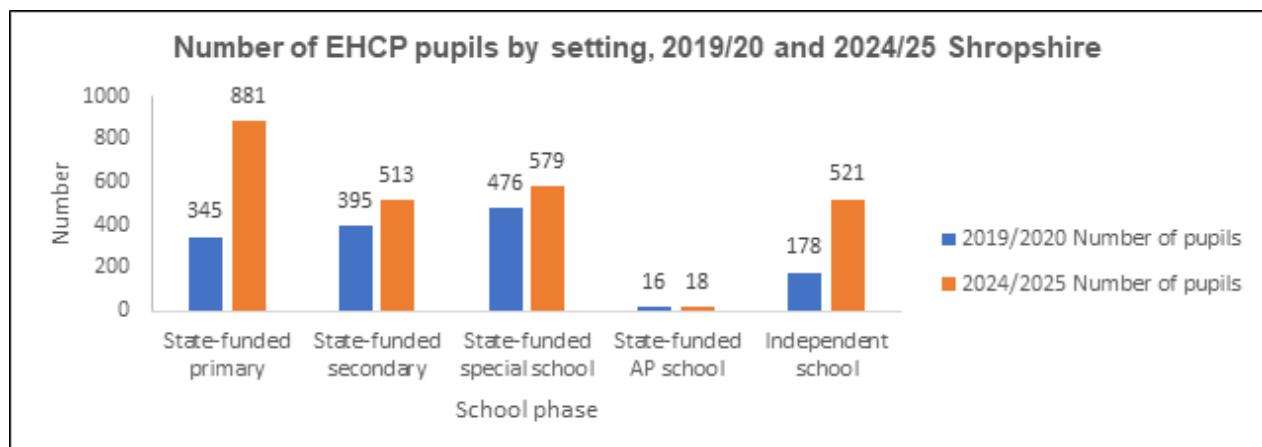
6.2 This increase has been particularly pronounced over the last 3 financial years; 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26.

6.3 There are a variety of reasons that have contributed to this rise. Shropshire is not unique in this position. [Research has indicated](#) that collectively councils could face debts of around £18bn by the end of this Parliament without action from central government.

6.4 Reflecting the national trend, there have been a large increase in EHCPs issued by Shropshire. The total number of plans issued by Shropshire increased by 70% from December 2023 to December 2025. In 2025, this equates to 5.7% of school-aged children in Shropshire, similar to our statistical neighbours (5.4%), higher than the West Midlands (5.0%) and similar to the England rate (5.3%).



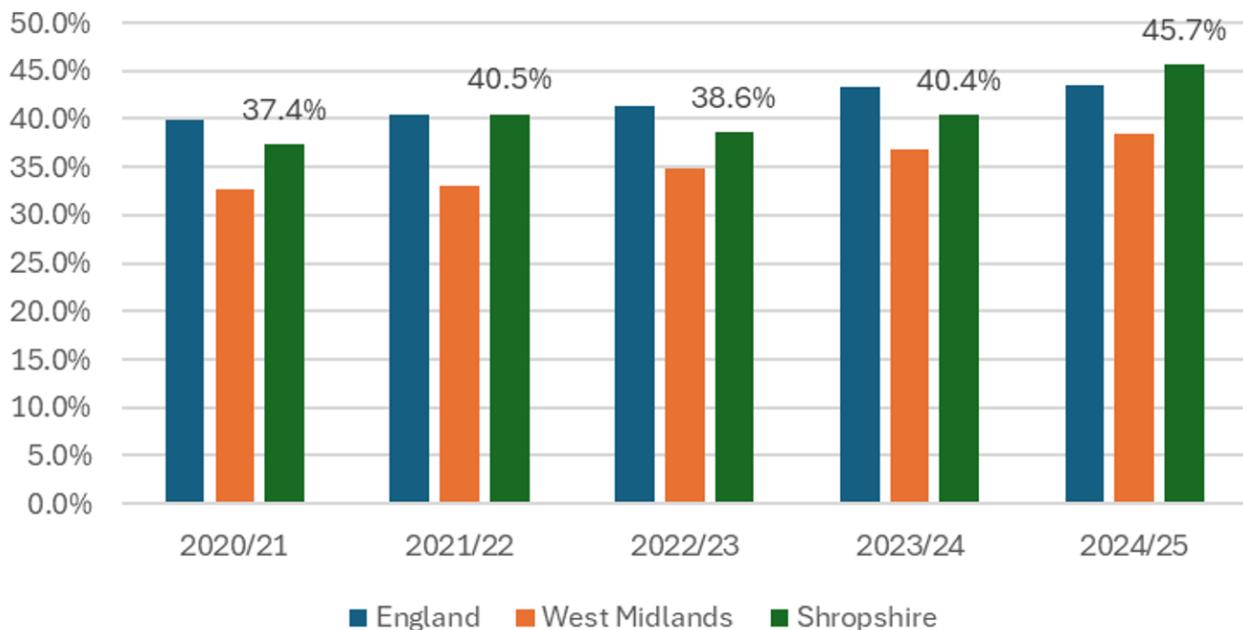
Within this growth there has been a sharp increase in the proportion of pupils attending independent special schools (192.6% increase from 2019/20 to 2024/25)



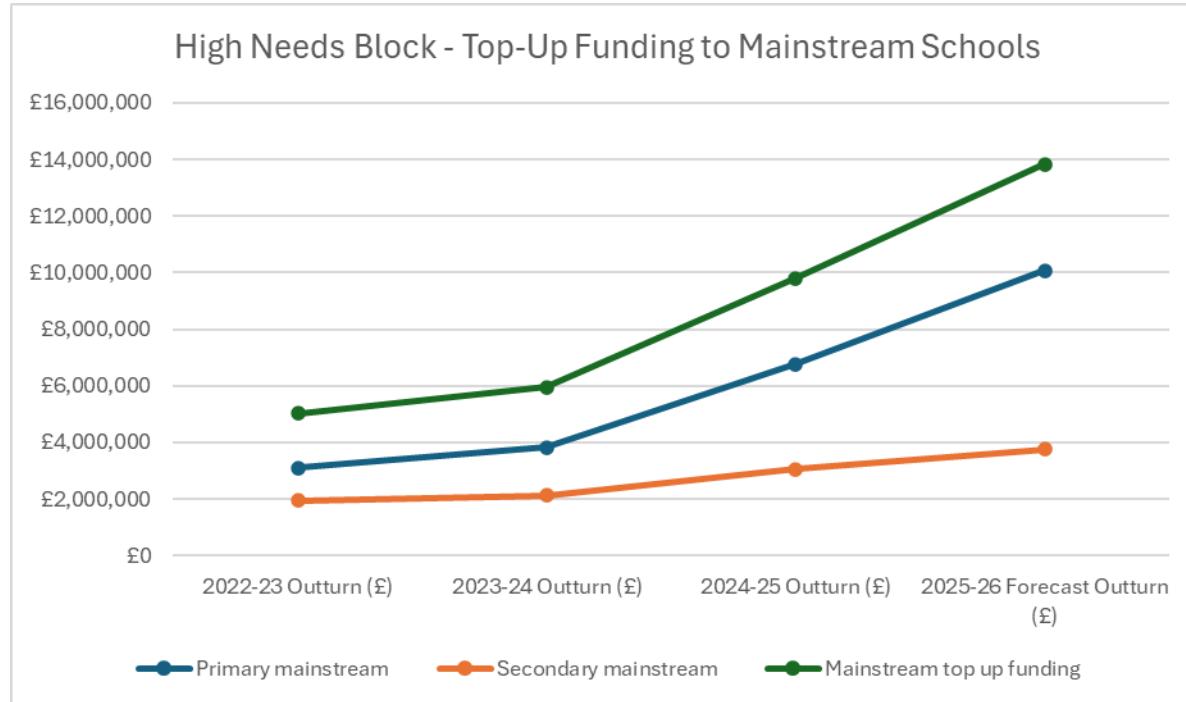
- 6.5 To support this growth, mainstream top up funding increased by 65% from 2023-24 to 2024-25. A further 41% increase is forecast because of the increased numbers of children and young people with an EHC plan.
- 6.6 This increase in the number of pupils supported in mainstream schools Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) reflects our ambition to support inclusive mainstream practice and the strategy to ensure that pupils needs are met, where appropriate in local mainstream classrooms or in resourced provisions (hubs) attached to mainstream schools close to where pupils live.
- 6.7 This ambition is aligned to the Government policy around the promotion of inclusive mainstream practice. As a result of the need to manage the challenge of rurality through the ongoing development of the SEND hub network, this proactive approach has positioned Shropshire as a leader in inclusive practice.
- 6.8 Shropshire now exceeds both the West Midlands and the national average with respect to the proportion of pupils supported with plans in mainstream schools in 2024/5.

6.9 It is likely that without this additional investment, this would have led to additional demand for more costly independent provision.

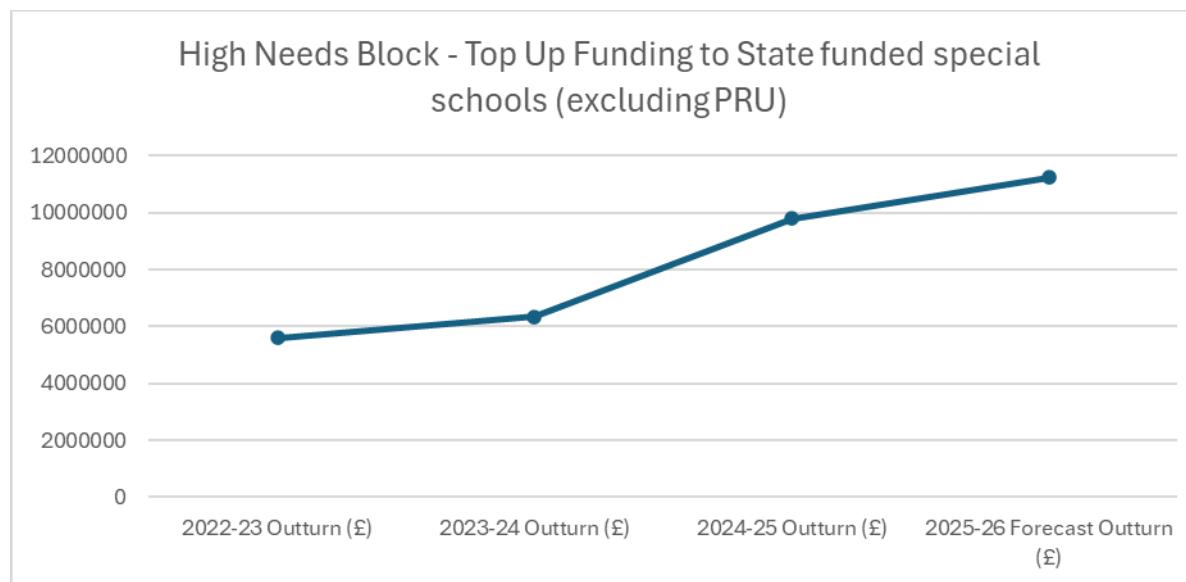
Total % CYP with EHCP in mainstream schools



6.10 Additional cost pressures were also created by the application of an inflationary increase in the top-up payments and expansion within resourced provision (hubs). The development of resourced provision and more adequate resourcing of mainstream EHCP provision is seen as an important part in the future management of the deficit recovery plan as this increases the ability of mainstream schools to successfully meet the needs of children and young people with an increasing range and severity of SEND needs.

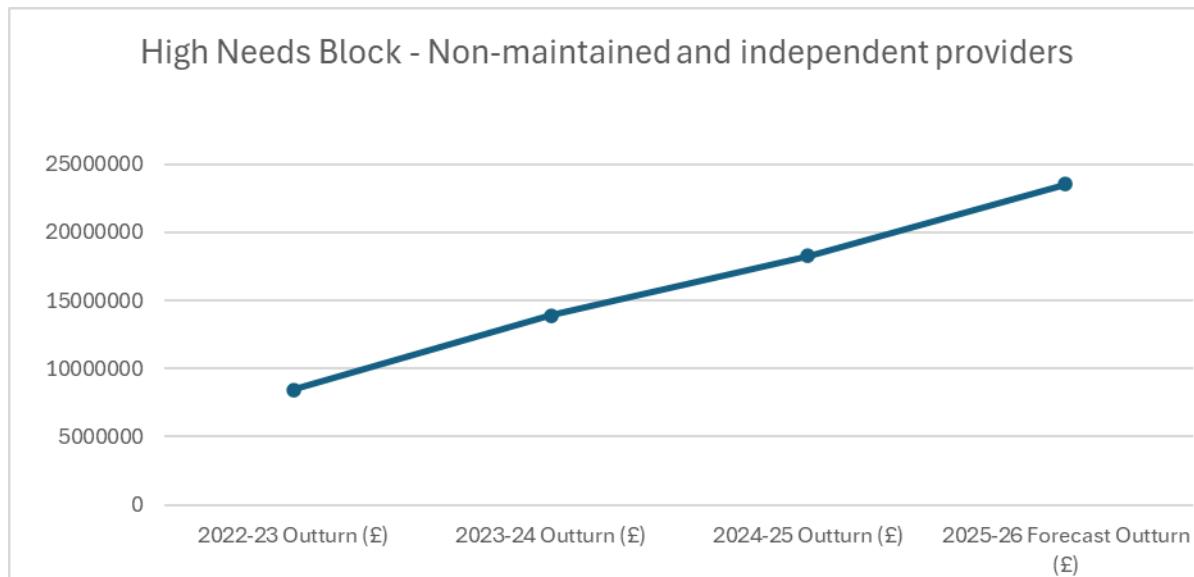


6.11 Furthermore, expenditure has similarly grown with respect to state-funded specialist provision. The review of, and subsequent increase in, banding levels in 2024 across the County's state funded special schools aligns with the strategy to build capacity in these settings where appropriate and significantly reduce the numbers of pupils placed in independent special school settings. This contributed to a 54% increase in spending from 2023-24 to 2024-25.



6.12 Despite the strategies outlined above, there continues to be an increased demand in places and increased costs with respect to independent non-maintained special schools (INMSS). Given the average cost of an INMSS is £63,000 per year, increases in places have contributed significantly to financial pressures. A central element of the strategy is to, where appropriate, return pupils from costly independent provision where their needs can be equally met well in state funded schools.

6.13 Spending on INMSS increased sharply by 65% in 2023-24 in line with the rise in EHCPs. This growth slowed to 29% in 2025-26 which suggests that the increase funding to state funded special schools and increase funding mainstream SEND hubs had reduced the acceleration of expenditure in this area. However, this continues to be an area of pressure as this has trend has not yet begun to reverse.



6.14 The Department for Education's DSG Deficit statutory override allows councils to keep high needs spending deficits separate from their core budget. The government announced in June 2025 that it has extended this override to keep councils' spending deficits for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) separate for another two years until March 2028.

6.15 In response to these acute national pressures, as part of the [Autumn Budget Statement](#) on 28th November 2025, HM Treasury announced that -

6.16 "The government will set out substantial plans for reform of special educational needs provision early in the new year to deliver a sustainable system which – first and foremost – supports children and families effectively. The 2025 Spending Review provided investment for SEND reform. Future funding implications will be managed within the overall government DEL envelope, such that the government would not expect local authorities to need to fund future special educational needs costs from general funds, once the Statutory Override ends at the end of 2027-28. The government will set out further details on its plans to support local authorities with historic and accruing deficits and conditions for accessing such support through the upcoming Local Government Finance Settlement."

6.17 At present, there are no further details as to the form this 'support' takes.

Shropshire's DSG recovery strategy

6.18 Council Officers met with representatives of the Department for Education (DfE) on 7th July to focus on actions aimed at addressing the DSG deficit. This meeting focused specifically on progress with the DSG management plan. DfE Officers confirmed that the DSG funding income assumptions that were forecast for 2026-27

and beyond were the correct approach and therefore no significant increase in funding (beyond the rate of inflation) was to be expected.

- 6.19 However, in December 2025, having received the HNB allocation for 2026-7, this indicates that the block allocation has increased by 6.74% (before any school block transfer). The total HNB has risen from £45.800m in 2025-26 to £48.886m.
- 6.20 Within the Council's Auditor's Annual Report published in November 2025, Grant Thornton endorsed the approach that had been adopted. Auditors recommended that the the Council should: continue to drive forward activity that seeks to mitigate the growth of the DSG deficit whilst continuing to engage through the Schools Forum on the management plan in place. Auditors also recommended that regular reporting on the impact of mitigations should be made through the Schools Forum whilst also being reported to Cabinet as part of the overall financial monitoring reporting.
- 6.21 Actions have been taken to strengthen the governance arrangements with respect to oversight of the DSG deficit. In October, a DSG management sub-group of Schools' Forum was created to strengthen the oversight of Forum with respect to the operation of the management plan. This also works to ensure that the school sector is cognisant of the challenges with respect to the management of this block and the mitigations in place. Furthermore, monitoring reporting has been strengthened by including updates with respect to the HNB within the standing agendas for both the SEND and AP Partnership Board and the Education Partnership board.
- 6.22 Whilst at an early stage of implementation, this work will further support the awareness of the challenges and strategy amongst a wider group, including parent carers of children and young people with SEND through the SEND and AP board.
- 6.23 A dedicated DSG management officer post has also been created in November 2025 on 1 day per week, utilising the skills and knowledge of an experienced schools' finance officer. This role will further support the monitoring of actions to manage the deficit over time and to model the impact of future changes.
- 6.24 By way of mitigation, the following actions aim to reduce the demand on the HNB and secure positive outcomes for children and young people -

Annual Review Recovery work

- 6.25 To address the backlog of annual reviews, a dedicated annual review recovery team has been established within the EHCP team, specifically targeting those reviews outstanding prior to 1st January 2025. There is current recruitment to expand the team so that this work can be completed by Easter 2026.
- 6.26 There is a new fixed annual review team that started September 2025 to facilitate the transition of pupils to more appropriate specialist placements where needed by encouraging the movement from independent specialist settings to state funded special school provision. In turn, as the needs profile of special schools change (to support those pupils with the most complex needs), growth is planned within

Shropshire SEND hubs and in turn within inclusive mainstream classrooms. This work is expected to both improve outcomes for children and young people and contribute to more sustainable provision within the local authority.

Increased use of short-term funding to support early intervention

6.27 Increased use has been made of Graduated Support Pathway funding (GSP) and Early Years Inclusion and Advice Funding (EYIAF). This has been designed to support swift access by schools and settings to support children and pupils where an EHC plan would be inappropriate.

6.28 With respect to the EYIAF, during the 2024- 2025 academic year a total of £639,026.28 was allocated via EYIAF panel, supporting a total of 176 children. The EYIF budget set within the Early Years (EY) block for the 2024- 2025 financial year was set at £1 million.

This was allocated as follows across the three terms:

- Autumn 2024 - £137,712
- Spring 2025 - £220,620
- Summer 2025 - £280,694.28

6.29 With respect to this academic year (2025-26) (December panel not yet added) £204,505.92 has been allocated supporting 127 children. Funding for EYIF is set within the EY block with the April 2025-2026 budget allocation set at £1.25 million. Within this budget, funding has been set aside to support funding our Early Years SEND Specialist Nursery hubs, currently this is only Wilfred Owen with the agreed spend of £164,956 from the EYIF budget for twelve placements. This equates to £13,746.34 per place. This will be used as a model for further Early Years SEND Specialist Nursery Hubs with a plan to have two further EY SEND Specialist Nursery hubs, one in the north of the county and one in the south. This funding will bridge across financial and academic years and be paid termly as EYIF funding.

6.30 The last two panels (November and December) have seen increased requests from schools compared to previous panels. This shows an increased awareness of the EYIAF panels but may also correlate with an increase in school-based nursery places.

6.31 The two most recent panels have also begun to see requests for support only which links directly to the recruitment of our Early Years SEND Support Officers (ESSOs)

6.32 The reviews these officers are completing with children has also enabled the LA to recoup EYIF from four settings in circumstances where a child had been granted an EHCP and the setting had not informed us leading to potential double funding. There is now increased oversight of the use of EYIF review and the completion of QA checks. ESSOs are also supporting with ensuring funding in place is beginning to be used to deliver suitable support and intervention matched carefully to a child's needs.

6.33 Where a request is brought to panel and panel are unable to determine the child's needs, an ESSO is begin asked to visit the setting to ascertain more information before funding is allocated. At least once, this has resulted in no funding being awarded with advice and support being provided instead.

6.34 Similarly, requests for Graduated Support Pathways funding have continued to grow.

6.35 Funded from the High Needs Block, this funding supports schools of Shropshire resident pupils to support to make requests for additional support in person, whilst also improving understanding of children and young people's (CYP) needs and the interventions already in place. The panel provides advice from peers (Senior Leaders and SENCOs) and enables faster, longer-term access to high needs top-up funding.

6.36 Funding is provided for 12 months and is designed to provide access to short term support where an EHCP may be inappropriate.

6.37 The GSP and the EYIAF process does not affect the ability to request an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA). However, due to timescales with respect to EHC needs assessments, many schools are understandably applying for both funding streams in order to access support (although only one is granted). As a result, this is not yet resulting in a reduction in EHCP applications although is securing swift access to resources in Shropshire schools.

6.38 With respect to GSP, the following funding was granted.

Summer 2025	Requests	Granted	Funding
EY (Reception)	18	18	120,667
Primary (Y1-6)	38	37	208,000
Secondary (Y7-11)	14	11	54,834

Autumn 2025	Requests	Granted	Funding
EY (Reception)	18	13	143,000
Primary (Y1-6)	59	52	382,334
Secondary (Y7-11)	25	13	59,000

Since April 2025	Requests	Granted	Funding
EY (Reception)	36	31	263,667
Primary (Y1-6)	97	89	590,334
Secondary (Y7-11)	39	24	113,834
All phases	172	144	967,835

Increase and investment in mainstream inclusive provision and practice.

6.39 Recent analysis of DFE School Capacity (SCAP) data and local SEND forecasts reveals a significant and accelerating need for additional specialist support in Shropshire. Over the next five years, the proportion of children requiring specialist provision is expected to rise by 39%. Without expanding local infrastructure, the

Council would face increased reliance on costly external placements, posing substantial risks to the High Needs Block.

- 6.40 In response, investment in its network of SEND resourced provision (SEND hubs) has been prioritised. Since 2022, the number of specialist placements within these hubs has grown by 200, and a further 42% increase is currently being delivered, reflecting a well-developed and expanding network.
- 6.41 This strategic investment serves as a vital long-term measure to protect revenue, whilst enabling children and young people to have their needs successfully met. The cost difference is considerable: a placement in a Resourced Provision (RP) or SEN Unit costs at least £23,000 per year, compared to an average of £63,000 per year for an independent specialist school (ISP) placement. This financial disparity strongly supports the case for capital investment in local provision.
- 6.42 Additionally, to further support SEND places in mainstream schools we have continued to develop inclusive spaces in primary and secondary schools funded through the High Needs Capital Allocation (to support resources such as sensory rooms in schools).
- 6.43 To further strengthen inclusive practice across Shropshire, we have significantly increased the support and training available to all schools, drawing closely on the expertise and guidance of our Education Quality Advisers (EQAs). EQAs play a pivotal role in designing and delivering a comprehensive programme of professional development, equipping school leaders, teachers, and support staff with up-to-date strategies for meeting a diverse range of needs within mainstream settings. This includes targeted training on inclusive classroom practice, the implementation of the Graduated Support Pathway, and the use of resources such as the Shropshire Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision (OAIP) guidance. In addition, EQAs lead regular networks and workshops, providing ongoing opportunities for staff to share best practice, seek advice, and access specialist input as required.
- 6.44 Inclusion is now firmly embedded as a central element of the new Ofsted inspection framework, published in Autumn 2025. The framework places a strong emphasis on the quality of inclusive provision and the extent to which schools enable all pupils, including those with SEND, to thrive academically and socially. In response, EQAs ensure that our training and support offer is closely aligned with these expectations, preparing schools to demonstrate their inclusive practice and to continuously improve outcomes for all children and young people.

The introduction of banding matrices to ensure that pupils' needs determine the level of funding and that the funding systems themselves are consistently applied.

- 6.45 Work is underway to provide clear banding matrices to ensure that pupil need is consistently and resourced. The lack of such a system has led to inequity between schools and a lack of clarity about that which could be considered 'Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision' (OAIP) in school. The publication of the Shropshire OIAP provides this clarity. Work is underway to connect this work to transparent

banding systems which provide for a clear system by which children and young people's needs are met.

6.46 Designing such a system is complex and uncertainty around central government activity with respect to this adds to the complexity. However, work has been completed in moderating banding levels with respect to the largest special school in the county and this has been successful in developing a transparent funding agreement for the future.

Increased challenge and monitoring of independent and state-funded specialist provision

6.47 Through the new Education Excellence Strategy, regular quality assurance checks will be made on the provision within independent and state-funded specialist provision. These checks will provide robust challenge where provision should be strengthened and, where necessary, will support action to seek alternative settings where there are significant concerns.

It is fully recognised that independent specialist provision will always have a role in supporting the education of those children and young people with the most significant needs. However, it also appreciated that where considerable public sums are used to facilitate this provision, it is right that appropriate quality assurance checks are also undertaken regularly. In one case, the work of the Education Quality and Safeguarding Service led to the complete withdrawal of all Shropshire placed pupils from a Shropshire independent special school due to concerns. This robust approach was validated after it was subsequently confirmed that the setting was judged not to be meeting all the independent school standards following an inspection by Ofsted.

DSG to HNB Block Transfer

6.48 The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) block transfer is a mechanism allowing local authorities to reallocate funds from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block, subject to consultation and approval by the Schools Forum. This process helps address the increasing budget pressures and DSG deficits faced by many councils. Local authorities have the flexibility to transfer up to 0.5% of the Schools Block allocation into another block, such as High Needs, with Schools Forum approval. Any transfer above this threshold requires permission from the Secretary of State for Education.

6.49 For 2026-27, due to rising cost pressures in High Needs, the intention is to transfer up to 0.5% of the Schools Block budget into the High Needs Block, provided sufficient funds remain after schools are funded in line with the National Funding Formula (NFF). This would require the approval of Schools Forum. This would transfer in the region of £1m back to the HNB.

6.50 Following extensive discussion at the Schools Forum meeting on 11 December 2025, and mindful of comparatively low level of funding provided to Shropshire schools it was agreed that any proposed transfer would be subject to detailed modelling (including analysis of permeations involving larger transfers up to 5%) before the National Funding Formula (NFF) is applied to calculate individual school budgets through the Authority Proforma Tool (APT). This ensures that the financial impact on schools is carefully considered and that the needs of both mainstream and high needs pupils are balanced.

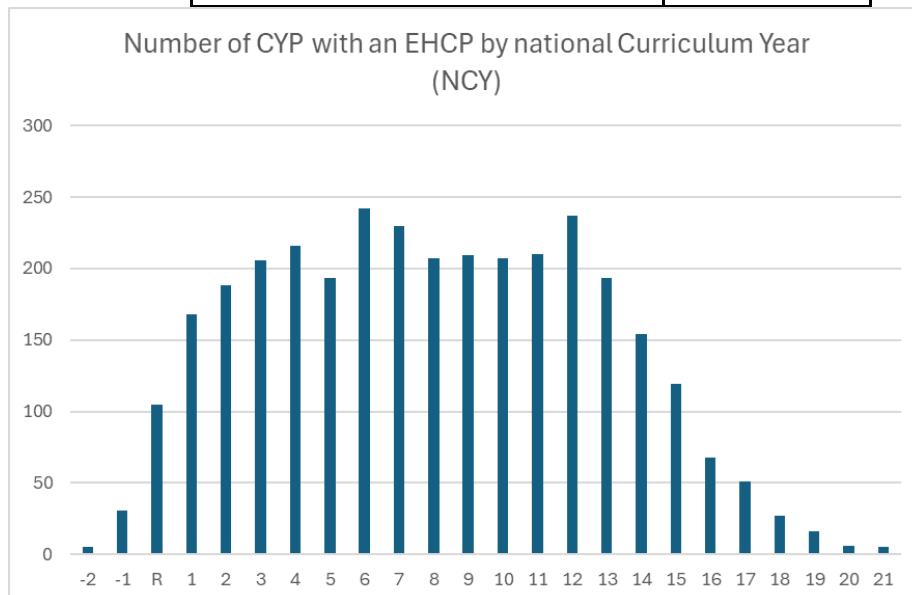
6.51 The proposed transfer is an important part of wider efforts to manage the DSG deficit, and ensure schools have the resources required to meet diverse educational needs.

Education Health and Care Plan Data Deep Dive

Age Profile of Children Currently Receiving Education Health and Care Plans

6.52 As expected most of our children and young people with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) are statutory school age. The number of EHCPs are highest in year 6 when children and young people are about to enter secondary school and in Year 12 when they just begin post 16 provisions. This needs to be monitored to see if it is a trend and what intervention planning could take place at transition points.

	Oct-25
Total number of children 0-4 years with EHCPs	95
Total number of children 5-10 years with EHCPs	1172
Total number of children 11-15 years with EHCPs	1067
Total number of children and young people 16-19 years with EHCPs	714
Total number of young people 20-25 with EHCPs	197
Total number of young people 26+ with EHCPs	2



Year Group	EHCPs								
-2	5	3	205	7	231	12	237	17	51
-1	33	4	217	8	208	13	193	18	27
0	105	5	195	9	210	14	154	19	16

1	168	6	245	10	206	15	119	20	6
2	189			11	209	16	68	21	5

Educational settings attended (including mainstream, special schools, and other provisions)

6.53 There are variations in how Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Case Officers have historically recorded attendance and this impacts the data in each category below. There is a need for standardisation of recording in this area, which is being addressed through regular data hygiene and recording approaches.

Mainstream	1397
Special	935
FE	336
Specialist FE	82
Supported internships/traineeships	33
EHE	54
NEET	80
AP/PRU	6
Other	169

Trends in reasons for EHCP provision

6.54 There has been an increase in the number of children and young people identified as having social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. This is being monitored via the EHCP team quality assurance processes as it is often underlying primary needs such as speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and neurodiversity (ND) that impact upon SEMH needs.

	01/01/2023 - 31/12/2023	01/01/2024 - 31/12/2024	01/01/2025 - 08/12/2025
ASD	158	118	71
HI	9	1	6
MLD	120	121	67
MSI	1	1	5
NSA	1	1	1
PD	11	13	17
PMLD	2	2	0
SEMH	398	346	424
SLCN	189	187	180
SLD	4	3	2
SPLD	4	1	2
VI	3	2	5

Outcomes following annual reviews, specifically the number of cases where EHCPs are no longer required

6.55 The Annual Review Recovery Team is in place because Case Officers have been unable to process the volume of annual reviews. The table below does not reflect the number of annual reviews received by the EHCP team, which come into the team on an ongoing basis whenever there is an annual review. Legally the local authority must inform the parent/young person of a decision to amend, cease or maintain a plan within four weeks.

Outcomes	Annual reviews 2025 (to Nov)	% 2025 (to Nov)
Outcomes of decision - Maintain	77	7.9
Outcomes of decision - Amend	830	85.6
Outcomes of decision - Re-assess	10	1.0
Outcomes of decision - Ceased	53	5.5

6.56 To support with the volume of late annual reviews, the number of case officers will be temporarily increasing so that all annual reviews pre-January 2025 are up to date and have been processed by the end of April 2026. A growth modelling exercise has also been undertaken to forecast ongoing annual reviews, an increase in EHCPs and to combat delays in timeliness of finalising EHCPs for the next financial year.

Banding of EHCPs including which setting and age group receive these

6.57 On a monthly basis, the amount of high needs top up funding that schools receive can be found in the table below. Banding currently goes from £1000 upwards, increasing by £1000 with each funding band. For example, Band 1 is £1000 and Band 16 is £16,000. Work is currently underway to reduce this to around 5 bands of funding only from early years to post 16. This is being completed with our educational provisions and Shropshire will have operational guidance to explain funding linked to levels of need by September 2026 (see 7.40 above as well).

	2023-24 outturn (£m)	2024-25 outturn (£m)	2025-26 Forecast Outturn (£m)
Primary mainstream top up funding	3.826	6.762	9.334
Secondary mainstream top up funding	2.122	3.052	3.673
Mainstream totals	5.948	9.814	13.007
Special school (excluding PRU)	6.347	9.799	10.388
Independent providers	13.892	18.259	22.134

Clarification of statutory versus discretionary elements of provision

6.58 High Needs funding is being increasingly requested to support areas such as transport, counselling, mentoring and Health Care Assistants (HCA), areas that are often deemed to be the realm of Health and/or Social Care, but impact on the ability of the child or young person to be educated or trained. What may once have been discretionary funding may now be picked up by the EHCP Team due to schools

saying they can't meet health needs without an HCA or where transport only allows pick up at the start and end of the day and it may be needed for half a day due to Alternative Provision being in place. Similarly, there can be a lack of alignment between health, social care and education with EHCP provision for a child/young person due to the length of waiting lists for health, what they are commissioned for and what the child/young person and family needs.

6.59 Some joint pieces of work with Severndale, health and education to consider commissioning for children and young people's health needs is due to begin in the new year. Similarly, work with transport is also due to begin in the new year to align what is our statutory duty for transport and what is needed for a child/young person to be able to attend an educational provision.

Number of applications refused and example reasons for refusal

6.60 Shropshire's percentage of applications declined this academic year, is currently higher than national average for 2024. There are two main reasons for an application for a statutory assessment request for an EHCP to be refused in Section 36 of the Children and Families Act, 2014:

- Insufficient evidence of need: The child or young person's needs can be met from the resources normally available in a mainstream setting without an EHCP.
- No evidence of special educational needs (SEN): The child does not have, or may not have, SEN that require special educational provision beyond what is ordinarily available.

	2025 (to Nov)	Shropshire (2024)	National (2024)
Requests for assessment	748	/	/
EHC requests declined total	205	/	/
% declined	27.4	19.6	25.2

6.61 The EHCP team report that there is an increasing number of requests where the absence of health (particularly mental health) or social care provision means that a young person is unable to access educational provision without the support of an EHCP.

6.62 Unless there is sufficient evidence to refuse a statutory assessment request for an EHCP in line with the Children and Families Act, then an assessment will be completed. Following an assessment a decision is then made at 16 weeks as to whether to issue a plan or not. In total 7 assessments this year have not resulted in a plan.

Referrer	Number of requests	No at 6 weeks to assess	No at 16 weeks to a plan	Shropshire (2024)	National (2024)
CDC	14	0	2	/	/
Parent/Carer	284	95	4	/	/
School	468	56	1	/	/
Young Person	12	1	0	/	/
Total	778	152	7	3.6%	5.8%

Examples of settings with low EHCP numbers demonstrating effective inclusion practice and associated outcomes

6.63 The two often do not correlate in terms of low EHCP numbers demonstrating effective inclusion. If a school is known for good inclusive practice, then parents are typically aware, and these are the schools that are requested via an EHCP. So good inclusive schools will often have higher EHCP numbers, and the local authority will direct mainstream schools if that is parental choice with no legal reason given by a school for saying they can't meet need at consultation.

6.64 Education Quality Advisors (EQAs) are in the process of collecting examples of good practice but there is currently no hard data around associated outcomes. Following allocation of graduated support pathway (GSP) funding and early years inclusion advice funding (EYIAF) there will begin some dip sampling for how the funding has been used to promote inclusion in the spring term.

Volume of cases proceeding to mediation and associated costs

6.65 Prime Resolution, mediation provider for Shropshire, produce regular reports. The main reason for mediation, between September 2024 and August 2025 is refusal to assess (64 cases), followed by content of a plan (35 cases), then refusal to issue a plan (8 cases) and ceasing of a plan (1 case). More recently, this autumn term, the main reason for mediation continues to be refusal to assess (12 cases) followed by refusal to issue a plan and then content of a plan (1 case).

6.66 There has been no mediations with regards to ceasing a plan this autumn term. Moving forward with the new cease panel, whereby health, social care and education all agree to cease a plan and to meet a young person's needs via alternative routes of care, that more plans will be ceased and there will remain no mediations in this area.

	01.09.24 to 31.08.25	01.09.25 to 04.11.25
Total Referrals Closed	108	17
Mediations Completed	75	12
Cancelled	12	1
Disagreement Resolutions	11	1
Enquiry Only	10	3

Volume of cases proceeding to tribunal and associated costs

6.67 There is currently only data with regards to volume of cases proceeding to tribunal. Associated costs would need to include the Tribunal's Officer salary, who was an agency member of staff and the legal costs required for particular complex cases.

	2025 to October
Number of tribunals registered	21
Number of hearings	24
Struck out	1
Number withdrawn (of hearing date this month)	8

Number settled before tribunal	8
Number upheld	0
Number partially upheld	4

6.68 Tribunals are now part of the Senior Case Officer's role. It is anticipated that due to the amount of learning the Senior's need to do to take on this new role, the change in how tribunal bundles now need to be presented and the time it takes to do this (two full days of a working week) that tribunal costs will increase this year unless tribunal cases are low.

Number of children in different Alternative Provision (AP) (Local Authority maintained, academies, private providers)

6.69 A distinction between local authority commissioned AP and school commissioned AP needs to be drawn. The local authority does not currently have data on school commissioned AP. What is meant by AP also needs to be clarified.

- At post-16 AP is regularly used when mainstream colleges respond negatively to consultations. Equally, it also offers a more nurturing and bespoke provision that meets the needs of many of our learners without the need for specialist placements. Furthermore, AP is often able to offer the vocational pathways that are closed when Further Education Colleges respond negatively to consultations.
- AP is increasingly being used to 'fill gaps' left by other Services i.e. mentoring/ therapeutic support, providing access into communities, filling timetables as post 16 provision often covers just 16 – 18 hours leaving some vulnerable young people at home for part of the week.

6.70 The table below shows cases where the AP provider is listed under main attendance. Therefore, AP numbers will be significantly higher in cases where the provider is a secondary placement and where attendance is listed as Education Other Than in School / Education Other than in College, for example. We do not have this data currently. This data does not include information from schools as to their commissioned use of AP.

Alternative Provision Provider	Number Attending
Auto Assess Limited	1
Crossbar	33
Juniper Training	2
Lower Bush Farm	2
Nisai Virtual Academy	1
Nova Training	2
One School Global	1
Positive Leap	1
Reach for Inclusion	55
Renu Hair Beauty	13
Shropshire Academy Adventures	3

Targeted Provision	1
The Life Shed	9
The National Teaching Advisory Service	1
The Orme Academy	1
The Really Neet Project	8
	134

Elective Home Education

6.71 The Education Access Service (EAS) supports the EHE statutory function and duties within the LA. There is a Lead Education Officer who oversees a Senior practitioner and five Inclusion Support Officers. This team also fulfils statutory duties for Children Missing Education, Section 19, Sixth day provision and panel representation for excluded pupils. They have also supported with exclusion prevention with advice to schools.

6.72 Our Shropshire Policy and resources to support practitioners and families with EHE can be found on our website here - [Elective home education \(EHE\) | Shropshire Council](#) Our website also includes Health information for EHE families - and we link with Health colleagues to continually update this. The EHE Welcome Pack also includes key Health information.

6.73 EHE is in the limelight nationally with learning from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review for Sara Sharif plus a tightening of policy is expected with the imminent Children's Bill.

Data

6.74 The LA must be notified by schools when a child becomes EHE, there is a process for this on the Learning Gateway. There is a robust tracking process of EHE data with monthly reporting and a scrutiny meeting led by the Head of Virtual School and Access to Education.

6.75 Current EHE numbers in Shropshire are 770 and our current rate of EHE is 2%. At the same data point in 2024 the Shropshire rate was 1.6% so there has been a significant increase in that time. In Autumn 2024 the Shropshire rate was slightly higher than national at 1.4% but was in line with our statistical neighbours. Numbers nationally are also indicated to be rising - however the recent census data is not yet available for benchmarking against national and regional.

6.76 This Autumn term the EAS team successfully closed 152 children to EHE, with 111 of those supported to return to school and 16 progressed to CME status (25 moved out of the LA). In 2024-25 the EAS team closed 226 children to EHE with 152 returning to school and 42 to CME status (32 children moved out of LA)

6.77 Based on the current trend it is foreseeable there will be a continuing and significant increase in EHE numbers thereby placing an increasing demand on our resources. The table below tracks the trajectory from 2022-23 to date.

EHE Register Growth by Academic Year

Academic Year (end)	Number of EHE Students
2022/23	539

2023/24	613 (+14% change year on year)
2024/25	685 (+12% change year on year)
2025/26	770 – Autumn term (+12% change in 1 term)

6.78 EHE numbers in the Autumn **term** for 2025-26 have shown a +12% change from 1/9/25 to 3/12/25. There are resource implications for the service in managing this increase in numbers and our focus is to support reducing demand management as much as possible as part of the inclusion workstreams, including for mental health. The most common reasons given by parents for choosing EHE in the Autumn census 2024 were submitted to the LA as 'Unknown', then 'Philosophical' and thirdly 'Mental Health' Staffing is at six practitioners in the team, they also support statutory duties for CME, S19 and Sixth Day Provision.

For forecasting purposes:

- if an average of +13% change year on year is applied then numbers could rise to 774 this year (but we have already nearly surpassed that number just in the autumn term)
- if a +12% change each term is applied then numbers could rise to **966** by the close of this academic year.

6.79 A breakdown of current EHE by vulnerable group is as follows:

By group	Number	%
SEN support	159	20.6
EHCP	54	7
Young carers	9	1.2
Free School Meals	214	28
Current CIN	16	2.1
Current on Child Protection Plan	2	0.2
Male	366	47.5
Female	404	52.5

Safeguarding Assurances

6.80 When a child becomes EHE there is a weekly triage process with Early Help partners to address Safeguarding concerns. The DSL is also contacted if there is any concern referenced in the notification form.

6.81 This statement runs through the veins of our Shropshire Policy –

Where there are safeguarding or child protection concerns about a child or young person, the school must inform the local authority of these before they remove the child's name from the admission register. This is to enable the local authority to explore the concerns raised and identify whether removing the child from the school roll would cause additional risk factors to the child, placing them at risk from harm.

6.82 Our Education Welfare Officer offers a meeting with school and home to see if the child might stay in school if felt appropriate eg if a parental concern can be resolved

- 6.83 An Inclusion Support Officer is allocated and if there is a CIN or Child Protection Plan (or other safeguarding concern) then they are prioritised for the earliest possible Home Visit.
- 6.84 Our Policy includes a flowchart around agreed process for EHE children with a CP Plan. Our practice is we expect a child to be returned to school - or for the LA to not agree EHE unless there are exceptional circumstances and it is in the best interest of the child not to do so. Shropshire goes above what the expectation is in current DFE Guidance in this respect (but stays within current law) in order to protect and safeguard our children.
- 6.85 Our practice extends to working closely with Early Help where a parent refuses to allow EAS to undertake a Home Visit but there are safeguarding concerns. For example, Early Help made a home visit to gain eyes on the child where the EAS practitioner had identified safeguarding concerns around parental mental health but was not legally allowed to make an EHE visit.
- 6.86 The Head of the Virtual School and Access to Education sits on the Shropshire Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SSCP).
- 6.87 A webinar has been presented on EHE to schools and LA practitioners – and is available on the SSCP website [Search — Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership](#)
- 6.88 The Working Together group is led by the Head of the Virtual School and Access to Education. This group of service managers across Social Care, Health and Learning & Skills meets fortnightly to focus on data highlighting children on a CIN or CP Plan who are electively home educated or are missing education.
- 6.89 Learning from the SCPR for Sara Sharif is being undertaken currently by EAS [SS-CSPR-SSCP-Report-for-publication-13.11.25.pdf](#)

Suitability of Education

- 6.90 Shropshire assesses suitability of education with a clear set of criteria. Statute only requires an annual report so the LA can identify if suitable education is in place, but our team promote and undertake home visits where there is a vulnerability including EHCP, CIN, CP Plan, Safeguarding concerns, Free School Meals or English as an Additional Language. To support smart working where there is consistent quality of education or less risk identified our practitioners offer a Teams meeting along with a report being submitted to the LA. Where education is not suitable there is a time framed follow up process and the EAS practitioner may move the child on to the status of being a child missing education (CME) which gives a legal basis for ensuring a return to a school.

Success

- 6.91 Two of the EAS practitioners recently received Gold Kit awards, these are awarded independently by 'Education Otherwise' following nominations from EHE families. This is the third year in a row that a case officer has received this award.
- 6.92 In 2024-25 the team supported the return of 152 children to schools.
- 6.93 OFSTED identified good practice for EHE in the report where the LA received an Outstanding judgement.

Alternative Provision

Shropshire Virtual School (SVS)

6.94 Data snapshot 1.12.25 for academic year 25-26 ; Source: SVS records

Reasons for AP intervention

AP	Reasons/Trends
Aspire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Careers information advice and guidance, focus on planning for destinations post 16 1-1 mentoring for young people with barriers to education who are in KS4 to reduce risk of NEET
Bloomin Lovely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Horticultural therapy Emotional wellbeing support, enhances curriculum offer and sensory support
Smash Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1-1 mentoring Supporting transitions (school/home moves), young people new to in care, those struggling with attendance at school and/or where there are emotional needs creating barriers to accessing learning.
Life Shed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal based personalised curriculum with Mentoring and Life Skills support
Nisai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online group tuition Supporting young people towards achieving and progressing, including accreditations and ESOL, during transition periods where access to current school is limited e.g. emergency placement move
Targeted Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Face to face and online 1:1 tuition To support academic achievement/close attainment gaps through extra tuition, during transition periods where access to school is limited e.g. emergency placement move

Shropshire Looked After Children who have accessed interventions at an Alternative Provider - age groups

6.95 All of these interventions listed below are funded from Pupil Premium + Grant for statutory school years and Pupil Premium + Post 16 Grant for Key Stage 5

This information includes data for children who access interventions from an AP while in school and on school site, as well as an after-school support.

Alternative Provision Name	EYFS	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS4	KS5	TOTAL
Aspire					7	1	8
Bloomin Lovely	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Smashlife			2	7	0	5	14
Lifeshed				5	4	0	9
Nisai	0	0	0	3	1	0	4
Targeted Provision	0	0	0	1	3	1	5
TOTAL							42

Referrals Source (by setting)

6.96 Primary School – 3; Secondary School – 45; PRU – 1; Key Stage 5 – 11. The average duration of placement in AP is often determined by a number of factors:

- Course length (typically one to two years)
- Availability of employment opportunities for progression

- Mental health of young person
- Whether or not long-term outcomes in EHCP's have been met

Average duration of placements in Alternative Provision by Key Stage

By Alternative Provision	<6 weeks (approx. 1/2 term)	6-12 weeks (approx. 1 term)	12-18 weeks (approx. 1.5 terms)	18-24 weeks (approx. 2 terms)
Aspire		KS4 KS5		
Bloomin Lovely		KS1 KS4		
Smash Life		KS5	KS3	KS2
Life Shed			KS3	KS4
Nisai	KS3	KS4		
Targeted Provision	KS5	KS4		KS3

6.97 Number of CLA who have accessed SVS commissioned Alternative Provision and duration

By Alternative Provision	<6 weeks (approx. 1/2 term)	6-12 weeks (approx. 1 term)	12-18 weeks (approx. 1.5 terms)	18-24 weeks (approx. 2 terms)	24+ weeks (in excess of 2 terms)
Aspire		8			
Bloomin Lovely		2			
Smash Life	1	10			3
Life Shed		3		3	3
Nisai	3			1	
Targeted Provision	2	1		2	

Education Access Service

6.98 Data snapshot 26.11.25; Source Power BI

6.99 Number of children in AP settings:

- 96 children placed on roll at TMBSS (39 single registration at TMBSS and 57 are dual registered)
- (TMBSS is the LA commissioned provider for Section 19, 6th day provision and children who need intervention with SEMH to prevent exclusion. 102 places commissioned.)

6.100 Age profile of children attending AP at TMBSS:

Single registration: 3 primary (yrs 2,4,5) and 36 Secondary (yrs 8,9,10 and 11)
 Dual registration: 18 Primary (years 1-6) and 39 secondary (years 7-11)

Age Profile of children attending AP with EHCPs

Year	Total No
Year 5	1
Year 6	1
Year 9	1

Year 10	1
Year 11	3
Year 12	41
Year 13	33
Year 14	19
Year 15	16
Year 16	7
Year 17	7
Year 18	3
Year 19	1

6.101 Funding arrangements:

Dedicated Schools Grant (Inclusion Cost Centre, EAS)

6.102 Average duration of placements in AP:

38.5 weeks (this includes Section 19 medical placements)

For children and young people with an EHCP, this is often determined by a number of factors:

- The course length that might be started in AP that a post 16 student may wish to finish (typically one to two years) and availability of employment opportunities for progression
- The mental health of a young person and the length of time it takes for them to be able to return, if at all, to a school or setting.
- Section 19 might also be in place whilst consultations for an appropriate school placement are in progress.
- Whether or not long-term outcomes in EHCP's have been met in post 16.

6.103 Source of referrals and trends for AP requirement

Schools via the Shropshire Inclusion Pathway - [Inclusion Pathway | Shropshire Council](#) and [shropshire-inclusion-pathway-2025-26.pdf](#)

Note – the LA currently does not collect information from schools about their own use of AP but there is a request with the Insight team for this to be achieved

6.104 The EHCP team will provide AP for young people for a variety of reasons. Below are some of the noticeable trends and reasons for providing AP:

- Many young people at post-16 with EHCP's are not being accommodated in mainstream colleges due to their complex needs.
- There are increasing numbers of young people with unmet mental health and EBSA needs.
- There is a lack of specialist provision for rising numbers of EHCP students.
- There are increasing numbers of young people with sensory profiles unable to access noisy or crowded provisions.

- There is a lack of provision for those with primary need of SEMH with externalising behaviours

6.105 Summary - Measures currently in place to prevent escalation into AP (Note - This list is illustrative not exhaustive)

6.106 The newly developed Outshine workstream in the Education Access Service focuses on early intervention for SEMH and supports integration into mainstream schools, including exits from TMBSS. The aim is to also reduce the need for EHCPs, specialist provision and reduce exclusions/suspensions. Outshine is comprised of a team including:

- Inclusion & AP Task Force Lead
- 2 Outreach Advisors (due to start Dec/Jan), 1 Support Officer for SEMH and 2 Inclusion Mentors
- due to start are a Family Support Worker and 2 Mentors to support children with EBSA (Emotional Based School Avoidance)

6.107 Triage, advice and intervention for young people with SEMH is made possible through the resource of this team. Pupil Support Meetings are being used to support earlier intervention and identification of need ie less likely for schools to progress towards exclusion. Impact examples:

- Exclusions for Autumn term 2024 were 21 and to date Autumn term 2025 is only 4. This has had a positive impact on reducing demand for AP at TMBSS for 6th day provision following exclusion and for SEMH.
- From the 19 Pupil Support Meetings held across September and October 18 of these children had received suspensions in the previous academic year. Since the meeting only 3 suspensions were issued for 2 children.

6.108 This workstream is funded by the SEND & APP Change Programme and has been no cost to schools for 25-26 academic year. The funding for this ends 31st August 2026. A SLA is being drafted with the aim of schools buying in a service in order for it to be sustainable in the academic year 2026-27. The risk is that schools may not be able to afford to purchase such a service and this is likely to impact on exclusions/suspensions.

6.109 The Inclusion Development Grant for secondary schools enables schools to plan for reducing exclusions and using AP effectively.

6.110 The Shropshire Virtual School has an extensive training programme for schools to support inclusion eg Nurture, Hearts & Minds, Emotion Coaching – see <https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/media/d4jpfqq1/shropshire-virtual-school-annual-report-2024-25.pdf>

6.111 The development of additional SEN Units and Resourced Provisions in Shropshire has supported schools to adapt provisions for children and improve capacity with less resort to exclusions and therefore AP at TMBSS.

Trends in reasons for AP

6.112 The relatively high number of exclusions across Shropshire in previous years has resulted in a high need for AP through the LA. However, through 2024-25 exclusions were halved in comparison to the previous academic year.

6.113 Key Stage 4 children have been-represented in exclusions, similarly those on Free School Meals or open to Early Help – and 40% of exclusions were for identified SEND and EHCP (Power BI 2024-25).

6.114 Most common reasons for exclusions in 2024-25 were persistent disruptive behaviour and physical assault on an adult.

6.115 Requests for AP at TMBSS are reduced for 6th day provision and SEMH, requests for AP for medical/health reasons under Section 19 are increased, this is being considered at meetings with TMBSS to support onwards planning.

6.116 Parents are increasingly requesting S19 support from the LA as an alternative to full time education in mainstream, the DFE Guidance documents are complicated on this matter and can give rise to some misunderstandings. The Shropshire Inclusion Pathway lays out our current approach to support for S19 requests from schools.

6.117 Some children at TMBSS AP have an EHCP and need onwards specialist provision.

Plans for future hubs within Shropshire schools and how these hubs will support inclusion

6.118 The Local Authority are continuing to extend the network of SEN Units and Resource Provisions (SURPs) across the county to support mainstream settings to include children within their local schools wherever possible. The Education Quality Advisors have developed a hub network to connect staff from each of the hubs for training, sharing of best practice and to work together on projects. All existing hubs have also been encouraged to join the DfE's regional hub networks which are starting in December 2025.

6.119 There are currently 17 SURPs and one Special School Satellite provision open. A new primary SURP is due to open in Oswestry in January 2026 and a further primary SURP and secondary SURP are currently going through consultation for a September 2026 start. As our SURPs become more established, the expectation is that they will support inclusion not only within their own setting but also within other local schools; three of our existing primary SURPs are currently part of the Shropshire specialist outreach pilot, offering outreach support to mainstream settings

6.120 Looking ahead, the Council is also exploring a new specialist school in the south of the county, which would create an additional 358 places. This represents a significant increase in the number of provisions, which is projected to grow from 11 in 2023-2024 to 29 by 2028.

Future provision	Date	Age Range	Type	SEN Registered with DfE	Future Capacity
New Senior provision in East Shropshire to be confirmed	Sept 26	11-16	Resourced Provision / Unit	TBC	15
Additional provision in South Shropshire	Sept 26	4-11	Resourced Provision	TBA	TBA
Primary Provision Oswestry TBC	April 26	4-11	Resourced Provision	TBC	12
Specialist All Age provision in South Shropshire To be explored	2030	4-16	New Specialist School	TBA	120 / 150
Secondary provision in South Shropshire TBC	Sept 26	11-16	Resourced Provision	TBA	20

Secondary provision in north Shropshire TBC	Sept 26	11-16	Resourced Provision	TBA	20
Secondary provision in central Shrewsbury To be explored	TBA	11-16	Resourced Provision	TBA	20
Specialist early years provision – under consideration	TBC	TBC	SEN Nursery Provision	TBA	TBA

Foster Carers

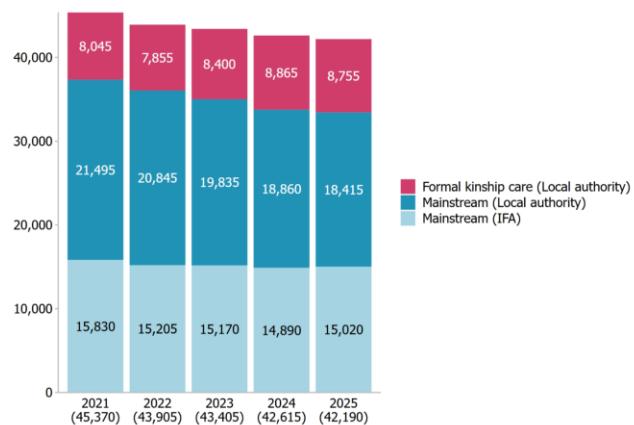
Fostering Development:

National Picture

6.121 There continues to be a national challenge with fostering recruitment. The latest statistics released by government November 2025 shows the following:

6.122 During the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025:

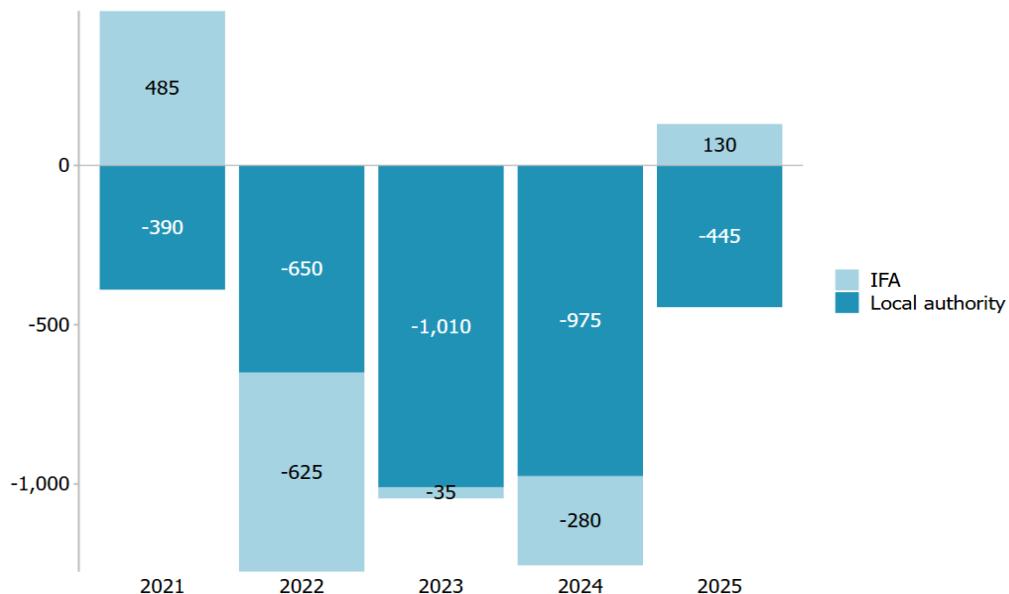
- The number of mainstream fostering households nationally has continued to decline over the past 4 years, but at a slower rate compared to last year. There has been a 7% decrease since 2021 and a 1% decrease compared to last year.
- Nationally local authority mainstream households have seen a decrease of 2% from the previous year that has been offset slightly by a small increase in IFA (Independent Fostering Association) households. Overall, this results in an increase in the number of newly approved mainstream households entering the sector this year, following a longer-term downward trend which plateaued between 2023 and 2024.
- The proportion of formal kinship care arrangement (family and friends) households has remained consistent with last year. However, there has been a slight decline in the proportion of newly approved formal kinship care arrangement households still active at 31 March.
- There continues to be an increase in the proportion of IFA mainstream households with the number of IFA households and places seeing a slight increase from the previous year
- At the end of March 2025, there were 42,190 fostering households in England. The number of households has decreased steadily since 2021, and the make-up has changed. Formal kinship care fostering is the preferred route in many cases, and it is increasingly common for this type of foster care to be used to meet the needs of individual children. The largest subset of fostering households is mainstream local authority households (18,415). These currently account for 44% of total fostering households (Figure 1).
- **Figure 1: Number of fostering households by type and sector as at 31 March, over the last 5 years**



Mainstream Fostering (National Picture):

6.123 The number of local authority mainstream households nationally is still decreasing. Between 2021 and 2025, the number of approved or newly approved mainstream local authority households has fallen by 14%. The rate of decline in the last year (2024 - 2025) is slower than in the previous 3 years. For the first time since 2021 there has been a net increase in the number of IFA households. (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Year-on-year net change in mainstream fostering households by sector over the last 5 years



Data for Figure 3: Percentage change in number of approved mainstream fostering households by region between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025

Region	IFA	Local authority
East Midlands	8%	-5%

Region	IFA	Local authority
East of England	0%	-2%
London	1%	0%
North East, Yorkshire and Humber	-2%	-3%
North West	-2%	-2%
South East	-2%	-1%
South West	-4%	-4%
West Midlands	8%	-2%

[Main findings: fostering in England 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

Turning the curve in Shropshire:

Overview:

6.124 The demand for foster placements remains high and far outstrips the sufficiency available. The recruitment of foster carers is a competitive market with aggressive marketing of Independent Fostering Agencies impacting recruitment. Larger independent agencies spend a significant amount on marketing and retention events, subsequently impacting recruitment figures.

6.125 Development of the service has been required in order to compete with the external market and support carers to understand the value of fostering for their local authority.

6.126 Over the past 2 years, transformation has focused on developing recruitment, communication channels and the support offer for foster carers. The appointment of a full-time Marketing & Events Manager (October 2024) has seen an increased focus on a digital approach to recruitment, development of the 'Shropshire Fostering' brand, greater visibility, streamlined communications and a program of events that supports and celebrates the value our foster carers have for children in Shropshire. Scheduled events throughout the year aim to support retention.

6.127 The Fostering Service has been through a recent restructure that ended on 08/12/25. The new service structure will be implemented from 01/01/26 and will seek to address the competing practice demands between Kinship Fostering and Mainstream Fostering recruitment.

Marketing and recruitment:

6.128 Digital Marketing: Digital marketing remained our primary activity. SEO work on the website enhanced our Google rankings, allowing us to give Facebook Ads more

priority over paid-for Google Ads as they were delivering the most measurable enquiries.

6.129 We initiated closer contact with our digital ads agency, to ensure clear expectations to optimise our Facebook Ads and Google Ads. Ad copy was produced in-house. There are traffic ad campaigns running for the website and event bookings. Increased digital exposure is in place via Shropshire Live, who have a high traffic news website and online radio station. Shropshire Fostering has website banners and radio ads, with the offer to feature radio interviews regularly. This change in activity is positively impacting enquiry figures.

Overall enquiries over the last 3 years for Mainstream Fostering increased as follows:

	23/24	24/25	25/26
Enquiries (personal details provided via web form)	252	262	464 (YTD)
EOI's (Expression Of Interest)	38	42	52 (YTD)
Approvals	7	16	10 (YTD) 24 (projected)

6.130 The focus has been strengthening the quality of enquiries, keeping warm enquirers who do not progress at the first point of contact to aid conversion at a later stage and successfully supporting potential foster carers through the training, assessment, approval and matching process.

6.131 Website and Branding: Our advertising has been successfully rebranded and relaunched. The rebrand to 'More Rewarding Than Ever' involved the design and production of marketing collateral for councillor meetings and public visibility, including banners, leaflets, postcards and branded merchandise for events. Banners are now on display at numerous high footfall county venues. Website has had an uplift and further work is being further developed to enhance the platform used.

6.132 Communication channel and data insight: The service has moved to Mailchimp communications system to allow for easier, more automated ongoing communications with both enquirers and existing carers. The Fostering Service have developed strong tracking of enquiry data, ensuring people who register for information but do not attend our webinars receive follow up communications and contact inline with our strategy to increase sufficiency.

6.133 From the data held we understand that it can take an average of 10 months from someone considering Fostering to actually making a decision to progress with an agency. We are actively using our 'enquiry data' and 'keeping people warm' with campaigns during this period and starting to see greater conversion from people who enquired earlier in the year.

6.134 Online vs Face to Face recruitment: Stronger participation has been seen with online events. The webinar sign-up process has been streamlined to capitalise on

people's busier lives, making them more appealing and leading onto a conversation from enquiry to Expression of Interest to Initial Home Visit.

6.135 A referral scheme was also launched for Shropshire Council employees and Shropshire Fostering Carers, promoted through internal webinars and newsletters.

6.136 Partner Organisations: Contacts have been made with partnering organisations, who can support our goals as a fostering service for the benefit of our Shropshire children. Shrewsbury football club have supported the development of a weekly Wellbeing Hub and children have been invited to join their 'Kicks' program.

Internal Fostering:

Mainstream Foster Carers

6.137 Mainstream Fostering recruitment has continued to show positive progress. We saw 100% increase on mainstream recruitment figures between 23/24 and 24/25. A further 50% increase is projected for 25/26 (see table below). Connected Person Fostering approvals remain consistently high.

6.138 We continue to monitor and learn from de-registrations to support retention and to ensure the right support at the right time to address instability within care arrangements. In 2025 - 2026, 3 Mainstream Foster Carers have been de-registered due to 2 retiring and 1 no longer wishing to foster. A high number of Connected Person de-registrations are noted due to families securing permanence for children via Special Guardianship Orders (SGO). This is a positive outcome for children. Some de-registrations have resulted from safeguarding and instability within care arrangements. Understanding of the demographic of our carers, including age and reasons for resignations supports strategic planning, learning and opportunities for development within our service plans, recruitment and retention strategy.

Connected Persons

6.139 Connected Person Foster Carer assessments have supported more children to remain living within their family network, enabling children to sustain important relationships and supporting their identity. The high demand for connected person assessments challenges the use of resources to recruit and assess mainstream foster carers. These assessments are complex and time-sensitive, often taking up most of the social worker's time. The capacity within the service is managed; the independent social worker assessments are utilised where required. The service has given due consideration to the model for the service to ensure this continues to develop and meet need. New service structure will be implemented from 01/01/26.

6.140 Approval and Deregistration data:

	Mainstream Foster Carers Approved	Mainstream Foster Carers De-Registered	Connected Person Foster Carers Approved	Connected Person Foster Carers De-registered
2025/2026 YTD	10 24 (Projected)	3	26 38 (Projected)	16

2024/2025	16	7 (1 transfer to Supported Living)	38	38
2023/2024	7	6 (+ 3 transferred to Supported Living)	32	28
2022/2023	4	6	44	34

Wider Context to placement demands:

6.141 Recruitment of Mainstream Foster Carers is integral to increasing sufficiency and decreasing the number of children placed in IFA and high-cost residential placements.

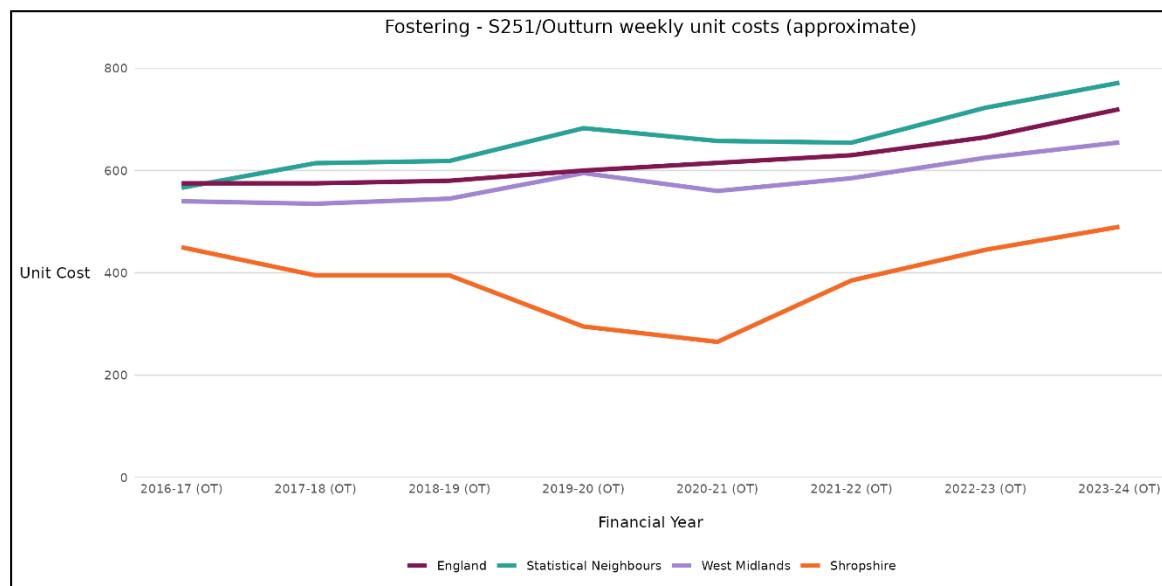
6.142 It is important to understand the demand for internal placements within the wider context of demand for services within children services. Children Services aims to support children to remain within their families where possible. Alternatively, where this is not possible a fostering family arrangement will be sought, and external provision will only be sought where there is no internal resources.

Summary breakdown by placement type as of 31/10/25

Placement Type	Number of Children	% of CLA (of 704 children)
External Residential	116	16.5%
Internal Residential	10	1.4 %
Semi - independent	47	6.7%
External Fostering	149	21.2%
Internal Fostering	283	40.2 %

6.143 Recent benchmarking report completed by the LGA shows that Shropshire has a high and rising demand for services, but low unit costs.

6.144 Unit costs for foster placements are low in comparison to statistical neighbours.



[Source LAIT November 2025 version]

6.145 The weekly unit costs are low across all placement types, further suggesting that any interventions to control costs should be pointed at demand management rather than lowering cost per unit.

6.146 The per capita spend on family support is also low within Shropshire, further attention to this area will directly impact on reducing demands for children's placements in the future.

6.147 Increasing sufficiency whilst also addressing early support for families and support services available to different care arrangements to aid stability will drive down both demand and cost. Work is being completed with Stepping Stones to support stability of care arrangements and prevent family breakdowns within fostering arrangements.

Shropshire Fostering transformation completed in the last 12 months:

6.148 **Increased Support Offer: Holistic support is the key to stability of care arrangements and the recruitment and retention of foster carers.**

6.149 **Allowances:** we have increased our allowances in line with the DFE recommended rate to support our foster carers, aid recruitment and retention. Our allowances are comparable to other LA's. We will continue to review remuneration requirements.

Increased weekly allowances:

Age Range	Weekly Rate From 23/24	New Weekly Rate From 24/25	New Weekly Rate From 25/26
Birth – 2	£135.54	£165	£170
3-4 years	£135.54	£170	£176
5-10 years	£154.54	£187	£194

11-15 years	£199.55	£213	£220
16 +	£236.66	£249	£258

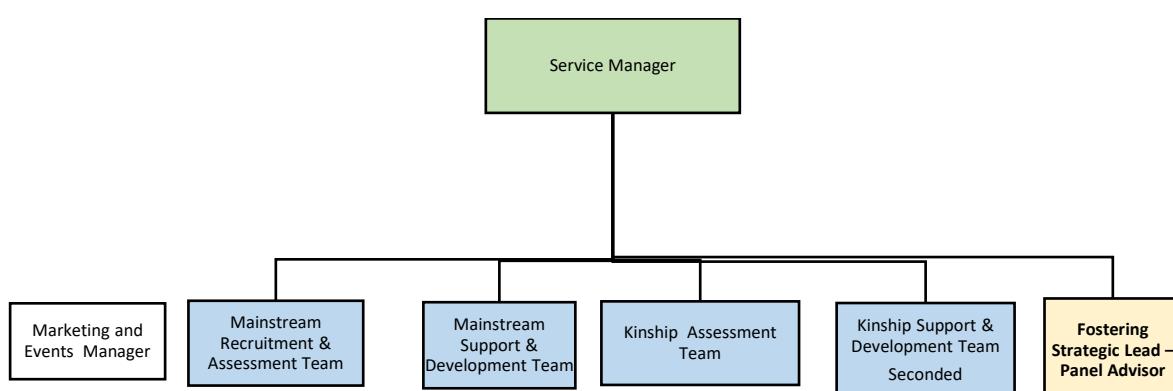
6.150 Training and events:

The Fostering Service has developed a trauma informed training and support group that has been well received by mainstream and connected carers. Our increased calendar of events has focused on Foster Carers wellbeing to aid retention; this has included Walk and Talk sessions, monthly therapeutic support group aiding peer relationships and networks as well as therapeutic parenting skills, coffee and chat sessions. Collaboration with Shrewsbury Foundation to create a Wellbeing Hub (facilitated once a week) with focused activities has enhanced benefits for both carers and children in Shropshire. Children have been invited to receive places on the Shrewsbury Football club Kicks program and we have seen this aid the stability of one care arrangement. There are plans to build on this collaboration the new year.

6.151 Fostering restructure:

Fostering Consultation has taken place. Staff are supportive of the changes and have embraced the vision for fostering in Shropshire. The new structure within the Fostering Service will be implemented from 01/01/26. This will see a more streamlined approach to Mainstream Fostering Recruitment and Assessment with dedicated resource and tailored support. It will address the challenge currently experienced with competing demand on assessment resource between mainstream and Kinship.

- 6.152 The Assessment and Support for Kinship Carers will be completed by separate teams. This will aim to ensure that Kinship carers are supported through assessment with robust support and any barriers to permanence for children can be addressed.
- 6.153 The Service aims to increase the supports available through the fostering constellation model; we currently have 1 Mockingbird constellation with the view to expand.



6.154 Fostering Transformation Project:

We have made changes to our recruitment process, identifying efficiencies and solutions, increased support, identified improvements for performance data and insights, developed our marketing imagery functions and increased our support offer.

6.155 Carer Connect: We have completed a soft launch of our Carer Connect sharepoint; providing foster carers access to carer portal, provider portal, leap into learn and practice guidance. They are able to self serve, and have the opportunity to book on training, submit carer records, documents, submit mileage claims etc. This digital transformation aims to reduce impact of administrative tasks for staff and aid efficiencies and carer satisfaction. Full rollout is in February 2026.

6.156 Marketing: Recruitment and Retention

Efficiencies and opportunities to improve digital marketing, automation, online campaigns, consistency in communications have been progressed at pace.

6.157 Key areas of focus in the next 6 months for marketing and recruitment:

- 6.158 Continue to increase sufficiency, recruiting more mainstream foster carers and retaining existing.
- 6.159 Update Marketing Strategy for 2026 / 2027. We will attract and retain a wider group of Fostering Families who are able to offer a range of fostering options to our children
- 6.160 Refreshed website to be launched, this will aim to increase the number of enquiries and reduce any barriers.
- 6.161 Development of Power BI further assist data and insights that inform strategic planning.
- 6.162 Radio and Media advertising will raise the profile of fostering for Shropshire Social media campaigns, digital campaigns, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) will all aim to increase conversion rate of enquiries to EOI to approval
- 6.163 Foster Carer champions and participation will be further developed to ensure that carers can share their experiences with potential carers.
- 6.164 Networking with local business leaders to raise the profile and support for fostering and the children in our care

6.165 Key areas of focus in the next 6 months for Foster Carer retention:

- 6.166 Focus on supporting children under 12 years in residential to step down into foster care. Using the increase in newly approved foster carers to match children with carers, ensuring carers are fully supported as they start their fostering journey. Where we are not able to match children with in house foster carers work is underway to work with regional providers to share profiles of children, including sibling groups, to find long term homes for children. This is priority piece of work.
- 6.167 Align support offer for Foster Carers with other service areas, including Virtual Education. We are embracing opportunities for efficiencies and stronger joint service delivery.
- 6.168 Annual Fostering Celebration event was successful in 2025. Plans for 2026 to be progressed to celebrate all foster carers caring for Shropshire Children.

- 6.169 Development of the therapeutic training offer. Progressive approach to training and development to ensure children's stability within care arrangements and prevent escalation to high cost placements.
- 6.170 Increase participation opportunities allowing foster carers and children to shape the service they receive
- 6.171 Increase benefits available to foster carers through wider council services and engagement with local businesses
- 6.172 Full roll out of Foster Carer portal to increase self service functions
- 6.173 The Mockingbird programme delivers the Mockingbird Family Model. This centres on a constellation where one foster home acts as a hub, offering planned and emergency respite, advice, training and support. We have a well-established Mockingbird constellation in Shropshire with 1 hub carer supporting 9 families within the constellation. Plans have been submitted to grow this model further by developing 2 more constellations with the support of the Fostering Network.

“Above and Beyond” Charity

- 6.174 The ‘Above and Beyond’ Charity has been set up and had 2 Trustee meetings this year. There have been some complications with getting a bank account set up, so it is not yet operating in full as a charity. There is a plan in place to address this in January 2026 and get the bank account set up. In addition, there has been a need to change some trustees and this is in progress of getting several new ones appointed. This will be complete in January 2026. A new Chair of Trustees needs to be appointed at the next meeting. The Service Director for Children and Young People is maintaining oversight to ensure that the actions outlined above progress.

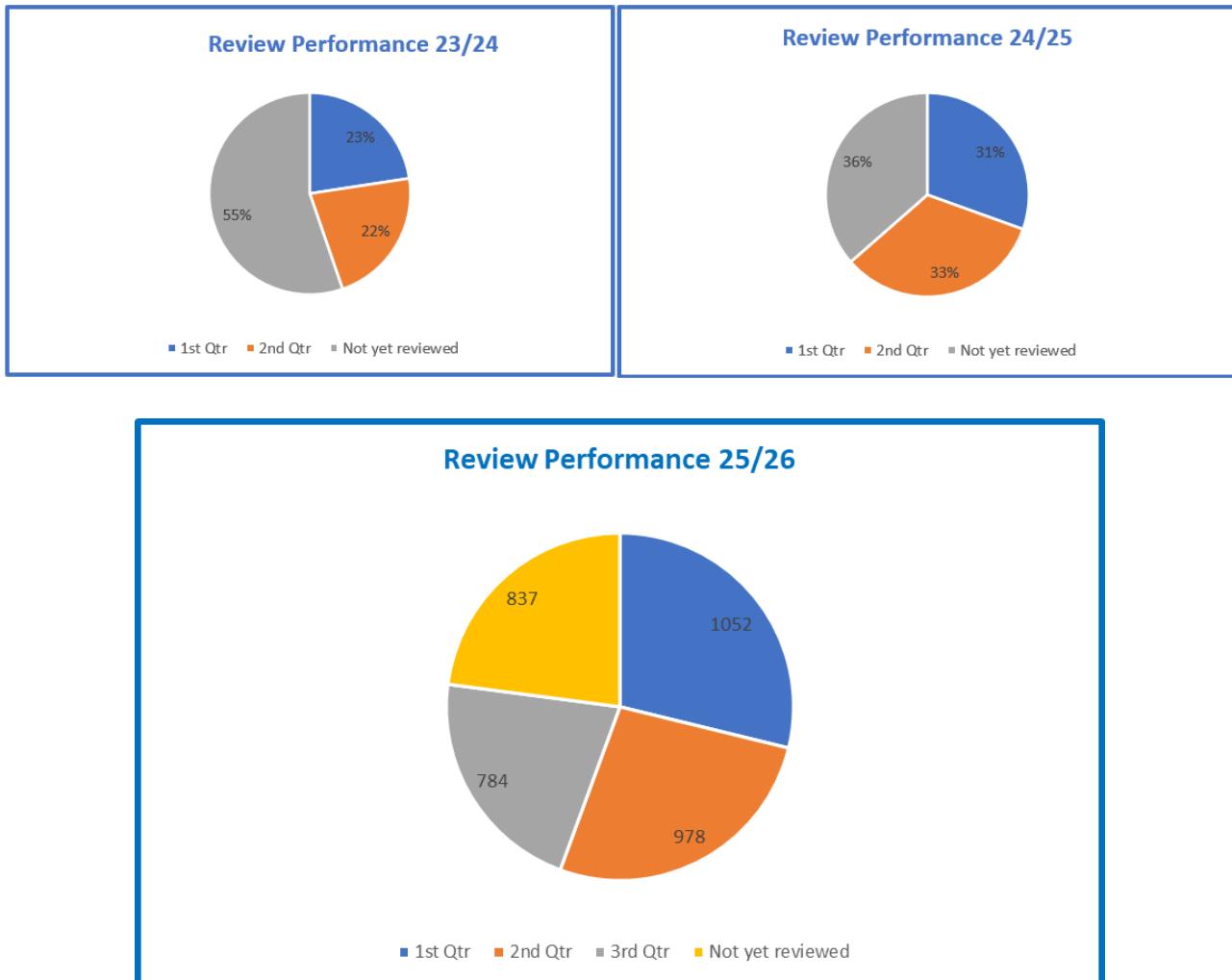
Adult Social Care

- 6.175 The three key areas Committee asked to report on this quarter are:

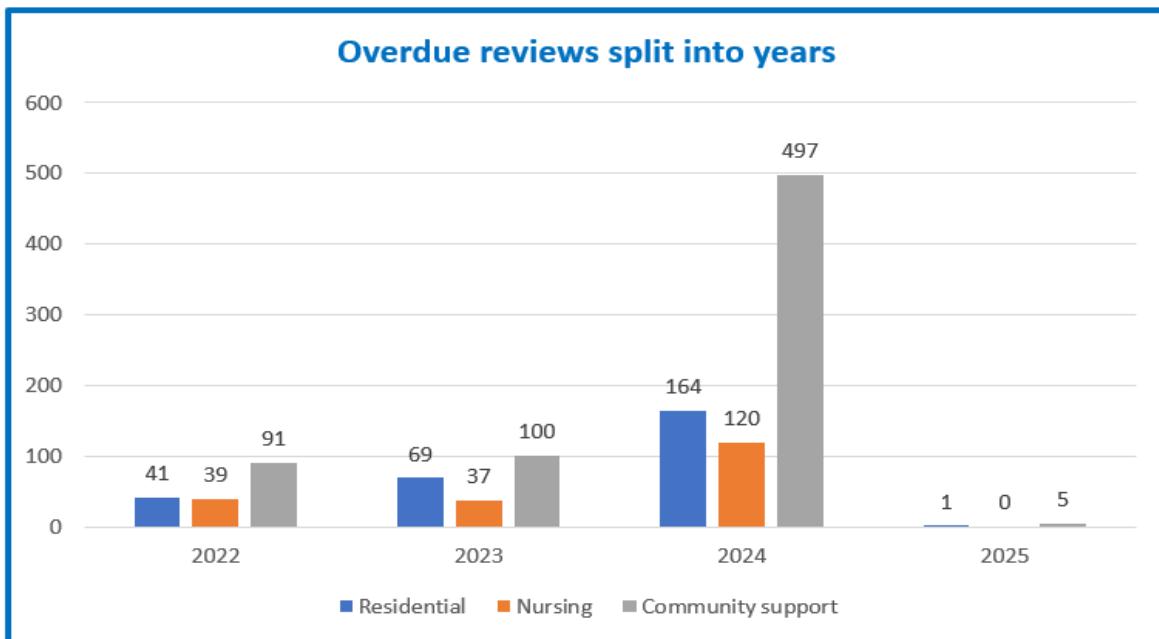
ASC reviews position:

- 6.176 Under s27 of the Care Act 2014 the local authority must keep care and support plans under general review. The statutory guidance sets an expectation that a review should take place no less than once every 12 months. This year we have had 4513 people in receipt of a funded service, currently we have 3651 active plans needing a review each year. These figures go up and down as new people come into the service or leave. When someone starts a new funded service we have a statutory duty to do a first review to ensure it is meeting their needs, we aim to do this within 12 weeks.
- 6.177 Since 1st April 2025 ASC have completed 2814 reviews. We are currently at 62.3% reviews completed across the service, our performance target is 70%, last year we achieved 56% completed for the whole year, so we are on track to achieve target this year.

6.178 Below are some charts to show progress on previous years:



6.179 Currently overdue are 1164 reviews. They are split as follows:



6.180 We do have an action plan in place that all 2022 are all completed by the end of March 2026 and those from 2023 completed by July 2026. Reviews are rag rated in order of risk priority. It's important to note that a number of reviews we have completed over the last two years have been targeted pieces of work aligned to specific cohorts and have not necessarily been from our overdue list.

6.181 There are 470 people in long term care home placements overdue a review in total however 222 of those in placements are subject to a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) authorisation and have been assessed or reviewed by a Best Interests assessor within the last 12 months.

6.182 To have reviewed all 4513 people within the statutory timeframe that would equate to approximately 86 reviews being completed each week, on a basis that a worker could complete 5 good quality reviews each week we would need a team of around 17 practitioners, this does not take into account annual leave, sickness absence, training or bank holidays. Our priority area is to ensure those presenting to the service with no current support in place are allocated as quickly as possible, we carefully assess risk for everyone. Those who are overdue a review is in receipt of a service, where there is a care provider in place who can escalate to the service if circumstances change or if they can no longer meet need.

6.183 We understand that there are key risks in relation to not completing reviews within the advised statutory timeframe, such as inappropriate or outdated support plans could impact individuals' wellbeing and potential budget over spend and we have implemented a clear plan to reduce overdue reviews and as you can see are making good progress, however we have to balance this demand with the increasing risks and demand of new individuals needing their first care act assessment and input from the service.

Out of county reviews

6.184 We currently have 171 people placed in care provisions out of Shropshire, We led a targeted piece of work in 2023 to clear a historical review back log, our aim where

possible is to support people in Shropshire however we will move people to be closer to their families and if this is a particular type of care provision we retain responsibility for their care and support. We also have a number of complex people where we have not been able to meet their needs in Shropshire.

6.185 Our current position is:

Year due	No. outstanding
2023	2
2024	11
2025 – Jan Dec	67
Due 2026	91

6.186 Most people are placed in one of our 7 bordering counties: T&W, Cheshire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Powys, Wrexham.

Location	No. of people
Cheshire	12
Herefordshire	9
Powys	8
Staffordshire	14
Telford & Wrekin	44
Worcestershire	14
Wrexham	8
Other	62

117 reviews

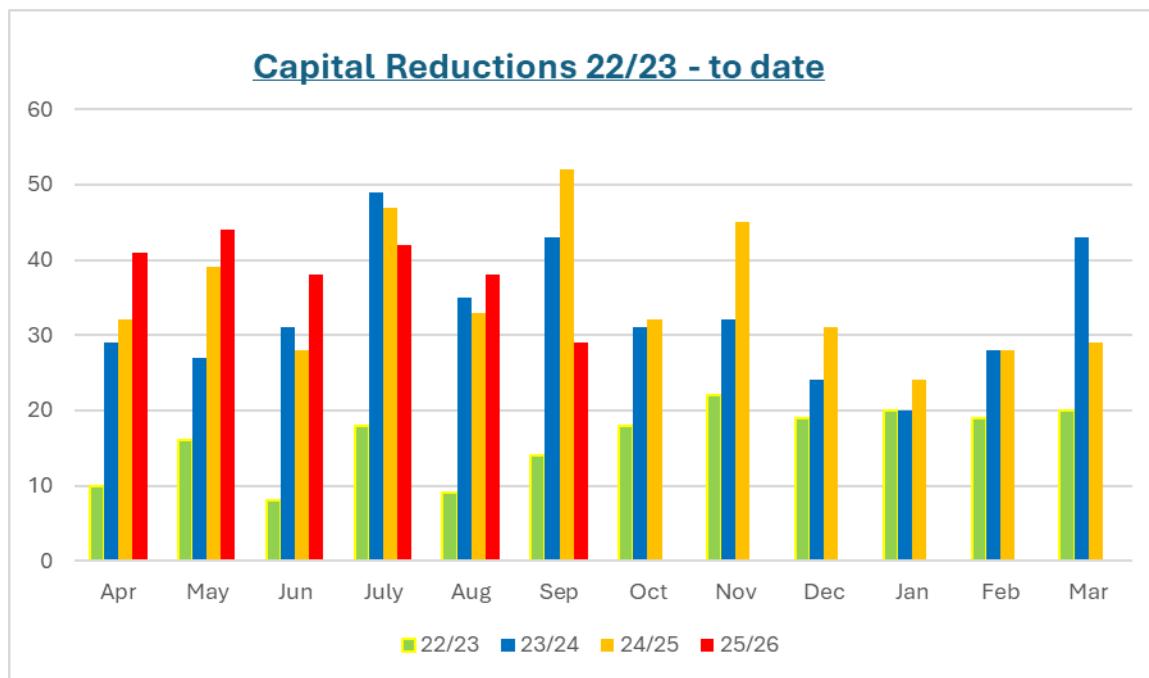
6.187 Currently we have 210 people in receipt of a funded service with a section 117 aftercare eligibility, 60% have had a review in year, with 82 people overdue, non-longer than 2 years. Many of them are allocated and there is a work plan in place to clear all back log of reviews in this area.

Capital reduction demand:

6.188 In adult social care, capital reduction refers to the point at which an individual's financial assets (capital) fall below the thresholds set by law, making them eligible for local authority financial support. Under the Care Act 2014 and related charging regulations:

- Upper Capital Limit: £23,250
If someone's capital is above this, they are considered a self-funder and pay the full cost of care.
- Lower Capital Limit: £14,250
Below this, no contribution is required from capital towards care costs.
- Between these limits, a tariff income is applied (a notional weekly contribution based on remaining capital)

6.189 We have previously reported on the demand into ASC when self-funders capital reduces to the threshold of £23,250. Below is summary of referrals numbers over the last few years, as you will see demand is increasing with care home capital reductions equating to 13% referrals into our bed hub each week.



6.190 We are currently reviewing how we collate and report on self-funders and capital reductions so cannot easily report on the total financial pressures of this cohort, however we can report in relation to bed placements sourced. From April – Sept this year the weekly cost was £90,520 on placements, with this increasing each time a new capital reduction bed is purchased. We follow a robust process in relation to capital reductions, ensuring we assess need and explore all options to meet assessed needs in the most cost-effective way. Our priority is to ensure any identified placement can provide quality care and meet need, our bed hub process is to obtain as many quotes as possible and they are put forward to the practitioner, who will ensure all identified placements are suitable, requesting any alternative identified home completes a pre-admission assessment. Our bed hub team will negotiate with the current provider where possible. If we do identify an alternative placement a robust risk assessment is completed to identify risk and any mitigations before a move is suggested. Any decisions relating to a move are presented to a funding forum.

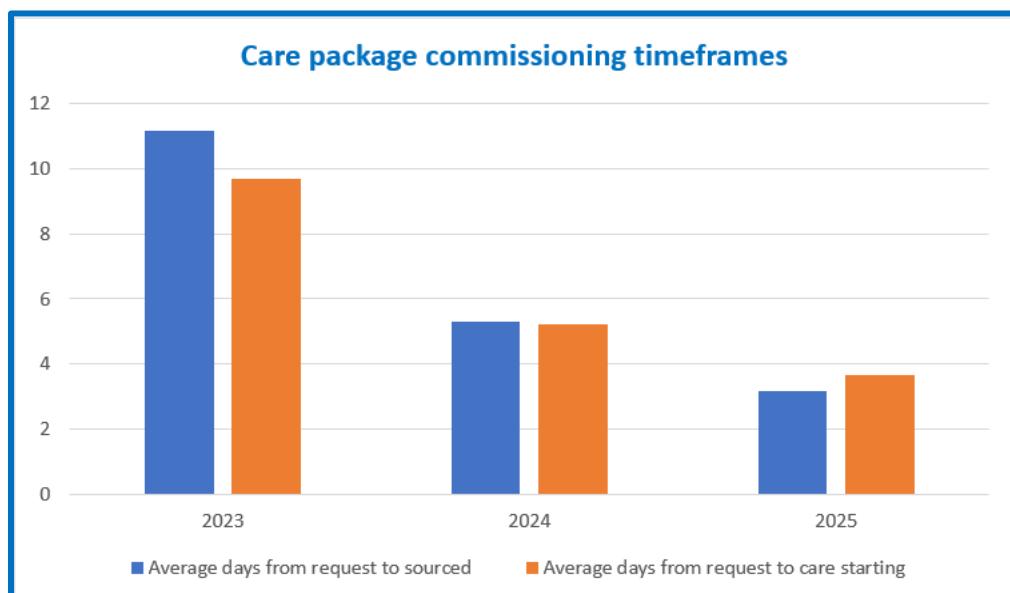
6.191 We are collating data with support from external partners such as Partner in Care and Health Watch in relation to future self-funding demand. We have put forward a transformation programme to support self-funding demand and increasing care fees across the self-funding market. This will provide a dedicated resource to self-funders seeking support and guidance to ensure they purchase support in line with their level of need and at a reasonable cost. This will help prolong their funds and ensure access to equitable rates and accredited providers.

Delays in providing services:

6.192 Brokerage acts as the link between assessed care needs and service providers. It ensures that once a practitioner has completed a Care Act assessment and identified eligible needs and funding is agreed, the right care package or care home placement is sourced, commissioned, and started promptly. The aim is to deliver timely, cost-effective, and person-centred care.

6.193 ASC are proud of our performance **across our brokerage and bed hub service**. Our latest data shows an average of 3.65 days for care to start from the date our brokerage team received the request from the practitioners.

6.194 Below you can see a significant improvement year on year:



6.195 Equally our bed hub also has excellent results with it taking an average of 3.7 days to source a care home placement from the date of the request. ASC do not consider that we have any delays in relation to sourcing care, however we do acknowledge that for individuals whose needs are particularly complex it can take longer to source appropriate care however in most cases this would be necessary to ensure the correct provider is selected and all relevant assessments and transition plans are completed prior to care starting. In instances where there are delays with sourcing appropriate care alternatives are offered to ensure no one is left without care. An example of this might be offering a respite bed whilst waiting on a care package to start.

7 Conclusions

- 7.1 The report provides detailed analysis of a range of key activities across the Care and Wellbeing and Children and Young People services as requested by the Committee.
- 7.2 Officers have outlined the challenges, opportunities and next steps in relation to these areas, including recovery plans and mitigations where appropriate. Areas of strength are also outlined.
- 7.3 Implications of increasing levels of demand across services, comparison with regional and national benchmarking, and subsequent consideration of the capacity/resourcing requirements are outlined. This includes financial implications for the Council, including in relation to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

7.4 This information is intended to provide detail that promotes questions and curiosity from the Committee.

Appendices

Shropshire Education Excellence Strategy – working draft January 2026
