Shropshire Council
Legal and Democratic Services
Guildhall,
Frankwell Quay,
Shrewsbury
SY3 8HQ

Date: 6th January 2026

Committee:
People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: Wednesday, 14 January 2026
Time: 6.00 pm
Venue: The Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury, SY3 8HQ

You are requested to attend the above meeting. The Agenda is attached

There will be some access to the meeting room for members of the press and public, but this will be limited. If you wish to attend the meeting please email democracy@shropshire.gov.uk to check that a seat will be available for you.

Please click here to view the livestream of the meeting on the date and time stated on the agenda

The recording of the event will also be made available shortly after the meeting on the Shropshire Council Youtube Channel Here

Tim Collard
Service Director – Legal, Governance and Planning

Members of People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Andy Davis (Chairman)	Vicky Moore
Mandy Duncan (Vice Chairman)	Mark Morris
Thomas Clayton	Alan Mosley
Susan Coleman	Teri Trickett
Jamie Daniels	Gemma Martin (Co-Optee)
Rhys Gratton	Carol Morgan (Co-Optee)
Duncan Kerr	

Your Committee Officer is:

Shelley Davies Committee Officer
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AGENDA

1   **Apologies for Absence**

2   **Disclosable Interests**

Members are reminded that they must declare their disclosable pecuniary interests and other registrable or non-registrable interests in any matter being considered at the meeting as set out in Appendix B of the Members' Code of Conduct and consider if they should leave the room prior to the item being considered. Further advice can be sought from the Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting.

3   **Minutes** (Pages 1 - 8)

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd October 2025.

Contact: Shelley Davies – Committee Officer.

4   **Public Questions**

To receive any questions from members of the public of which notice has been given. The deadline for this meeting is 12.00 pm, Thursday 8th January 2026.

5   **Member Questions**

To receive any question of which Members of the Council have given notice. The deadline for this meeting is 12.00 pm, Thursday 8th January 2026.

6   **Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report** (Pages 9 - 78)

To receive the Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report. (Report attached)

Contact: Tanya Miles - Executive Director DASS/Interim Chief Executive.

7   **Children's Services Reforms** (Pages 79 - 142)

To receive the Children's Services Reforms Report. (Report attached)

Contact: David Shaw - Director Children's Services

8   **Work Programme** (Pages 143 - 144)

Verbal update on the work programme of the Committee. (Work Programme attached)

Contact: Sophie Foster – Overview and Scrutiny Officer.

9   **Date of next meeting**

To note that the next meeting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be held at 6.00 p.m. on Wednesday 22nd April 2026.

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

PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2025
In the The Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury, SY3 8HQ
10.00 am - 1.02 pm

Responsible Officer: Shelley Davies
Email: shelley.davies@shropshire.gov.uk   Tel: 01743 257718

Present
Councillor Andy Davis (Chairman)
Councillors Mandy Duncan (Vice Chairman), Thomas Clayton, Susan Coleman, Rhys Gratton, Duncan Kerr, Mark Morris, Alan Mosley and Teri Trickett

13   **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Jamie Daniels, Councillor Vicky Moore and Sian Lines, Diocesan Board of Education.

14   **Disclosable Interests**

None received.

15   **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd July 2025 be confirmed as an accurate record.

16   **Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

17   **Member Questions**

There were no member questions.

18   **Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report**

Tanya Miles, Interim Chief Executive and Executive Director DASS introduced the Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 4 which gave an update on key areas of performance across Care & Wellbeing and Children and Young People services. She emphasised the importance of identifying specific areas for future scrutiny and asked the committee to consider which performance areas they would like to focus on for the next meeting in January.

Natalie McFall, Service Director - Care & Wellbeing and Amanda Allcock, Service Manager - Ops South, outlined key areas of the report in relation to Adult Social Care. It was reported that there were ongoing challenges due to demographic pressures, increased complexity of cases and a high number of weekly referrals, but proactive measures were in place and the service was working closely with commissioning to improve delivery models and address demand.

In response to questions in relation to Adult Social Care members were advised that:

- There was a specific mental health pathway for young people preparing for adulthood and the focus was on measuring success by achieving safe transition and appropriate support.

- The main challenge regarding self-funded care was identifying and reaching people who were not known to adult social care, as these individuals often make decisions in crisis without information regarding the support available.

- The team was focusing on improving advice and information in regard to self-funded care through family hubs and community outreach, to help people make informed choices before their savings were depleted.

- The team was working to improve advice and information to enable families to make more appropriate decisions and avoid unnecessary early entry into care homes by recommending alternative pathways, such as reablement services or domiciliary care.

- It was important to reach those not yet known to Adult Social Care through partnerships with GPs, pharmacies, and other health providers before their needs escalate.

- The family hubs initially focused on children, but adults were now being integrated into the model. It was acknowledged that some areas of the County may need bespoke or outreach models due to local needs and limited existing infrastructure.

- Adult Social Care has already taken £34 million out of its budget over recent years by transforming service delivery and that every possible efficiency was being explored including benchmarking against other councils and inviting independent scrutiny to identify further opportunities for sustainable budgeting.

David Shaw, Director Children's Services and John Rowe, Head of Education Quality and Safeguarding outlined key areas of the report in relation to Education. It was reported that there was a need for more challenge and support for Academies and it was noted that a new education excellence strategy to increase the local authority's role in challenging, supporting, and intervening in all schools, including academies, to improve pupil outcomes was being developed.

In response to questions in relation to Education members were advised that:

- Electively Home Educated (EHE) pupils were monitored by a specific service (EAS), which has become more proactive, especially regarding safeguarding and ensuring children receive a good education. It was suggested that Jo Kelly, Virtual Head Teacher who leads this area, could provide more detail at a future meeting.

- The Council monitors planning applications and large housing developments to estimate the number of children likely to result from new developments and a formula was used to inform decisions in relation to school capacity.

- The new education excellence strategy aims to increase its influence over academies, focusing on robust, constructive, and challenging conversations with Multi Academy Trust CEOs in relation to pupil outcomes.

- The Council's ability to monitor academies was constrained by the removal of the school monitoring and brokering grant in 2022, which previously funded these activities. As a result, the Council has limited capacity and relies on existing staff to support monitoring, making comprehensive oversight of academies challenging.

- Resources such as the inclusion development grant and outreach programs were used to support students at risk of exclusion.

Lisa Taylor, Principal Educational Psychologist and Preventative Lead outlined key areas of the report in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). It was reported that the rising demand of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) continues to strain resources and the need for early intervention and system changes to manage demand and maintain strong relationships with families and schools was emphasised.

In response to questions members were advised that:

- Achieving financial sustainability for SEND and high needs by 2028 was extremely difficult due to a large and growing deficit, low mainstream school funding, and increasing complexity and demand. It was stressed that the problem was national in scale, and there was no straightforward solution or high confidence that EHCP growth can be contained within budget.

- Settings were advised to use early intervention and additional resource pathways before pursuing an EHCP to provide targeted support for short-term or specific needs, potentially preventing the need for a long-term EHCP.

Sonya Miller, Service Director Children's & Young People outlined key areas of the report in relation to Children's & Young People Social Care noting in particular the flow of children through the service and the impact of early help on reducing statutory interventions. She highlighted that the number of children in statutory services was at its lowest in over six years which indicated that the investment in early help was working.

In response to questions members were advised that:

- Shropshire had a higher than- average number of large sibling groups, which increased case complexity, especially when multiple parents were involved. It was also noted that there had been an increase in child exploitation cases.

- There was a lack of dedicated early intervention services for parents facing issues such as mental health, substance misuse, and domestic abuse and the need for more joined-up, early intervention services for families with multiple, complex needs was emphasised.

- Shropshire Council uses both direct (in-house) foster carers and independent fostering agencies and that both were needed to ensure children were placed appropriately, with matching based on needs rather than whether the carer was in-house or agency.

- The Council was not allowed to actively approach agency foster carers to bring them in-house but conversations about the Council's offer do occur, especially if carers have children placed with them long-term.

- The Council has improved support through initiatives like the Mockingbird model and Stepping Stones to help foster carers manage challenges and prevent placement breakdowns.

- Shropshire Council participates in the national transfer scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and the government funding just about covered accommodation and living costs but does not cover all costs, such as social work time, travel, or PA support.

All officers were thanked for their reports and commitment to supporting people in Shropshire.

RECOMMENDED:

That the report be noted and the following areas be added to the work programme as future topics for the Committee:

- Adult social care: Focus on the self-funding market - Joint item with HOSC.

- Education - Academy liaison programmes and support, including sharing updates on the Academy strategy.

- Virtual school – Jo Kelly to be invited to a future scrutiny meeting for more detail on electively home-educated children, children missing education and the outreach programme for supporting children with additional needs.

- Fostering - Report on private foster carers versus local authority foster carers, including numbers and breakdowns.

- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children - hearing directly from young people about their outcomes and experiences.

19 **Care Quality Commission (CQC) Update Report**

Tanya Miles, Interim Chief Executive and Executive Director DASS presented the report which provided an update on the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Adult Social Care Assessment.

Daniel Powner, Service Manager, Community Partnerships and Day Opportunities advised that the assessment focused on working with people, providing support, ensuring safety, and leadership/governance. He reported that Adult Social Care had been rated "good" with notable strengths in Care Act compliance, carer engagement, user experience, and innovative rural delivery. The key improvement areas included streamlining processes, reducing assessment delays, enhancing carer support and learning from complaints and it was noted that a 'towards outstanding action plan' (TOAP) was in place to address these areas.

In response to a request from a member for the inclusion of dates on the Action Plan at Appendix 2, Daniel Powner advised that the appendix was an extract of a larger document but progress dates would be added for future meetings.

Officers were thanked for their report.

RECOMMENDED:

That the contents of the report be noted.

20 **Local Youth Transformation Pilot**

David Shaw, Director Children's Services provided background information in relation to the Local Youth Transformation Pilot and introduced Helena Williams, Youth Support Team Manager.

Helena Williams gave a presentation in relation to the Local Youth Transformation Pilot, a system transformation pilot to build sustainable youth work across Shropshire.

In response to questions members were advised that:

- The funding for youth services under the Local Youth Transformation Pilot was expected to come from a combination of sources, including town and parish council precepts, partnerships, and identifying different funding pots that Shropshire Council may not be able to access directly.

- The project would be challenging due to the need for sustainable funding and collaboration with town and parish councils, which have limited resources and varying capacities.

- The pilot included a grant, but only a small portion was for direct delivery, the majority was for building capacity, structures, and sustainable systems to create lasting change rather than temporary fixes.

- The Council cannot fund all youth services directly but can support coordination, share good practice, and help bridge gaps between well-served and underserved areas.

- The development of youth services and the Local Youth Transformation Pilot strategy must be co-produced with young people, ensuring their involvement in every element of the project, from local youth partnerships to strategic decision-making.

Councillor Andy Hall, Portfolio Holder for Children and Education congratulated the Team for securing the funding which will support the transformation of youth provision in Shropshire and provide much needed training for youth professionals.

The Chairman thanked the officers for the presentation and welcomed a future report on progress of the Local Youth Transformation Pilot.

RECOMMENDED:

That the presentation be noted.

21 **Work Programme**

Sophie Foster, Overview & Scrutiny Officer noted that a number of topics to be added to the work programme had been suggested during the meeting and she suggested that an additional meeting via Teams be arranged to discuss the priorities for the Committee.

RECOMMENDED:

That an additional Teams meeting be arranged to discuss the Work Programme.

22 **Date of next meeting**

Members noted that the next meeting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Meeting will be taking place on at 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday 14th January 2026.

Signed   .... (Chairman)

Date: ....

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Performance Monitoring Report Q1

Responsible Officer:	Tanya Miles and David Shaw	
email:	Tanya.miles@shropshire.gov.uk David.shaw@shropshire.gov.uk	Tel:
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Ruth Houghton and Andy Hall	

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 what ever 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%).

**Number of Shropshire Plans (home LA & Funding LA Shropshire)**
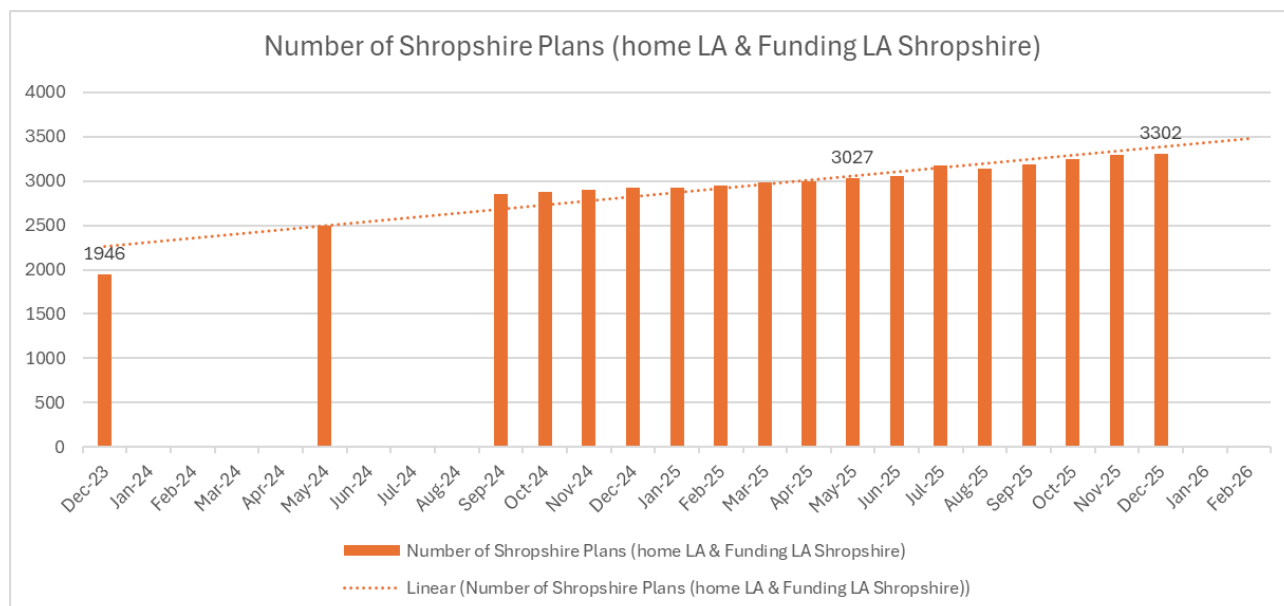
Within this growth there has been a sharp increase in the proportion of pupils attending independent special schools (192.6% increase from 2019/20 to 2024/25)
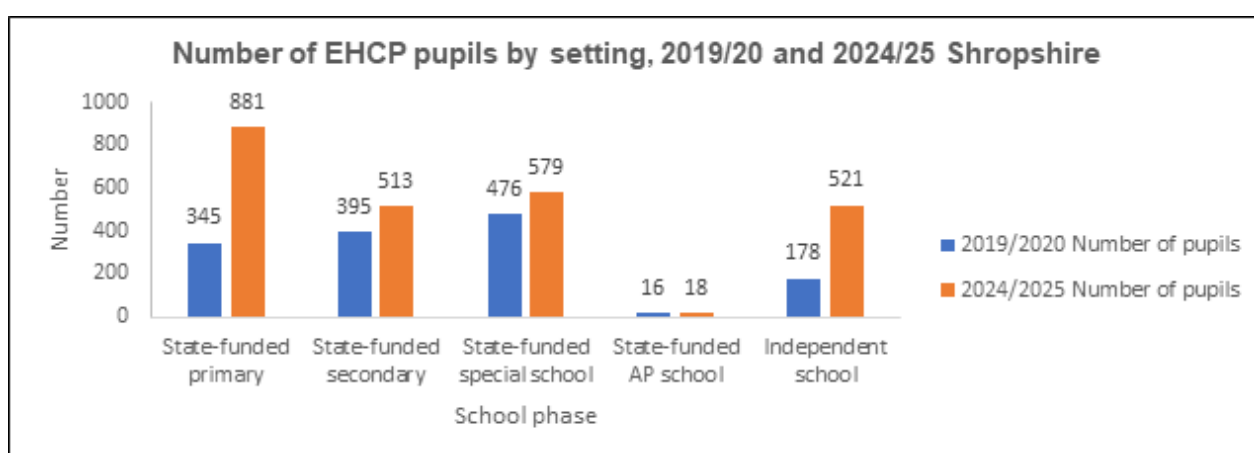

6.5   To support this growth, mainstream top up funding increased by 65% from 2023-24 to 2024-25. A further 41% increase is forecast because of the increased numbers of children and young people with an EHC plan.

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

Legend: ■ England ■ West Midlands ■ Shropshire
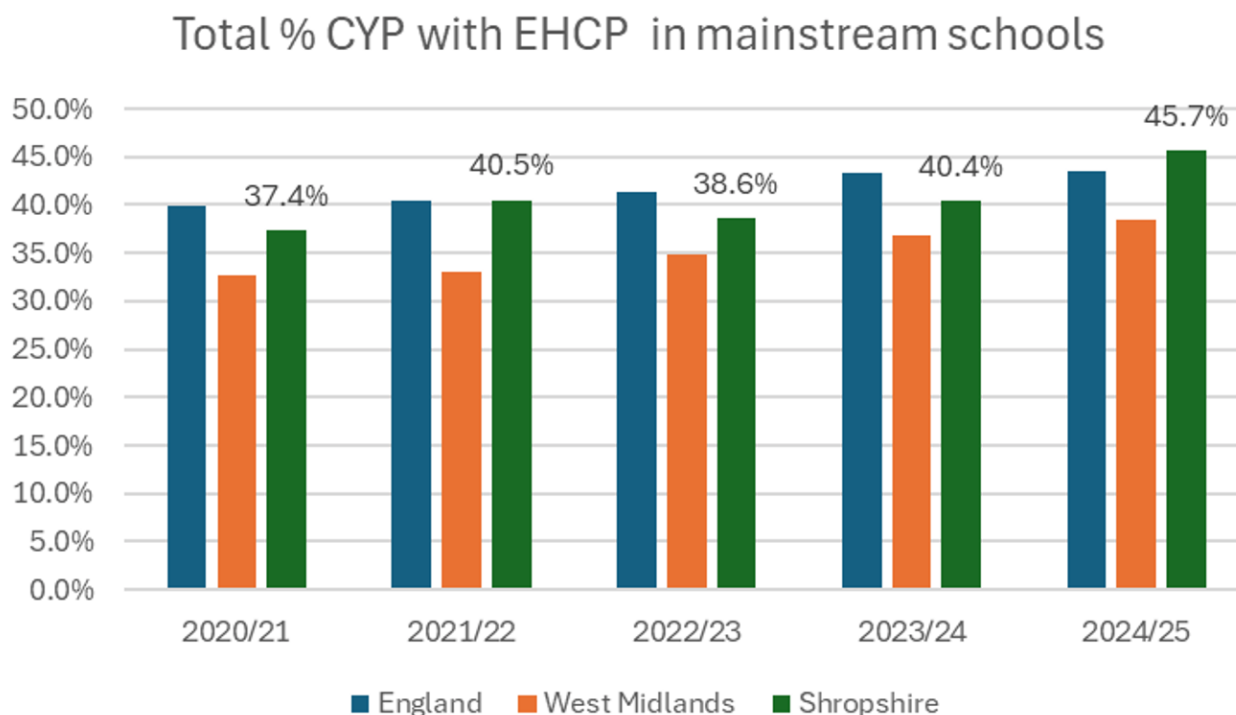
6.10 Additional cost pressures were also created by the application of an inflationary increase in the top-up payments and expansion within resourced provision (hubs). The development of resourced provision and more adequate resourcing of mainstream EHCP provision is seen as an important part in the 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.

High Needs Block - Top-Up Funding to Mainstream Schools
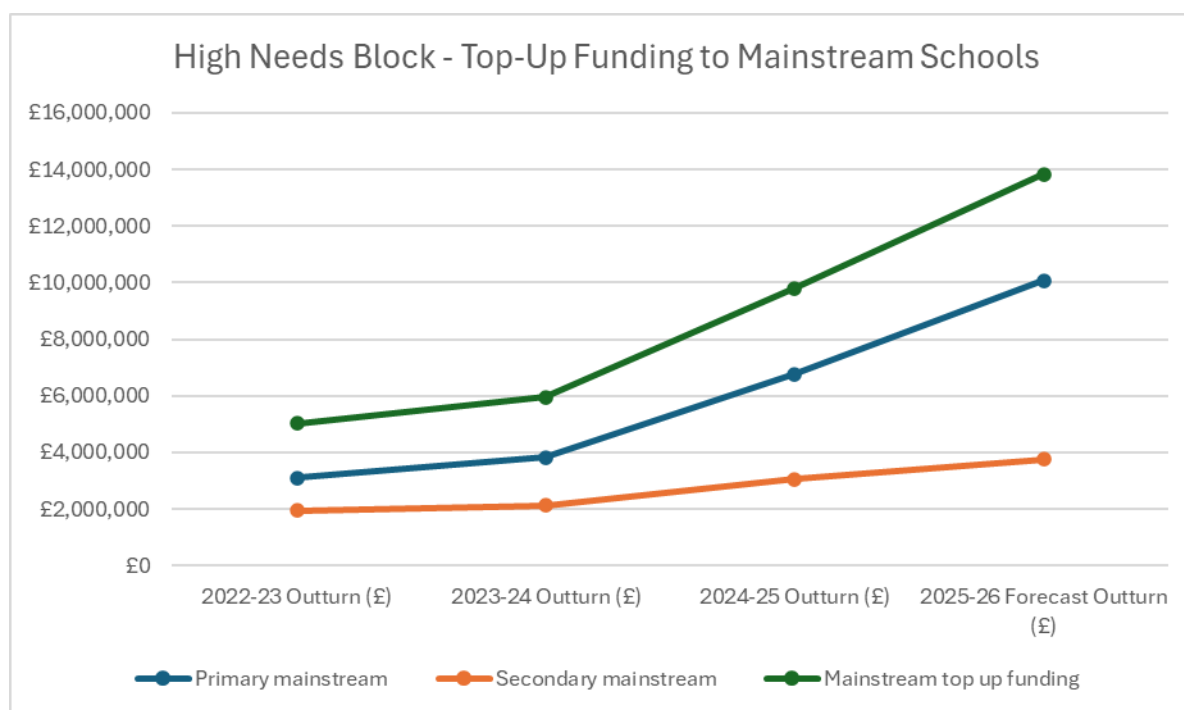
6.11 Furthermore, expenditure has similarly grown with respect to state-funded specialist provision. The review of, and subsequent increase in, banding levels in 2024 across the County's state funded special schools aligns with the strategy to build capacity in these settings where appropriate and significantly 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.

High Needs Block - Top Up Funding to State funded special schools (excluding PRU)
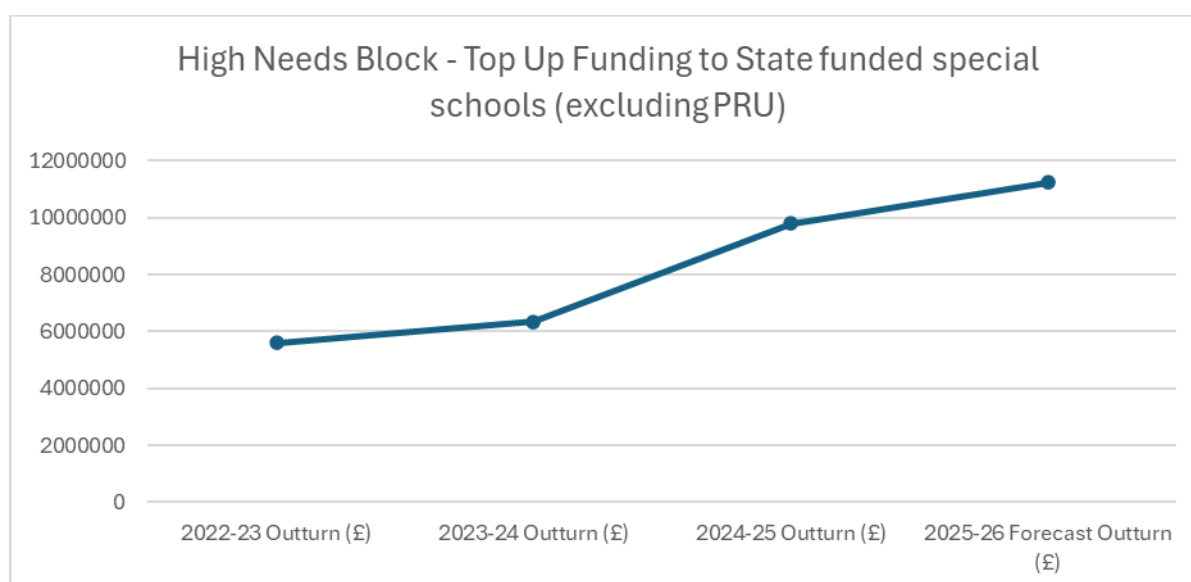
6.12 Despite the strategies outlined above, there continues to be an increased demand in places and increased costs with respect to independent non-maintained special schools (INMSS). Given the average cost of an INMSS is £63,000 per year, increases in places have contributed significantly to financial 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.
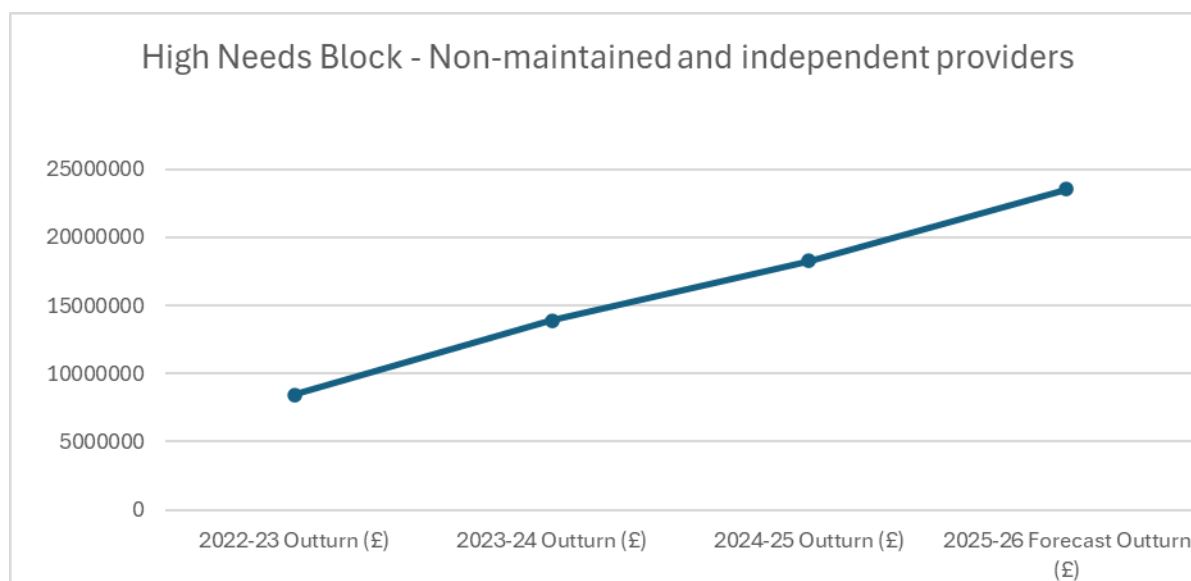
6.14   The Department for Education's DSG Deficit statutory override allows councils to keep high needs spending deficits separate from their core budget. The government announced in June 2025 that it has extended this override to keep councils' spending deficits for special educational needs and disabilities (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 sat 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
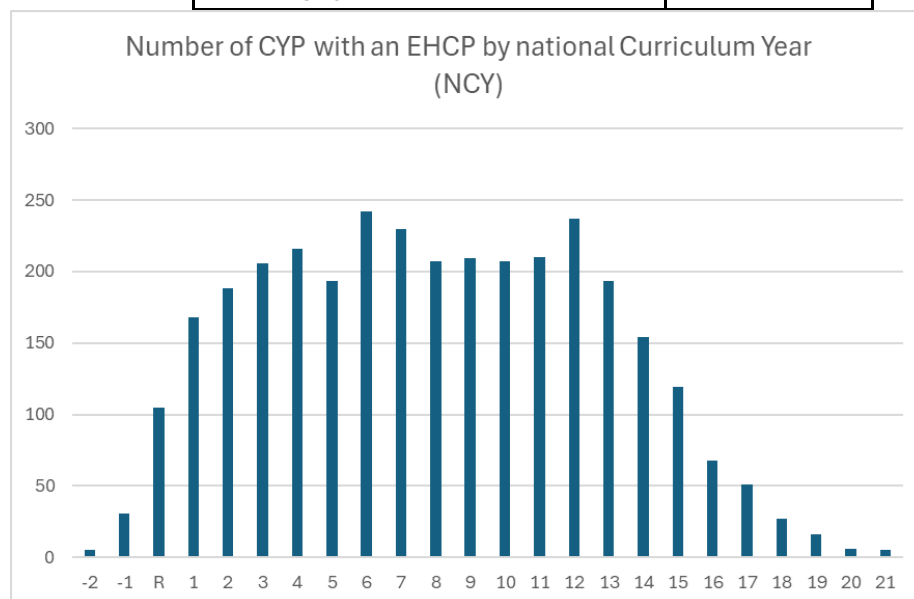
Year Group	EHCPs	Year Group	EHCPs	Year Group	EHCPs	Year Group	EHCPs	Year Group	EHCPs
-2	5	3	205	7	231	12	237	17	51
-1	33	4	217	8	208	13	193	18	27
0	105	5	195	9	210	14	154	19	16

| 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	• 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 reducer risk of NEET
Bloomin Lovely	• Horticultural therapy • Emotional wellbeing support, enhances curriculum offer and sensory support
Smash Life	• 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	• Goal based personalised curriculum with Mentoring and Life Skills support
Nisai	• 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	• 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. ½ 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. ½ 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 shropshires-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/d4jpfgq1/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**
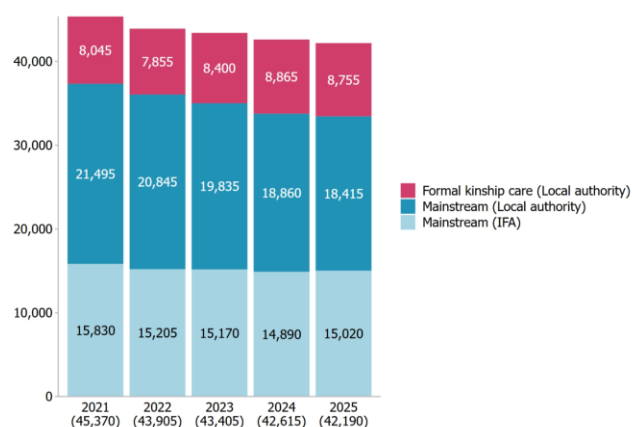
Mainstream Fostering (National Picture):

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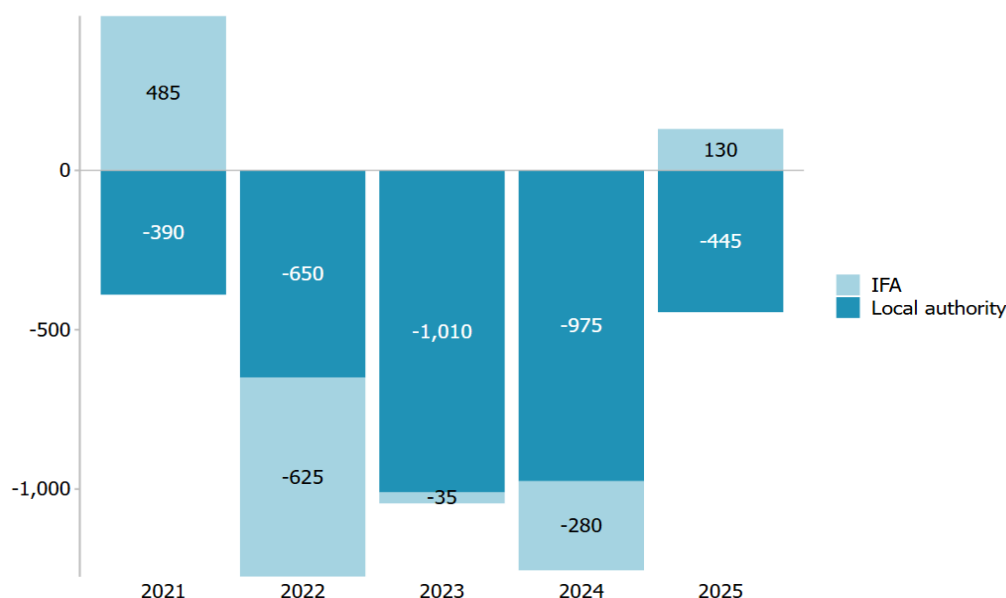
Data for Figure 3: Percentage change in number of approved mainstream fostering households by region between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025

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 (1transfer 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.
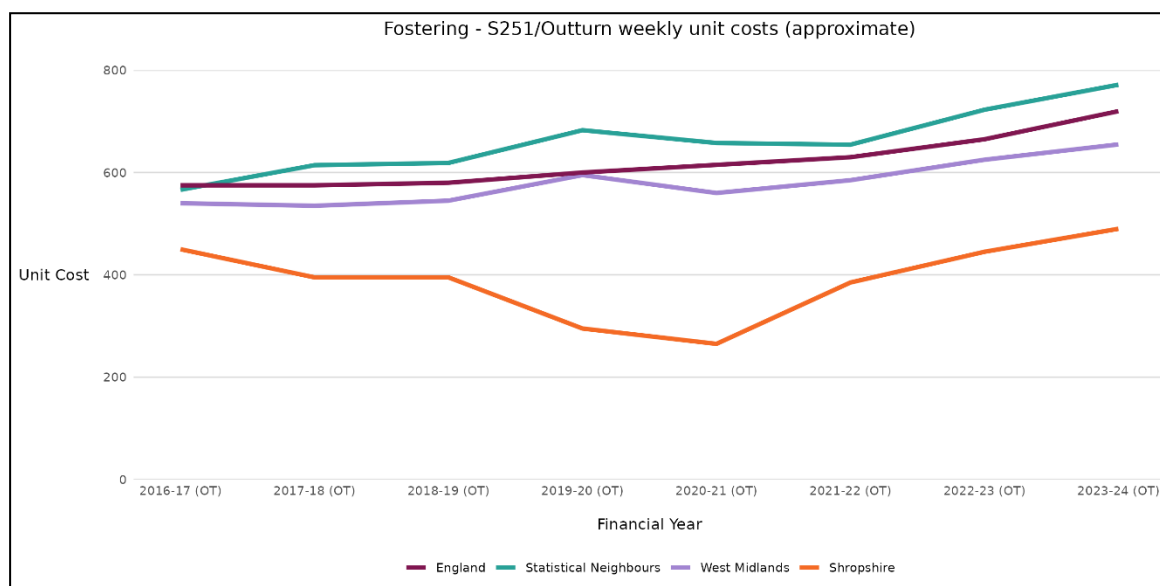
[Source LAIT November 2025 version]

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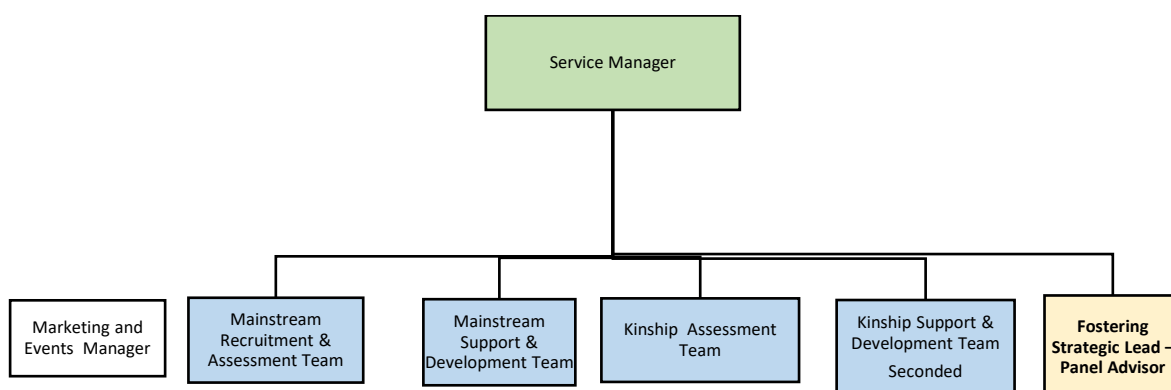
6.154 Fostering Transformation Project:
We have made changes to our recruitment process, identifying efficiencies and solutions, increased support, identified improvements for performance data and insights, developed our marketing imagery functions and increased our support offer.

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.
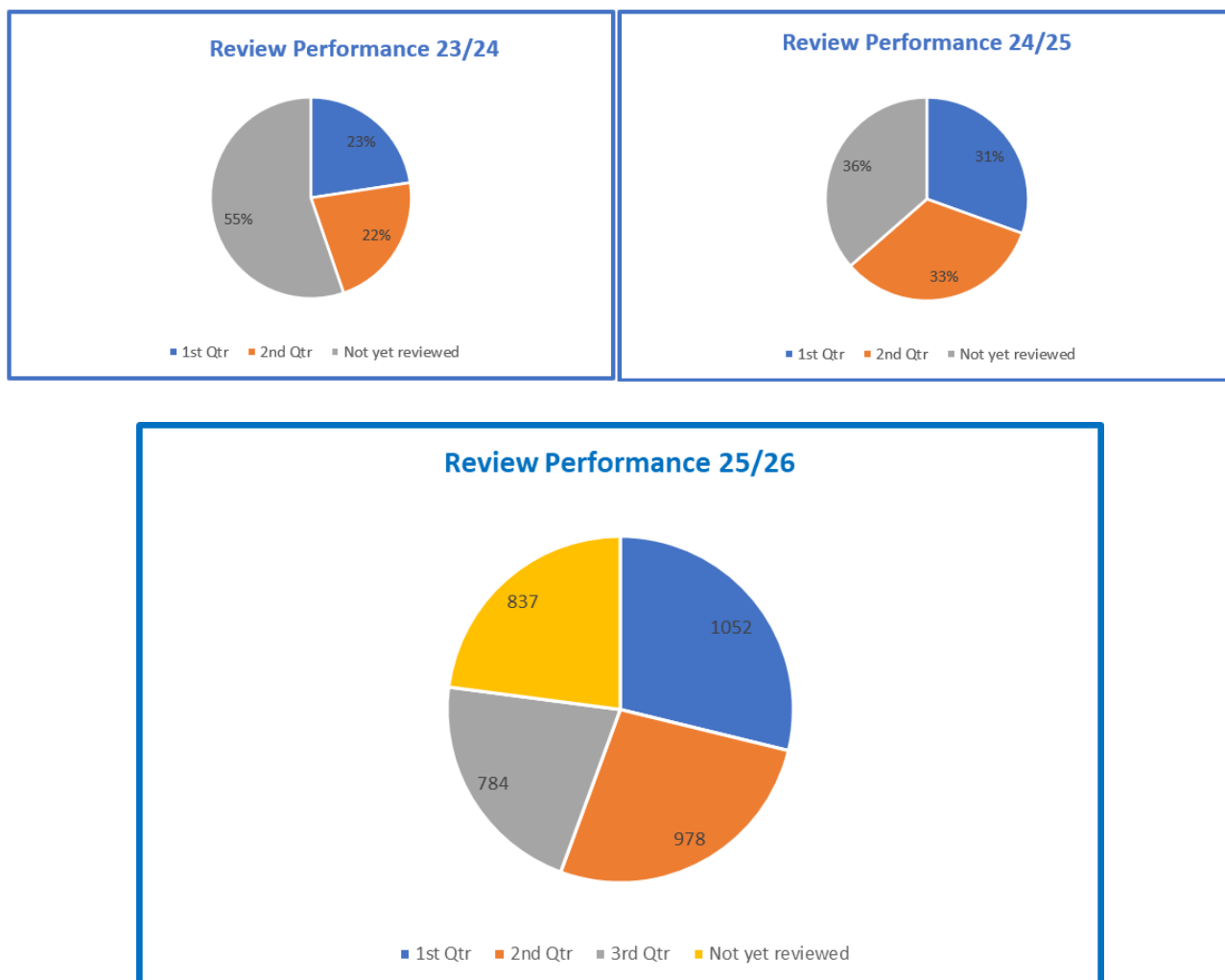
Adult Social Care

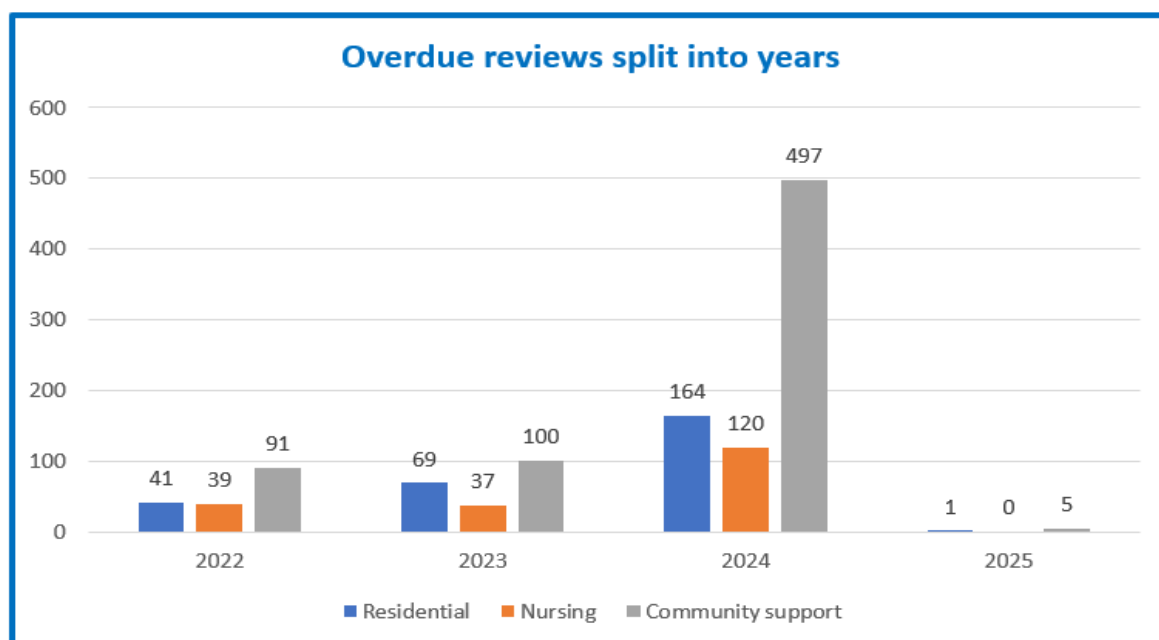6.175 The three key areas Committee asked to report on this quarter are:

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:

Review Performance 23/24

23%
22%
55%

■ 1st Qtr ■ 2nd Qtr ■ Not yet reviewed

Review Performance 24/25

31%
33%
36%

■ 1st Qtr ■ 2nd Qtr ■ Not yet reviewed

Review Performance 25/26

1052
978
784
837

■ 1st Qtr ■ 2nd Qtr ■ 3rd Qtr ■ Not yet reviewed

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

Overdue reviews split into years

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.

Capital Reductions 22/23 - to date

Legend: ■ 22/23 ■ 23/24 ■ 24/25 ■ 25/26
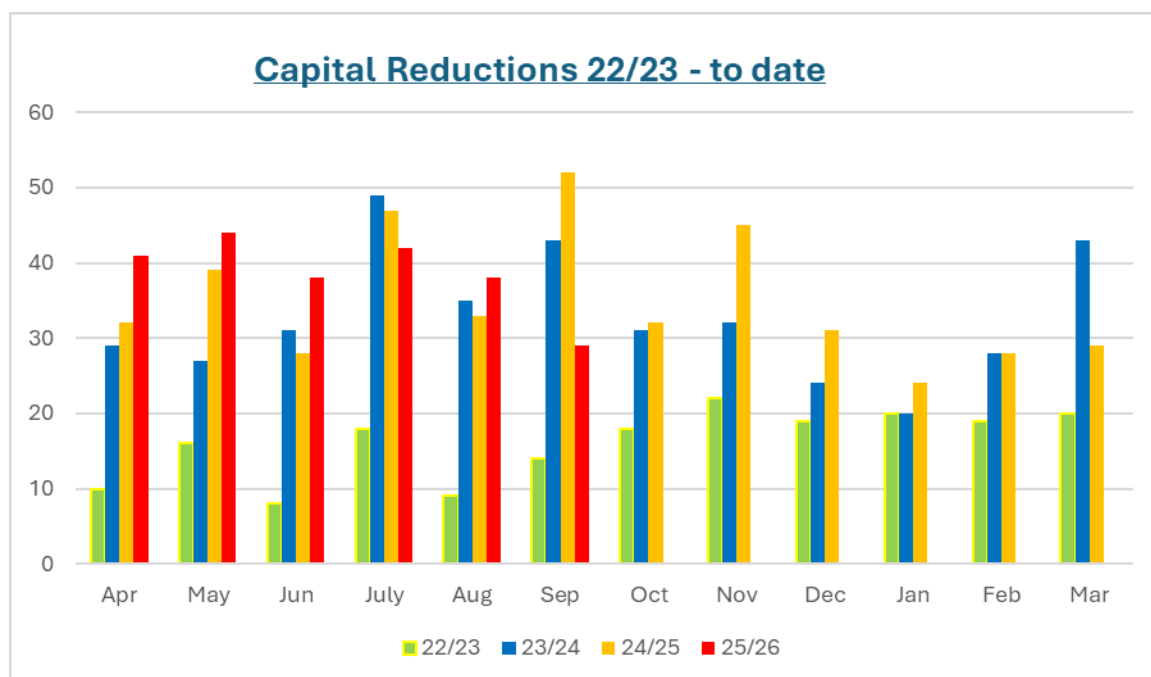
6.190 We are currently reviewing how we collate and report on self-funders and capital reductions so cannot easily report on the total financial pressures of this cohort, however we can report in relation to bed placements sourced. From April – Sept this year the weekly cost was £90,520 on placements, 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:
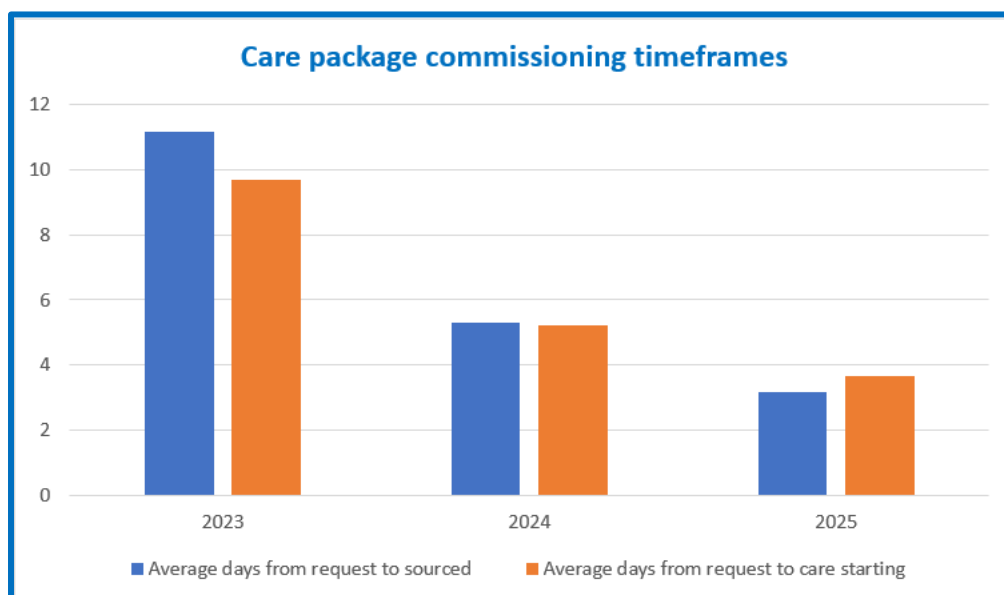
6.195 Equally our bed hub also has excellent results with it taking an average of 3.7 days to source a care home placement from the date of the request. ASC do not consider that we have any delays in relation to sourcing care, however we do acknowledge that for individuals whose needs are particularly 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

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Foreword

Shropshire Council is passionate about making sure every child in our county gets the best possible education—no matter which school, setting, or type of provision they attend. Every child deserves to learn in an environment that meets their needs and keeps them safe. When we talk about 'education settings', we mean all kinds of providers across Shropshire: maintained schools, academies, early years settings, alternative provision, post-16 providers, and out-of-school settings.

Over the past few years, the role of local authorities in England has changed a lot. Instead of running schools directly, we now focus more on supporting and guiding the whole education system. This shift has happened mainly because there are now many more academies, which run independently from the council. Even with these changes, councils like ours still have important legal responsibilities and remain key champions for high standards in education for all children and young people in our area.

This new strategy sets out how we'll meet those responsibilities and make sure we're always working towards the best outcomes for Shropshire's children and young people."

Statutory Responsibilities for Educational Excellence

Section 13a of the Education Act 1996 outlines the current statutory obligations of local authorities regarding educational excellence.

Local authorities must carry out their education functions with the aim of promoting high standards. This duty exists within a landscape where schools and education settings have increasing autonomy and where there is a shifting model of accountability. Crucially, there is an expectation that schools themselves lead their own improvement.

"Local authorities have overarching responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people in their area, regardless of the types of educational settings they attend. There are a number of statutory duties under the 1989 and 2004 Children Acts which make this clear. In order to fulfil these duties effectively, local authorities need to work in partnership with all schools (including independent schools), appropriate religious bodies and further education and sixth form colleges in their area" (Support and intervention in schools - GOV.UK:p40).

Strategic Role in Education Improvement

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 further defines the strategic role of the local authority in supporting improvement across schools and education settings. The Act establishes the local authority as:

- A 'champion' for the needs of children, young people, and their families.
- Responsible for planning, commissioning, and assuring the quality of educational services.
- Tasked with challenging schools and educational settings, commissioning support when necessary, and intervening in management and governance where appropriate.
- Required to raise concerns about the performance of academies/free/independent schools directly with the Department for Education.
- Obliged to refer concerns about Early Years settings to the childminder agency and/or Ofsted.

Responding to Concerns and Powers of Intervention

The 2006 Act also gives local authorities a duty to respond to parental concerns about the quality of local schools. It grants new powers to intervene earlier in maintained schools that are underperforming. Specifically, Part 4 of the Act enables:

- Early action to address school underperformance before it becomes entrenched and leads to formal failure.
- Immediate provision of effective support and challenge when standards are found to be unacceptable, ensuring rapid improvement.
- Decisive intervention if a school in 'special measures' fails to make sufficient progress, in order to protect the education and life chances of pupils.

Use of Intervention Powers

With respect to maintained schools, the Act provides a clear responsibility on local authorities to intervene where schools are causing concern. These expanded statutory powers are designed to ensure every child receives the quality of education and opportunities they deserve. Shropshire Council will employ these intervention powers as appropriate. The Education Quality and Safeguarding team will work collaboratively with other teams across the local authority to gather evidence and

information about schools' vulnerabilities, ensuring timely and effective support or intervention when required.

This is part of an ongoing process built on strong relationships, respect and effective communication. Where schools are deemed to require additional support, this will be determined, when necessary, in order to ensure that swift action is taken to address concerns.

Role of the Director of Children's Services

Section 18 of the Children Act 2004 requires every top tier local authority to appoint a Director of Children's Services. The DCS has professional responsibility for the leadership, strategy and effectiveness of local authority children's services. The DCS is responsible for the performance of local authority functions relating to the education and social care of children and young people. The DCS is responsible for ensuring that effective systems are in place for discharging these functions, including where a local authority has commissioned any services from another provider rather than delivering them itself.

The Education Quality and Safeguarding team plays a pivotal role in supporting the Director of Children's Services to discharge their statutory responsibilities effectively. This team works closely with schools, providing expert guidance, challenge, and practical assistance to ensure that educational standards and safeguarding practices are consistently robust. Through regular monitoring, sharing of best practice, and targeted support, the team helps to address areas of concern swiftly, foster school improvement, and ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet the highest standards across all settings.

<u>Core Principles</u>

<u>Building positive relationships</u>

We recognise that educational leadership is a complex and often demanding. In all our interactions, we are committed to treating educational providers with professionalism, courtesy, empathy, and respect, and we expect the same standards in return.

By promoting this mutual expectation, we foster an environment built on trust, understanding, and constructive partnership, ensuring that all support and challenge is delivered in a manner that values expertise and dedication on all sides—ultimately focussed on achieving the very best outcomes for children and young people.

<u>Effective communication</u>

Shropshire Council is committed to ensuring that school leaders receive timely and relevant information, with as much advance notice as possible, to enable effective planning and decision-making. Open communication will be supported through

- The weekly education update
- Termly headteacher briefings
- The publication of the directory of LA services
- Shropshire Learning Gateway.
- Maintained Headteachers' Forum
- Schools Forum
- Various partnership boards and sub-groups with education representation

We will aim to ensure that all schools and settings are kept informed of developments and opportunities. The LA will continue to seek new opportunities to support communication.

In return, Shropshire Council expects all schools and trusts to keep the local authority informed of key events in accordance with the 'Notifiable Incidents Protocol', and to share examination data promptly to facilitate robust cross-county analysis and collaborative improvement. This two-way approach to communication enhances transparency, accountability, and shared understanding across the education community.

Early identification of needs

Shropshire Council's approach is built upon principles designed to ensure proactive engagement, be informed by data, and aimed to foster collaborative relationships with all setting and schools.

The primary aim is to identify potential issues at an early stage, enabling the provision of constructive challenge and support before concerns escalate.

This approach seeks to cultivate a culture of continuous self-evaluation and improvement within schools.

This allows for timely, supportive interventions to be deployed before issues reach a crisis level. As a result, this intervention minimises disruption to pupils' education and maximises the potential for school-led improvement.

The framework will facilitate a continuous process of reflection, leadership development, and collaborative practice, aiming to ensure that every pupil thrives and, as the Shropshire Plan articulates "lives their best life."

Recognition of context

Shropshire is a diverse county. When school performance is examined, including the analysis of data, it is essential to recognise the unique context in which each school

and setting operates. Factors such as demographic profile, community circumstances, local challenges, and resource availability can significantly affect outcomes and progress. For example, where schools are working hard to provide inclusive environments for pupils with the most significant needs, it is recognised that this might not be reflected in 'headline' data.

A nuanced understanding of context allows for a fair and balanced interpretation of data and actions, ensuring that the strengths and barriers faced by each school and setting are acknowledged and inform both evaluation and support strategies.

Professional challenge

Through our work in supporting the best possible outcomes for children and pupils, we seek to fostering a culture of constructive dialogue and accountability among education professionals. By encouraging open discussions about practice, performance, and outcomes, the framework enables both recognition of achievements and identification of areas for development. This atmosphere of professional challenge is not adversarial, but is designed to support growth, reflective practice, and the sharing of expertise, ensuring that all schools and settings strive for continuous improvement while feeling supported and respected in their efforts.

Key Monitoring Areas and Data Sources

The Education Quality and Safeguarding Team will co-ordinate the gathering and analysis of data across several key areas to gain a comprehensive understanding of school performance and identify areas requiring support.

This will include analysis of -

- Educational Performance
- Published and internal data with respect to pupil achievement
- Outcomes of Ofsted inspections
- Attendance data
- Suspension and Exclusion data
- Outcomes from safeguarding assurance activities or other information from other Local Authority teams relating to the safeguarding arrangements in education settings.
- Practice with respect to the management of off-site visits
- Financial health
- Provision for pupils who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Information provided by Shropshire HR
- Information provided by Children's Services
- Use of non-school (unregistered) Alternative Provision

- Use and impact of non-statutory additional funding and support e.g. EYIAF, GSP, Primary and Secondary Inclusion Development Grants, outreach.

Challenge and Accountability – Academies

Shropshire Council is committed to fostering a collaborative partnership with academy CEOs and their schools, with the collective goal of ensuring high-quality educational provision for every child and young person in Shropshire.

Academies nurture their pupils; the Local Authority has a duty to all children.

The annual conversation

As part of the Council's commitment to robust accountability and support, all academy CEOs are invited annually to engage in a strategic dialogue with Education Quality Advisers.

These annual conversations are designed to offer both support and constructive challenge to academy trusts, providing a forum to address areas of concern, promote open communication, and strengthen the relationship between the local authority and the trust. Key focus areas for these discussions include:

- Academy trust successes
- Ofsted inspection outcomes
- Pupil outcomes and achievements
- Attendance, suspensions and exclusions
- The quality of safeguarding arrangements across schools in the Trust, including engagement with local arrangements
- Support offered to pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- The trust's capacity to support other schools
- Use and impact of non-statutory additional funding and support e.g. EYIAF, GSP, Primary and Secondary Inclusion Development Grants, outreach.
- Identified areas for development.

Monitoring visits to academies

The annual meeting will be used to determine the schools to be visited by Education Quality Advisers during the year. This will be informed by specific needs and risks in discussion with the CEO.

These meetings will provide an opportunity to share and celebrate effective practice, validate the judgements of leaders, and provide an opportunity to highlight areas of need through professional challenge.

An academy meeting typically involves open dialogue between Education Quality Advisers and school leaders, where key successes are recognised, areas for growth are constructively discussed, and practical solutions are collaboratively explored with the aim of fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

EQAs will aim to visit all academies in a two-year rolling cycle.

Where schools are receiving support through RISE advisers, the progress of this improvement work will be examined. EQAs will not seek to provide additional input where schools have been identified as needing support through RISE.

To support academies further, additional services from the Education Quality and Safeguarding team may be procured, subject to negotiation, availability and team capacity.

Maintained Schools

To provide effective support and challenge, all schools maintained by the local authority will receive a minimum of one Senior EQA visit per year. This will be supplemented by an additional visit from an associate headteacher. Where schools are in need of additional support, this will be provided by either colleagues from the EQS team and/or additional associate headteacher time.

These visits will support leaders with respect to school condition and standards with a second visit later in the year focus exclusively on standards. In both visits, the headteacher's own agenda will be prioritised.

Records of visits will be maintained through the annual visit record. This will record areas of discussion relating to

- Safeguarding
- Inclusion
- Curriculum and Teaching
- Achievements
- Attendance and behaviour
- Personal development and wellbeing
- Leadership and Governance

And where appropriate

- Early years
- Post-16 provision

Where other Local Authority Education Quality and Safeguarding staff are involved in visits to the school, these notes will be appended to this record.

Where schools are deemed to require a higher level of support this will be identified through discussion with the headteacher.

Higher support may be deemed appropriate in response to

- Factors that affect the leadership and management of the school
- Concerns with respect to safeguarding
- Concerns with respect to inclusion and attendance
- Concerns with respect to pupil outcomes

To address the concern, the Lead EQA in consultation the headteacher will consider

- A local authority review (a 1 day on-site visit by EQAs)
- A School Performance meeting involving the school and diocesan representatives to support.

Programme of activities

Visit 1 – Standards and Condition	Visit 2 – School Standards (led by an EQA or an associate headteacher)
Local Authority Focus areas - Areas of development for the academic year - Curriculum, teaching and pupil achievement - Financial health - Learning walk	Local Authority Focus areas - Curriculum, teaching and pupil achievement - Learning Walk - Activities informed from previous visit/school priorities - Inclusion, attendance and behaviour - Personal development and wellbeing - Financial health

Checks on
- Staff performance management arrangements
- KCSIE updates and safeguarding training
- Premises checks (to include)
  o Fire Risk Assessment and record keeping
  o Health and Safety Audit
  o Premises/condition needs
	Checks on
	- Desktop check of school website
	- Impact of strategies to support attendance of pupils.

Associate Headteachers

The Local Authority maintains a pool of highly experienced headteachers from maintained schools.

Their work supplements the work of Education Quality Advisers and will provide a valuable link to support sector led school improvement work.

All schools will have an attached link associate headteacher to complement the work of the EQA team.

These leaders are called upon to offer specialist advice, peer challenge, and direct support to schools identified as needing a higher level of intervention.

The involvement of these associate headteachers is formally commissioned by the Local Authority, and where a higher level of support is needed the funding arrangements negotiated between the schools requiring support and the LA.

This ensures that all schools benefit from relevant expertise while fostering a culture of professional collaboration and continuous improvement.

Associate headteachers will meet regularly with the EQA for school standards to receive training and support to fulfil their responsibilities and to build a strong link between their work and the Local Authority.

<u>Local Authority Reviews</u>

To support the school in addressing areas of concern within maintained schools, the LA may seek to determine an LA review. This will have a specific area of focus and work with the school in analysing more closely areas of need. This may include work scrutiny, lesson visits, viewing documentary evidence. School leaders will be involved in this process and the outcomes communicated through updating the annual visit record.

<u>School Performance meetings / monitoring</u>

Both Local Authority Reviews and School Performance meetings are structured to provide schools with targeted guidance, rigorous evaluation, and actionable recommendations.

School Performance meetings, on the other hand, bring together school leaders, governors. relevant local authority representatives, and, where appropriate, diocesan representatives. These meetings enable a holistic exploration of pupil outcomes, trends in attendance and inclusion, and the overall quality of educational provision.

Monitoring will take place at a LA, trust and school level. Local authority education quality advisors will meet regularly to discuss schools and performance alongside associate headteachers and other LA officers. as previously mentioned, the LA will also hold annual conversations with Trusts regarding the performance of their schools as well as agreeing a timetable for individual school visits. Individual schools will receive at least 2 monitoring visits a year. These will examine areas linked to the new Ofsted framework as well as looking at areas such as finance, health and safety and school condition. At least one of these visits will be conducted by a Senior Education Quality Advisor. Written records will be made of all visits and shared accordingly.

Discussion is both reflective and forward-looking, enabling stakeholders to jointly celebrate progress, address emerging challenges, and agree on support strategies. Action points from these meetings are tracked and followed up to ensure sustained improvement.

The school would work with EQAs to develop the plan of support. Where it is deemed that a school will require an additional level of support, consideration will be given to brokering additional support from associate headteachers.

Acting Headteachers

The EQS team will maintain and train a pool of acting headteachers drawn from aspiring headteachers from across the county. This pool will support, in conjunction with School HR, the arrangements to support maintained schools at those times where an acting headteacher is required.

When a maintained school faces the long-term absence of its substantive headteacher, governors are advised to follow established protocols to ensure continuity and stability.

Initially, the governing body should consider whether cover can be provided using existing staff within a federation, if applicable. The substantive headteacher, during their absence, should not be expected to undertake leadership or management tasks, though limited contact with the school may be agreed upon following advice from medical professionals and with the support of Human Resources. The level of such engagement must be regularly reviewed.

An extraordinary meeting of governors should be convened to discuss the expected duration of absence, any ongoing or new initiatives, impending inspections, and to collate relevant policies and HR casework for the acting headteacher. The governors should also address next steps for arranging cover, with three main options typically considered: having a current staff member step up (usually the deputy headteacher), contracting a leader from another school or academy, or appointing an executive headteacher on a temporary basis. If a deputy headteacher becomes acting headteacher, arrangements must be made to cover their previous role, and adjustments to contracts and pay should be handled in liaison with HR.

Brokering arrangements between schools and trusts with respect to acting headships would be supported by the Head of Education Quality and Safeguarding.

Support for new headteachers

In recognition of the particular challenges faced by those stepping into headship for the first time, a structured support package is in place for all new headteachers. Central to this is the provision of three EQA (School Standards) visits during the first year, designed to offer guidance, assure quality, and reinforce positive leadership

practices. Alongside this, each new headteacher is paired with a dedicated link associate headteacher, who serves as a mentor and sounding board.

In addition, where schools are identified as requiring further support beyond the core offer, additional capacity and expertise will be deployed as appropriate from the wider EQS team. This flexible approach ensures that schools have access to a breadth of specialist knowledge and resources tailored to their unique contexts and improvement priorities.

This mentor is an experienced, practicing headteacher, able to provide practical advice, share insights from their own leadership journey, and help navigate complex situations as they arise. The dual approach of regular, standards-focused visits and personalised mentorship ensures that new headteachers are well equipped to lead their schools effectively, fostering a culture of support, ambition, and continuous professional development.

Through the Senior EQAs for school standards, the LA will facilitate an ongoing network for new headteachers during their first year.

Support for maintained schools during an Ofsted inspection

An Education Quality Adviser of the Local Authority is in a position to be the named responsible person for headteachers wellbeing at the point of school inspection. During the planning call by Ofsted, this will be established by the lead inspector.

Advisers will contact schools at the point of notification and work to provide support to school and discuss queries. Education Quality Advisers will contribute to the inspection in line with the requirements of the inspection handbook. This will usually be through an in-person meeting with the lead inspector.

Headteachers will have mobile phone access to the nominated EQA for use during the inspection process.

Where it is felt by the headteacher and/or LA that additional time on site is appropriate in order to provide support, this will be provided through an EQA or an associate headteacher.

The Local Authority will always attend the outcome meetings of Ofsted inspections in person.

Small schools

It is recognised that Shropshire faces a particular challenge with respect to the proportion of small (under 150 pupils) primary schools. Whilst there are myriad benefits to small schools, this also poses a challenge. This can impact on curriculum design, capacity for leadership, and recruitment and retention of staff. Small schools are also more affected by specific challenges and events that present (e.g. complaints, critical incidents, and falling rolls)

To support this, the EQS team will be sensitive to these challenges.

As a rural Local Authority, Shropshire Council follows the presumption against the closure of rural schools. This requires officers to work closely to support schools and governing bodies in developing alternative strategies to support positive outcomes for pupils and communities. In addition, a small school closure policy has been developed in line with Department for Education guidelines. This is included as an appendix to this policy.

Supporting inclusive practice in schools

Shropshire Council will co-produce a robust and sustainable Local Inclusion Specialist Support Offer that will build the capacity of all schools and settings to meet the needs of their pupils.

Shropshire Council is committed to ensuring children can be educated successfully and fully included within their local mainstream schools when appropriate to do so.

The Council offers a range of support, guidance and challenge to schools and settings to foster inclusion, including:

· A range of CPD and training courses

· SEND Reviews

· Specialist Outreach

· Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce

· Traded support packages from specialist SEND professionals

· Access to high needs top up funding without an EHCP, to support early intervention and a graduated response

· Access to capital and revenue funding through the Primary and Secondary Inclusion Development Grants, to support schools to develop their own setting-based approaches to SEND and inclusion to meet identified needs.

The Council endeavours to co-produce and co-deliver support by working with a wide range of local providers, including schools, Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), Health colleagues and SEND specialists, to ensure the support on offer remains current, good value for money and of a high quality.

In addition, Shropshire Council is committed to further growing its network of SEN Units and Resource Provisions (SURPs) across the county, to extend the range of provision on offer within our mainstream schools, avoid unnecessary travel and promote belonging and inclusion within the local community.

Safeguarding

The Education Quality and Safeguarding Team have staff within it who take the lead role in offering training, advice, support and challenge with respect to the management of safeguarding to all educational settings.

The work of the lead officers within this team includes

- The provision of safeguarding training in line with local arrangements (https://www.shropshirelg.net/safeguarding-and-child-protection/safeguarding-team-information-and-services/safeguarding-in-education-training/)
- Support for the Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership to facilitate the quality assurance of 'training pool' training.
- The provision of safeguarding consultancies to support identification of strong practice worthy of dissemination and identification of practice that needs to be strengthened. (See https://www.shropshirelg.net/safeguarding-and-child-protection/safeguarding-team-information-and-services/safeguarding-consultancies/)
- Providing advice to providers to support a strong culture of safeguarding (including template policies/guidance)
- Management and oversight of Statutory safeguarding audits (in line with Section 11 duties)
- Completing quality assurance checks on safeguarding arrangements in education provision. This will typically be following discussion with school leaders but can include exceptional short notice visits to ensure the safety of children where serious and urgent concerns are raised that indicate safeguarding arrangements are ineffective. Where such visits are organised, the purpose and rationale will be clearly explained to the provider on arrival.
- The provision of safeguarding training and network meetings (further information outlined at Safeguarding Team Information and Services | Shropshire Learning Gateway.
- Investigation of safeguarding complaints on behalf of DfE and Ofsted.
- Co-Chairing of the Education Safeguarding sub-group.
- Working with other teams in the local authority to share information about safeguarding arrangements to support best practice and address the need for any improvements.
- Facilitating the representation of education on strategic, working and operational groups/ processes.

Support with respect to Educational Trips and Visits

The Outdoor Education Adviser provides comprehensive support to schools and settings, ensuring that educational trips and visits are both enriching and safe.

Drawing on the principles and best practices of OEAP (The Association of Advisers for Outdoor Learning and Educational Visits) this includes an annual review of LA Policies and procedures guidance which links to an online visits form called 'eVisits'. This supports the submission by schools and settings of all offsite visits (this incorporates an approval system for Quality Assurance purposes).

The eVisits software enables trip leaders to link in with OEAP National Guidance website for additional information when organising an offsite trip. The Outdoor Education Advisor also has a management responsibility for Schools Forest School programmes and approval of Duke of Edinburgh's Award expeditions.

To support schools effectively, the Outdoor Education Adviser's activities encompass the following:

Training and Capacity Building:

- Delivering a structured programme of training for Educational Visit Coordinators (EVCs), group leaders, and accompanying staff. This training is regularly updated to reflect current national standards and includes modules on risk management, emergency protocols, effective supervision, legal responsibilities, and specific topics such as inclusion, medical needs, and adventurous activities.
- Facilitating induction sessions for new staff involved in visits, as well as refresher training to ensure ongoing competence and confidence.
- Providing specialist workshops on topics such as overseas visits, residentials, and high-risk environments, tailored to the needs of individual schools or groups of settings.
- Supporting whole-staff briefings to promote a culture of safety and shared understanding of roles and responsibilities during off-site activities.

Monitoring and Quality Assurance

- Regularly reviewing schools' visit policies and procedures to ensure alignment with OEAP National Guidance and statutory requirements.
- Auditing a sample of educational visit records, including risk assessments, consent forms, and post-visit evaluations. This helps to identify areas of good practice and opportunities for development.
- Conducting monitoring visits, which may include observing pre-visit briefings, accompanying visits to evaluate practice in real-time, and providing detailed feedback.
- Offering constructive recommendations following audits or monitoring, supporting continuous improvement in the planning and delivery of visits.

Advisory and Emergency Support

- Serving as a key point of contact for schools, offering advice on risk management, trip planning, and the use of external providers, including vetting of providers and venues.
- Maintaining up-to-date knowledge of sector developments, disseminating updates, and sharing case studies or learning from incidents to promote best practice.
- Providing real-time support in the event of an incident or emergency during a visit, assisting with incident management, communication, and post-incident review.

Development of Resources

- Creating and updating guidance documents, checklists, exemplar risk assessments, and templates to assist schools in their planning and record-keeping.
- Facilitating access to OEAP National Guidance resources and supporting schools in interpreting and implementing this guidance in their local context.

Through these activities, the Outdoor Education Adviser ensures that all aspects of educational trips and visits—from initial planning and risk assessment to delivery and evaluation—are robustly supported.

This approach helps schools provide safe, inclusive, and high-quality outdoor learning experiences for all pupils, in line with the expectations set out by OEAP National Guidance.

Early Years

The Early Years Education Quality Adviser and the Early Years Quality Improvement and Learning Co-ordinator provide a comprehensive programme of support and challenge to group and school-based providers and childminders, designed to raise standards and ensure the best possible outcomes for children aged 0-5.

Their support role includes:

- Visiting group and school-based providers and childminders to offer hands-on guidance and personalised feedback tailored to the individual context and needs of each provider.
- Modelling high-quality practice across all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), demonstrating effective strategies for teaching, learning, assessment, inclusive provision, and positive interactions with children and families.
- Facilitating access to targeted professional development, including training workshops, coaching, and peer networks, to build practitioner confidence and expertise.
- Advising on the effective use of assessment and observation to inform planning and meet the learning and development needs of all children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
- Providing resources, toolkits, self-evaluation frameworks, and practical materials to assist settings in quality improvement and reflective practice.
- Providing advice, guidance and challenge to group and school-based providers and childminders drawing upon the Ofsted framework for the inspection of the Early Years, and schools. This includes supporting group and school-based providers and childminders with inspection preparation, supporting action planning in response to feedback, and embedding a culture of continuous improvement.

In addition, the Early Years team (Education Quality Adviser, Early Years Quality Improvement and Learning Co-ordinator, Early Years Safeguarding Officer and Education Quality Adviser (AP and SEND).

- Monitor and evaluating the quality of provision through a range of mechanisms, including learning walks, scrutiny of documentation, and analysis of data such as Ofsted outcomes, EYFSP results, and attendance patterns.
- Identify underperformance, gaps in provision, or safeguarding concerns, and addressing these promptly through clear, evidence-based recommendations and agreed action plans.
- Support settings with respect to ambitious but achievable improvement targets and providing robust follow-up to ensure progress and impact are sustained over time.
- Encouraging a culture of high aspiration, reflective practice, and accountability, supporting leaders and practitioners to embrace challenge as a catalyst for positive change.
- Escalating persistent concerns or significant safeguarding issues to the local authority and other relevant agencies to ensure swift and appropriate intervention.

Collaboration is central to the Early Years Team approach: they work closely with group and school-based providers, childminders, local authority teams, and other partners to foster networks of support, share best practice, and ensure that early years provision is inclusive, safe, and responsive to the needs of every child and family. Where issues are identified, they keep clear records of visits, actions agreed, and progress made, ensuring transparency and accountability throughout the process.

Work is focused on empowering early years providers to deliver consistently high standards, nurture children's development, and build a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

Post 16

The Post 16 team plays a crucial role in supporting young people as they transition from secondary education into further education, employment, or training. Central to their work is the tracking of pupils who are at risk of becoming Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET), as well as those whose post-16 destinations are not known. This involves systematic monitoring of attendance, engagement, and progression data, enabling early identification of students who may require additional support.

Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) professionals within the team provide tailored support to students and their families, helping them to explore post-16 options and make informed choices about their future pathways. Transition Support Workers collaborate closely with schools, colleges, and external agencies to facilitate smooth transitions, ensuring that vulnerable students are connected with appropriate resources and support networks.

In Year 11, the team works proactively with school careers and safeguarding staff to identify vulnerable students who may be at risk of disengagement or who face barriers to successful transition. This is achieved through effective data sharing and analysis of risk factors, and individual casework. We also share the pen portrait of their transition support needs to the confirmed provider in early September to ensure that places are successfully maintained by enabling early interventions to occur.

Education Settings Outside the Local Area and Independent Special Schools

To ensure the highest standards of provision and safeguarding across all education settings, EQAs will coordinate periodic visits to Independent Special Schools within the local area and to education settings situated outside the immediate local area when commissioned for Shropshire CYP. These visits are designed to provide an objective evaluation of the quality of education, the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, and the overall well-being of pupils.

During these visits, EQAs will undertake a range of monitoring activities. This may include reviewing safeguarding protocols, examining documentation, meeting with school leaders, and conducting learning walks to observe classroom practice. Particular attention will be paid to how well the school responds to the needs of its pupils, inclusivity, and attendance patterns. Findings and recommendations from these visits will be communicated promptly to SEN commissioners and be used to inform decision around future placements Before and after visits to education settings outside of the local area, EQAs will communicate with the Local Authority within which the setting is located. Visits may be dictated by commissioners in response to concerns or complaints.

Monitoring and Safeguarding in Out-of-School Settings (OOSS)

Shropshire Council's commitment is to ensure that all children and young people in the area, regardless of the setting they attend, are safe and supported.

Shropshire Council acknowledges that OOSS—such as tuition centres, supplementary schools, sports clubs, dance classes, religious education, and youth organisations—play a significant part in the lives of children and young people in the county. While many of these settings provide enriching educational and social experiences, they are not regulated under the same statutory safeguarding frameworks as registered education settings.

The Council will work closely with the Department for Education (DfE), Ofsted, statutory safeguarding partners and other relevant agencies to ensure that children

attending OOSS are as safe as possible and receive a suitable education. The Council's approach will include the following key actions:

- Mapping and Understanding Local Provision: Shropshire Council will take steps to identify and understand the range of out-of-school settings operating in the area. This will involve gathering basic information, engaging with local communities, and establishing or strengthening processes for reporting concerns about specific settings.

- Promoting Good Safeguarding Practice: The Council will encourage OOSS providers to implement and maintain robust safeguarding policies and procedures. Where possible, the Council will condition any lease, hire, or funding agreements for local authority premises or financial support on compliance with minimum safeguarding standards, as outlined in DfE guidance.

- Support and Training: The Council will consider offering guidance, training opportunities, and information on voluntary accreditation schemes (such as Ofsted's voluntary childcare register) to OOSS providers. The Education Quality and Safeguarding team may provide advice, share best practice, and facilitate access to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks as appropriate.

- Engagement with Families: The Council has a duty to provide parents with information about available services and facilities, including guidance on what safeguarding measures to expect from OOSS providers. The Council will promote awareness among families so they can make informed decisions about their children's participation in these settings.

- Identifying and Responding to Concerns: The Council will work to proactively to identify OOSS of concern—those lacking appropriate safeguarding arrangements or potentially operating as unregistered independent schools. The Council will establish or publicise clear reporting mechanisms for concerns and collaborate with schools and other local authority teams to share information about high-risk or unsuitable provision.

- Enforcement and Escalation: In cases where settings fail to meet safeguarding expectations or are suspected of operating illegally (for example, as unregistered independent schools or as unregistered childcare providers), the Council will act promptly and proportionately.

  To support this, the Local Authority will periodically make checks on OOSS providers to ensure that procedures are in place to keep pupils safe.

- This may involve notifying Ofsted, the DfE, the police, the Health and Safety Executive, the Fire and Rescue Service, or other relevant bodies, and supporting any subsequent investigations or prosecutions.

Alternative Provision

- The local authority (LA) maintains close communication with LA commissioners to ensure robust quality assurance of non-school (unregistered) alternative provision (AP). Regular updates and collaborative reviews are held to monitor the effectiveness, safety, and suitability of such placements, with feedback from EQAs informing these discussions. Commissioners are kept informed of any concerns or areas for improvement identified during monitoring visits, and joint action plans may be agreed where necessary to address specific issues.
- Responsibility for the oversight of the alternative provision used always rests with the local authority or school that commissioned the placement.
- Schools should always inform the local authority when they commission a placement in alternative provision for a child to ensure the local authority maintains oversight of sufficiency and safeguarding. This is an expectation of the Department for Education. The Education Access Service will maintain a register of all AP placements of which they have been notified.
- Guidance for schools commissioning AP emphasises the importance of thorough due diligence before making any placement. Schools are advised to seek assurances regarding safeguarding, health and safety, curriculum quality, and staff qualifications, and to maintain ongoing oversight throughout the child's time in AP. The LA provides schools with practical checklists and support materials to guide their selection and monitoring of AP providers, ensuring that placements meet both statutory requirements and the individual needs of pupils.
- The Local Authority will publish and maintain an up to date AP Directory which will guide schools in their choice of AP placements, while making it clear that the school retain responsibility for undertaking their own QA prior to commissioning.

The Council will continually review and strengthen its processes for monitoring, supporting, and, where necessary, intervening in out-of-school settings, working collaboratively with partners, families, and communities to uphold the highest standards of safeguarding and educational quality.

Complaints about schools and settings

Most complaints about schools are managed directly by the schools themselves, following clear procedures set out in statutory guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted.

All schools and trusts must publish accessible complaints policies, enabling parents, carers, and stakeholders to raise concerns. The process usually starts with informal resolution, progressing to formal complaints if needed, and may culminate in a hearing by the school's governing body. The local authority (LA) does not arbitrate or

mediate individual complaints, nor does it overturn school decisions. Instead, the LA monitors the frequency and nature of complaints to assess risks relating to safeguarding and school, trust and setting processes. Where concerning patterns or significant issues emerge, this intelligence informs decisions about further support, scrutiny, or escalation and where necessary information is shared with partners such as the DfE and Ofsted.

As the regulator, the Department for Education will occasionally seek assurances from the LA on the receipt of complaints about schools, academies and settings directly received by the Department. The LA will therefore, from time to time, conduct enquiries in order to provide this information on behalf of the Department for Education. However, this function is again not to act as an arbitrator on behalf of the complainant.

When Ofsted or other bodies refer qualifying complaints to the LA, the information is considered as part of broader risk assessment and oversight. The LA reviews these referrals for evidence of ongoing issues or safeguarding risks.

In cases where concerns are identified, the local authority's contact will be limited to the school itself, ensuring communication remains direct and appropriate. For academies, the local authority will request that the academy makes the relevant trust aware of the issue. This approach respects the governance structures of academies, where trusts hold oversight responsibilities, and ensures that concerns are managed by those with the requisite authority and accountability to take effective action.

This may trigger further information being sought from the complainant/provider to assess whether there is an indication of wider concerns. However, the LA will not intervene in any existing complaints processes. Such intelligence is used to guide ongoing monitoring, support (in the case of maintained schools), or potential escalation in line with statutory and local safeguarding requirements.

Schools, academies and settings will be provided of information shared by the LA with Ofsted and/or the Department for Education.

At all times, the LA maintains oversight of quality and safety, while ensuring the primary responsibility for resolving complaints remains with the individual schools, trusts and settings.

Education Providers causing concern

In circumstances where Shropshire Council identifies serious concerns regarding the performance or operation of a provider, the Council will initially contact the individual provider to raise these issues. Quality assurance activities may also be arranged; including exceptional short notice visits to ensure the safety of children where serious and urgent concerns are raised that indicate safeguarding arrangements are ineffective. Only in exceptional circumstance will information not be shared, such as where doing so would place a person at increased risk of significant harm or injury and/or obstruct or interfere with any potential regulatory body or enforcement agency investigation.

Serious concerns might include, but are not limited to -

- Serious circumstances that compromise the safety of children, young people and staff.
- Persistent failure to comply with legal duties after this has been identified.
- Continued underperformance
- Concerns that necessitate action in line with whistleblowing and audit procedures.

This correspondence is shared with leaders of this provision, and, where relevant, the governing board of this organisation.

If, after raising concerns, the Council concludes that sufficient progress has not been made to address them, this will escalate the matter to the relevant department within the DfE and/or Ofsted or the relevant regulatory authority.

Oversight and Governance

The Head of Education Quality and Safeguarding will periodically accompany staff to visits to support the quality assurance of support and challenge provided to schools and settings through visits and training.

The impact of this plan will be systematically monitored and reported through several key governance forums. Specifically, progress and outcomes will be shared with the quarterly People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, ensuring thorough oversight and accountability. Additionally, updates will be provided to the SEND and AP Partnership Board, the Children's Safeguarding Board of the Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership, and the Shropshire Education Partnership Board along with its sub-groups. This multi-layered approach guarantees that all relevant stakeholders are kept informed and involved in evaluating the effectiveness of the plan and driving continuous improvement.

Development of this strategy

You said	We did
Change the order so that the 'schools causing concern' is seen as exceptional action rather than following on from the day to day arrangements	Moved this section towards the end of the document
Reference more clearly 'challenge' as a principle and to describe what form this takes	The notion of professional challenge, although referenced throughout the strategy is now included as a key principle.
Recognise more strongly the role of sector led improvement as being of	More detail provided about the role of associate headteachers confirming

benefit for all schools, not just those judged to be in need of a higher level of support	blend for all schools of LA QA visits and associate HT peer challenge.
Provide greater clarity with respect to the format of the annual conversation with CEOs	Planned development of model agenda developed through CEO representatives from Education Partnership Board
Clarify process of how complaints are managed	New section added.
Concern that this is interpreted as the LA operates as a 'maintained era' QA model	With respect to academies, this strategy is focused on developing a culture of information sharing between academies and the LA. This is not about LA delivered consultancy with respect to school improvement rather about building relationships between the LA and academies (particularly where there has been variability in how this has applied in the past).
There is little around structure with respect to small schools and federation, academisation and closure	Added section to include the Small School Closure policy.

Appendices

I) School Closure Policy

Introduction

This policy is in relation to the closure of maintained schools within Shropshire Council's geographic area.

Decision maker: For the purposes of this document the decision maker will normally mean the local authority e.g. Shropshire Council who have overall responsibility for the school closure process of maintained schools.

2. School closures

2.1 Stages of the proposed school closure

Under section 15 of Education and Inspections Act 2006, a local authority can propose the closure of a community, foundation, voluntary, community special, foundation special or maintained nursery school; and the governing body of a voluntary controlled, voluntary

aided, foundation or foundation special school may publish proposals to close its own school.

The statutory process is set out in the DfE guidance Opening and closing maintained schools

Alternatively, the governing body of a foundation or voluntary school may give at least 2 years' notice of its intention to close the school to the Secretary of State and the local authority.

2.2 Reasons for considering closing a school

The DfE's guidance: Opening and closing maintained schools states that the reasons for closing a maintained school include, but are not limited to, where:

● there are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium to long term;

● it is to be amalgamated with another school;

● it has been judged inadequate by Ofsted and the Secretary of State has revoked the academy order;

● it is no longer considered viable;

● it is being replaced by a new school.

2.3. Avoiding school closures

Closing a school is a difficult decision which impacts on the whole school community including the children, parents and school staff and would normally only be taken when all other options to keep the school open have been exhausted.

As a **rural local authority**, the DfE guidance Opening and closing maintained schools holds the position that…

"Proposers should be aware that the department expects all decision makers to adopt a *presumption against the closure* of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but that the case for closure should be strong and clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area. *Shropshire Council follows this presumption.*

The presumption does not apply where a rural infant and junior school on the same site are being closed to establish a new primary school.

Proposers should set out whether the school is referred to in the Designation of Rural Primary Schools (England) Order or, where the school is a secondary school, whether the school is identified as rural on the Get Information about Schools database (using the Office for National Statistics' Rural Urban Classification).

In formulating any closure proposals under this section in relation to a rural primary school, proposers must have regard to:

• the likely effect of the discontinuance of the school on the local community;

• the availability, and likely cost to the local authority, of transport to other schools;

• any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the discontinuance of the school, and the likely effects of any such increase; and

 • any alternatives to the discontinuance of the school.

 Proposers, for all rural closures, in addition to the above, should also provide evidence to show they have carefully considered:

 • alternatives to closure including:

• conversion to academy status and joining a multi-academy trust

• federation with another local school;

 • the scope for an extended school to provide local community services and facilities (e.g. childcare facilities, family and adult learning, healthcare, community internet access);

 • the availability, and likely cost to parents, of transport to other schools;

 • whether the proposal will result in unreasonably long journey times – as well as the cost to transport arrangements following the school transport policy – which provides transport to the *nearest or catchment school* where the distance criteria is met i.e. 2 miles for primary, 3 miles for secondary.

 • the size of the school and whether it puts the children at an educational disadvantage e.g. in terms of breadth of curriculum or resources available;

• the proportion of pupils attending the school from within the local community i.e. whether the school is being used by the local community;

• the overall and long term impact on local people and the community of the closure of the school and of the loss of the building as a community facility;

• educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools;

 • whether the school is now surplus to requirements (e.g. because there are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils, and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium or long term);

• wider school organisation and capacity of good schools in the area to accommodate displaced pupils" *(DfE Opening and Closing Maintained Schools pg24)*

When a school is being considered for closure which may result in the displacement of staff, the Local Authority will explore all possible alternatives to the potential school closure.

3. School amalgamations

According to the DfE's guidance: Opening and closing maintained schools, there are 2 ways to amalgamate 2 (or more) existing maintained schools:

• The local authority and/or governing body (depending on school category) can publish proposals to close 2, or more, schools and the local authority (or a proposer other than the local authority depending on category) can publish a proposal to open a new school. Where this is a *presumption school, this will be subject to publication of a section 6A notice . This will result in the creation of a new school.

• The local authority and/or governing body (depending on school category) can publish a proposal to close one school (or more) and enlarge/change the age range/transfer site of an existing school (following the Statutory Prescribed Alterations Process as necessary), to accommodate the displaced pupils. The remaining school would retain its original school number, as it is not a new school, even if its phase has changed. This is sometimes referred to as a 'merger'.

*Where a local authority identifies the need for a new school, section 6A of EIA 2006 places the local authority under a duty to seek proposals to establish an academy (free school) via the 'free school presumption'.

4. Pre-statutory procedure actions

In order for Shropshire Council to follow the local authority statutory procedure (Section 5), the Director of Children's Services would take a 'Working Paper' to cabinet for discussion and exploration. This paper would highlight reasons for closure as well as alternative possible solution – including any financial implications. If agreed at cabinet then the statutory procedure outlined in Section 5 would be followed.

5. Local authority statutory procedure

The DfE's guidance: Opening and closing maintained schools outlines the steps the local authority for maintained schools needs to take when making a decision on the permanent closure of a school;

Stage 1: Consultation
It is a statutory requirement to consult any parties the proposer (e.g. the local authority) thinks appropriate before publishing proposals to open or close a maintained school.

Stage 2: Publication
A statutory proposal should be published within 12 months of the initial consultation period being completed. It marks the start of the representation period or formal consultation.

Stage 3: Representation
This is the formal consultation period. The proposer should consult organisations, groups and individuals they feel to be appropriate during the representation period though any person or organisation can submit comments on the proposal to the local authority (LA), to be taken into account by the decision maker. The representation period starts on the date of publication of the statutory proposal and MUST last for 4 weeks.

Stage 4: Decision
All of the responses received during Stage 3 must be considered by the decision maker. Related prescribed alterations proposals should also be considered and, where possible, determined at the same time. The LA will be the decision maker on a school closure

proposal, unless the closure proposal is 'related' to another proposal that is to be decided by the Schools Adjudicator. The decision would be made by Full Cabinet.

Stage 5: Implementation
The decision made in stage four is implemented. There is no maximum limit on the time between the publication of a proposal and its proposed date of implementation. However, decision makers should be confident the proposers have good justification (for example an authority-wide reorganisation) if they propose a timescale longer than 3 years. The proposer must implement a proposal in the form approved, including any modifications made by the decision maker.

Committee and Date

People Overview and Scrutiny

14th January 2026

Item

Public

Children's Services Reforms

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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Ruth Houghton		

1. Synopsis

1.1 This report provides an overview for People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the reforms being implemented Nationally related to Children's Services and helps leaders across the organisation understand how this might impact locally on both Children's Services and also the expectations on how this will change the way the organisation works more broadly.

1.2 These reforms signal the largest changes within Children's Services in decades, and their impact are critical to achieving better outcomes for children but also ensuring good value for money. Their aim is to meet the needs of families as early as possible to prevent needs escalating.

1.3 The reforms will see us need to work more holistically as an organisation as they rely on the resources of other departments such as adults, housing, domestic abuse which are often contributory factors in children needing help and support.

1.4 There is likely to be a wider impact of this transformation that changing the way children's services work, as if successful, it should inform wider changes across the organisation to the way in which we work such as harnessing digital means to maximise our efficiency.

1.5 All of these reforms are expected to be delivered in partnership with statutory safeguarding partners (police, health, local authority and education) and children and families themselves.

2. Executive Summary

2.1   Since the new government formed, several initiatives, programmes and reforms related to Children have commenced. These have been initiated on the back of significant work a summary of this can be found here Executive Summary of 'Stable Homes, Built on Love: strategy and consultation'

2.2   This report will offer an overview of the reforms, the expectations being placed upon us, some initial reflections on how this might impact across a broader range of services outside of Children's Services and the progress to date.

2.3   These programmes are all aimed at how the safeguarding children's partnership in its broadest sense help to deliver better outcomes for children and their families. They are all focussed on how we intervene and support earlier and utilise technology to help us meet the needs of children and their families sooner and reflect the changes that were implemented in Working Together 2023 Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance

2.4   The key programmes are,

- Families First Partnership The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide
- Best Start in Life Giving every child the best start in life
- Family Hubs Family Hubs and Start for Life programme - GOV.UK
- Local Youth Transformation The Local Youth Transformation Pilot - GOV.UK
- Private Law Pathfinder Private Law Pathfinder Delivery Update
- Reform of the SEND system Reform of the SEND system: What might the next stage look like and how can we build consensus? | Local Government Association

2.5   Each of these programmes seeks to reform the way we work preventatively with children and their families. Some are specific to age ranges where we see pressure in the system and others are more holistic. This is a whole system reform to rebalance the system towards more preventative Family Help.

2.6   All of these changes will result in changes to the statutory framework, guidance and inspection regimes over the coming years. This is still going through the stages before gaining royal ascent Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

2.7   Each requires partners and corporate support to achieve the ambitions set by central government and have a level of oversight nationally. This report seeks to provide an overview on our response, the support required and the benefits we might realise following implementation.

3. Recommendations

3.1   We ask that the Committee review the report and supporting documentation and make recommendations that it considers critical to inform Cabinet on the most effective way to deliver the programme.

3.2   Offer reflections on the assessment on our progress towards implementing the reforms and whether this is an accurate assessment based on your respective areas or portfolios.

3.3 Seek to understand the reforms well enough so that you can champion and advocate within your area or portfolio for the changes that will be needed.

3.4 Endorse the proposed strategic approach and plan that is set out and seek to integrate this into the overarching improvement, corporate and partnership planning currently underway.

3.5 Acknowledge that a key change to the way we need to work is ensuring that the voice of children, young people and families are heavily involved in shaping the reforms this will impact on our traditional ways of working.

3.6 Consider and agree the reporting to the scrutiny to maintain regular assurance on the progress being made to achieve these reforms.

Report

4. Overview of Reforms

4.1 These reforms signal the most critical changes within Children's Services and the partnership for decades. The ambition is to rebalance the system towards greater early intervention and prevention as opposed to later acute care.

4.2 Each of the aspects of reforms has its own requirements a summary of these is provided below,

4.3 Best Start in Life Family Hubs, We are required to:

4.3.1 Prepare a readiness survey that tells the Department for Education how well prepared we are for the reforms (Appendix A.)

4.3.2 Identify our local Best Start in Life Family Hubs site, this has a strong criterion based on deprivation. Data is currently being analysed which indicates Shrewsbury is the site we ought to select based on the criteria from the Department for Education.

4.3.3 Review our parenting programmes so that parents can access parenting support either via parenting programmes or through supporting them to enhance the home learning environment from April 2026. The DfE have stipulated the courses we can provide.

4.3.4 Publish the 'Best Start in Life Plan' this should be available to the public to explain to them the actions our partnership is taking to achieve the good level of development target set.

4.3.5 For Shropshire our Target is 77% this is a 9% increase and is ambitious given children will need to be 3-4 years old ideally to reach this target.

4.4 Families First Partnership, We are required to:

4.4.1 Deliver a seamless system of support across **Family Help**, this is a newly defined continuum which would have previously been known as, 'Early Help and Children in Need.' There is a requirement of the Safeguarding Partnership to identify a broad range of partners who can deliver early help outside of the local authority. The partnership is required to deliver several key milestones (Appendix B) which will help us secure more effective earlier support for families.

4.4.2 Develop a **Multi Agency Child Protection Team** (MACPT) This is a completely new aspect of the system the multi-agency partnership are being asked to develop. This should be a team that provides a 'second look' at the partnership support and provides 'high support, high challenge' to ensure that our practice is as effective as it can be to prevent poorer outcomes for these children.

4.4.3 Embed **Family Group Decision Making** (FGDM) throughout the system so that at the earliest point in a family's journey opportunities to utilise and build upon the family's strengths including their widest family network are explored and built upon.

4.4.4 Each of these aspects has a partnership task and finish structure. Each is led by a multi-agency partner – education lead Family Help, MACPT led by Police and FGDM led by the Local Authority.

4.4.5 All aspect of this reform will require a change to the way we work placing much more focus on:
a. Engaging Children and Families
b. Multi-Disciplinary and Joint Working, there is a need to consider fully where the partnership should be building multi agency capacity rather than single agency responses.
It is envisaged all of these changes will reduce the number of children in care and see more children being worked with within Family Help and Child Protection.

4.5   Youth Strategy (precursor was the Local Youth Transformation Fund)
We are required to deliver:

4.5.1 Trusted Adults: We are required to upskill people working with young people to identify the early signs and intervene to help children feel connected and supported to be emotionally well. This could include mentors from the private sector alongside public partners. Placing Youth Workers in localities where there is a high level of need so that targeted interventions can take place.

4.5.2 Strengthening the Workforce: Developing and growing a skilled and sustainable paid and volunteer youth sector workforce, with the highest standards to meet young people's needs.

4.5.3 Friends and Relationships: Helping young people to develop positive social connections in schools and colleges, in their communities, and online.

4.5.4 Richer Lives: Providing enriching and meaningful activities for young people in and outside of education.

4.5.5 Good Work: Providing better education, guidance, training, and support for young people to get a great job.

4.5.6 Keeping Young People Safe: Intervening earlier to increase young people's safety in communities.

4.5.7 Health and Wellbeing: Supporting young people's physical and mental health to allow all young people to take up opportunities and live richer lives.

4.5.8 Engaging Young People in decisions: Putting young people in the driving seat of their own lives. This includes lowering the age at which they can vote.

4.6 Private Law Proceedings

4.6.1 It allows the court to identify families' needs earlier and fosters improved multiagency working between HMCTS, Cafcass, Cafcass Cymru, local authorities, specialist domestic abuse support providers and the police. This approach is designed to improve experiences for families by reducing the time from application to a court order and requiring fewer court hearings for each family.

We are required to:

4.6.2 Collate information to inform an assessment

4.6.3 Work as a multiagency partnership to understand the best resolution.

f. Work with the court to achieve timely resolution for families.

4.7 SEND Reforms

4.7.1 The Government have committed to the reform of the SEND system, we await the formal papers but in December 2025 the Department for Education wrote to Local Authorities to ask them to start to work as a partnership to work towards a rebalanced more inclusive system of early intervention and support, to support them to achieve this they asked that local partnerships assess their maturity against seven key pillars,
a. Co-Production with parents and carers and children and young people.
b. Effective System's Leadership and Governance
c. Accurate understanding of needs through effective use of data
d. High quality deliver at all levels
e. Effective partnerships across health, education and social care
f. A skilled partnership workforce
g. Targeted, judicious and sustainable use of resources

There is a clear indication that the reforms will be built upon existing reforms to compliment the wider system reforms.

5. Our Local Context

5.1   The case for change locally, Shropshire has a high number of children in care; we stand second highest regionally which seems at odds with the local context in which there are relatively low levels of poverty.

5.2   We spend £1,400 per child per year, this is in line with the national average level of spend for Children's Services.

5.2   What is in stark contrast to the national picture is the proportion of this spend on Children's Social Care, in Shropshire we spend circa 80% of every pound on Children's Social Care whereas the average is 47% spent on Children's Social Care this reflects the fact that Children's Services has a broad range of statutory duties outside of Children's Social Care. As budgets have tightened, spend on earlier intervention and prevention services have reduced to such a low level that it is ineffective at helping to prevent children coming into care resulting in unaffordable spend on children's care.

5.3   Following an initial assessment of needs, the majority of children known to Children's Services will be due to the needs of their parents, hence the need for greater collaborative working with adults' services and those services commissioned by the Local Authority and its partners.

5.4   Within the SEND system is under pressure. There is a recognition nationally that the High Needs Block DSG deficit is at unprecedented levels and is estimated to reach £5 billion at the end of the 2025/26 financial year. Shropshire's cumulative DSG deficit is circa £41 million. The Department are committed to rebalancing this system towards more inclusive systems of support building on the existing reforms.

5.4   These change programmes represent a chance to rebalance the system. However, it is important to recognise that the overall amount of spend on Children's Services (total budget across LA education, early help and social care services) is in line with the national average. Our priority is to reallocate the resources we have, so that we reinvest into earlier help and support to prevent rising demand and reduce children looked after numbers.

5.5   A key area of scrutiny is therefore consideration of how this spend is being rebalanced.

5.6   Baseline Self-Assessment

5.7   We conducted a self-assessment across the partnership to ascertain the baseline position from which we are starting and a summary of this has been included below

Our Partnership Self Assessment (2025)

5.8   This tells us that,
a. We have the conditions to embed FGDM as this has been an area of progress in recent years.
b. We have made some strides to embed Family Help within the Local Authority but the preventative work has shrunk to such a level we are ill equipped to identify people preventatively. This is because 80% of the budget for Children's Services is spent on Children's Social Care. We need better tools to help us know and understand people who are likely to need help and support and provide this prior to referral. There is also a need to increase the range of partners supporting and leading in the Family Help space as this is largely delivered through the Local Authority.
c. We have significant work to develop and embed MACPT, this will be an area of challenge as we seek to work with partners who have a larger geographical patch (NHS and Police), with already stretched resources whilst navigating the changing roles that may exist across our partnership moving forwards.

5.9   Initial Stakeholder Feedback
To compliment this, we held an initial stakeholder session to add value to this self-assessment the findings of this are below,

Summary of key themes

- People felt Family Hubs were strong and we needed to build upon them.
- People described the system as reactive, siloed and confusing.
- People said that we were pushing children through a system rather than responding or meeting needs.
- People from the same team don't see each other in person regularly.
- People from the same team do not know data that is shared in a partnership arena.
- People want to know more about each others roles and how they can work effectively together.
- People are frustrated at the level of duplication and inefficiency of the systems and processes.
- People don't always feel safe enough to speak up with each other to address the behaviour we don't want to see in the system.

- People know that there is inconsistent practice but do not always address it.
- People know that supporting families earlier is the right thing to do but the resources needed to achieve this are not always in the right place.
- People were keen to be one partnership team supporting children and families but the system is described as too complex to change.
- There is a need to mature the way we work with representative groups.
- Language is getting in the way of us being an effective system.

6   Our Plan

6.1   In order to deliver these ambitious changes we feel strongly that there is a need for one plan to guide them all. We think that these programmes represent a change to the way we work as a whole system which means we need to see them as one integrated package of reforms. We will seek to deliver the change needed through a single Children's Transformation as part of the wider corporate improvement plan. A copy of the full document is included Appendix C

6.2   We have agreed a thematic roll out approach and are in the scoping phase to understand more about how we may need to sequence some of this roll out to meet the needs of national departments and achieve local ambitions.

6.3   Our plan will reiterate as key milestones are met, for example once we are clearer about the outcome of the needs and harms assessment this is likely to provide much more detail on how this will affect the composition of our teams. Regular oversight and scrutiny from Members is welcome as we move throughout the delivery of this programme.

6.4   We have developed in partnership our draft plan (Appendix C.) We welcome feedback from scrutiny to ensure that these plans are impactful and reflect the views of residents that they represent.

6.5   The pillars of the changes will be,
    a. Workforce
    b. Children and Family Voice
    c. Outcomes, data and systems.
    d. Inclusive Places and Spaces
    e. Leadership, Governance and Commissioning
These are aspects of all the reforms that connect the key changes being sought.

7 Our Structure

7.1 Good governance will be critical for the success of the programme. Given the breadth of the change required the relationships with key external governance structures is critical.

7.2 Our proposed governance structure for internal delivery is as follows;

Meeting	Purpose	Role	Frequency	Responsible Officer
Children's Ambition Board	Strategic Partnership Board driving ambitious outcomes for children and families. to oversee the Children's Transformation	Sets the vision, oversees the Children's Transformation Programme and ensures multi-agency alignment	Every 2 months	Tanya Miles – Interim Chief Executive
Shropshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership	Statutory Safeguarding board for Children & Adults in Shropshire	Overseeing the FFP Implementation. Decision making board for the Families First Partnership	Monthly	David Shaw - DCS
Internal Children's Transformation Board	**Internal** Governance ensuring delivery assurance and compliance for Children's Services Transformation projects.	Monitors progress, manages risks and aligns internal workstreams with strategic priorities. Internal Workstreams to provide updates monthly	Monthly	David Shaw - DCS
FFP Tactical Delivery Group	Provides strategic direction for the Families First transformation programme, ensuring alignment of Start for Life and Family hub, and the Local Youth Transformation Pilot.	Provide governance and oversight for the programme's delivery plan & progress of the Task and Finish Groups ;FH, MDT's, MACPT's & FGC.	Monthly	Natasha Moody – Assistant Director for FFP
Operational Task & Finish Groups	Short-term, outcome focused groups delivering specific objectives within defined timeframes. •Family Help •Family Group Conferencing •Multi-Disciplinary Teams •Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams	Each Tactical Delivery Lead will co-ordinate their T&F Group regularly to deliver the detailed work required to achieve the programme objectives.	TBD	Task & Finish Group Leads
Operational Internal Workstreams	Thematic areas of delivery; •Places and Space •Children & Family Voice •Commissioning •Data & Systems •Inclusion •Workforce	Each internal workstream lead will co-ordinate their workstream regularly to deliver the specific objectives and deliver the work identified.	TBD	Workstream leads

8 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

8.1 The key risks related to this programme of change are detailed below. There are many risks that are documented but the most critical is the priority of these reforms amongst the broader context the council faces in terms of the financial emergency. This is undoubtably drawing focus towards short term savings as opposed to long term change of this nature.

8.2 These changes are due to become statutory and whilst this is not a current risk, there is an emerging risk about our ability to remain statutorily compliant.

8.3 There is a very real challenge that the Local Authority faces with a high number of children in care, for this programme to be successful there is a key interdependency with practice for Children in Care. As reducing the number of children in care will help us to achieve the overall rebalance of the system as circa 80% of children's services spend in on Children's Social Care currently (for most Local Authorities this is closer to 50%.)

8.4 Strategic Risk:

Risk	Response
Overwhelming Volume of Change • There is change to the way aspects of Public Sector delivery takes place e.g. change of the footprint of the ICB's, LGR and removal of Police and Crime Commissioners. All of this change alongside these service level changes can become overwhelming for people and there is a risk that we lose momentum as these changes are deemed as less important than other more strategic issues,	a. Ensure good communication and alignment with the other changes to ensure that where possible these dovetail together. b. Ensure that communications are sympathetic to the volume of change and make sure that the methods used to communicate are clear. c. Ensure good feedback loops from a range of people to understand how well the changes are landing and if any barriers or if there is pulls in different directions to ensure these are escalated to the respective governance structures
Financial: • There is a risk that the budget is not sufficient to deliver the required change across the local authority and the broader partnership. • There is a risk that the budget constraints in place make it challenging to spend the allocation on time which could result in claw back from Department for Education.	a. Gants being mapped and a clear breakdown of spend being developed. b. Broader range of grants being drawn together to ensure that where possible the programmes align and income can be used efficiently to deliver all programme objectives. c. Partners making necessary representation to raise this risk e.g. DfE if required. d. Continue to monitor the spend and raise key concerns. e. Seek exceptional arrangements for grant funding to enable swift spend against the agreed plan. Any deviation from plan would be subject to normal spend control processes.
Scale of Culture Change: • There is a risk that the scale of change needed at a time of	a. Resources allocated b. Leadership buy in secured from Leadership Board

	considerable strain within the council is not achievable. • There is a risk that the organisation and the partnership see this as a programme related to Children's Services missing the critical role that they need to play in these reforms.	c. Woven into the fabric of how we work around here as part of the improvement plan, corporate plan and partnership plan. d. Representation and deliverables from across the organisation and partnership secured. e. Regular monitoring and progress by Leadership Board. f. Partnership leads appointed. g. Partnership support to develop the 'what good looks like' for us collectively. h. Sequencing of the aspects of change. i. Frequent monitoring and oversight by partnership and DfE.
Risk to Safety: • Rebalancing a system of support to children and families brings a risk that children and families needs are not met resulting in a risk of harm.		a. Practice Lead a requirement of the programme. b. Learning from pathfinders and other local authorities. c. Regular check and challenge from Department for Education. d. Sequencing of change and roll out approach considered thoughtfully. e. Working with Telford and West Mercia footprints to test and learn on some aspects of the programme. f. More frequent oversight of the programme and reporting to the safeguarding partnership.
Delivery: • There is a risk that this work is not prioritised meaning that key milestones are not met this is also pertinent to partners who are straddling up to four Local Authority Areas.		a. Regular reporting to Leadership Board, Cabinet, Scrutiny and Partnership Boards. b. Tactical Delivery Group to ensure alignment with all 4 LA's. c. Alignment with the overarching council improvement and partnership plan. d. PM support secured. e. Regular reporting to DfE to maintain progress and oversight of progress.
Workforce: • There is a risk that the workforce are not equipped to support the changes, they are resistant to change and/or burnt out from the level of change.		a. Developing a coherent narrative and approach to integrating reforms so we have a systematic way of enveloping all changes. b. Skills Audit and Population Needs Analysis. c. Engagement of workforce a critical component of the change programme. d. Regular communication. e. 'Go and See' partnership leaders to visit practitioners to ascertain the appetite and acceptance of change to refine the delivery methods. f. Independent scrutineer utilised at critical points to check and challenge.
Reputation and Public Trust: • There is a risk that the public lose faith or see the changes in a critical light.		a. Co-production and measuring families perception is a key aspect of the programme. b. Monitor feedback c. Regular communications with members, MPs and community influencers such as PCF. d. Regular audits and reports to maintain an overview of practice. e. Examples of the change and it's benefits shared widely. f. Communications support secured.

9. Financial Implications

9.1   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.

9.2   The budgets for local authorities have previously been made via grant agreements for different programmes of work such as Holiday Activities and Food, Supporting Families, Children's Social Care Prevention Grant. From 2026/2027 financial year, these grants will be consolidated into a Children, Families and Youth Grant. **This ringfenced grant is designed to strengthen local authority support for children and families across England, reducing inequalities and breaking down barriers to opportunity (Appendix E.)**

9.3   The financial aspects of this programme are two-fold, there is an income coming into the local authority which is summarised below and there is an anticipated cost avoidance which is being attributed to achieving this change nationally.

Programme of Work	Funding Allocated 2025/2026	2026/27	2027/28
Families First Partnership	£1.759m	£2.872m (this has increased due to the consolidation of a number of grants. However, we are yet to understand if this is a real terms increase or decrease.)	£2.872m
Best Start in Life	£0.152m	£0.811m (see full details Appendix D)	£0.742m

9.4   The Department for Education are investing earlier as Local Authorities have been clear they cannot reduce demand without twin tracking investment.

9.5   We need to reinvest savings into prevention we will not be able to realise the full anticipated benefits.

9.6   The DfE have made the case to the treasury that investment in prevention will realise a reduction in the high costs of care, however this is a 5-year plan to reduce the overall costs at the more acute end.

9.7   The first Pathfinders such as Wolverhampton (which started in 2023) are seeing this reduction in care numbers within 2025/26 but later Pathfinders are not seeing this reduction yet.

9.8   We assume that Shropshire will follow a similar trajectory where investment in this approach will start to realise the benefits 2-3 years after the reforms being implemented within the cost of care.

10   Climate Change Appraisal

10.1   It is envisaged that these changes will have limited effect on Climate Change, the small impact will mean more locality working with teams based in local communities as far as possible.

11   Conclusions

11.1   These changes represent the single biggest set of changes to the way Children's Services and the partnership work in a lifetime. They provide a unique opportunity to support more children closer to home, in their community as soon as they face challenges to help them resolve them quickly to achieve better outcomes for families.

11.2   The landscape within which we operate nationally, regionally and indeed locally present challenges to the effective deliver particularly given the financial challenges the local authority is currently facing and the fact that increased funding is being targeted towards areas of deprivation means that Shropshire will have to work hard to rebalance the system without the same financial investment.

11.3   Commitment from the council to reinvest spend into early intervention will be critical to achieve the rebalancing of spend towards the national average of 50% spend.

11.4   We seek your feedback and support to ensure that these changes are successfully embedded.

Appendices

Appendix A: Readiness Survey

Appendix B: Summary of Minimum Expectations

Appendix C: Delivery Plan

Appendix D: Best Start in Life Family Hubs Grant

Appendix E: Letter from Josh McAllister

Appendix F: DfE-NHSE Joint Letter to Local Authorities and ICBs

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Best Start in Life Readiness Check

1. Which local authority are you responding from?

The content of this survey is tailored based on the local authority you are responding from and whether you have previously received funding from Family Hubs Transformation Fund, Family Hubs and Start for Life programme or Development Grant.

Introduction for Transformation Fund and Development Grant Local Authorities

This government is committed to raising the healthiest generation of children ever and making sure that every child has the best start in life. The foundations for lifelong success, health and learning are laid in early childhood. Families must be supported to provide the nurturing care that children need to thrive. This support should be embedded at the heart of our communities and bring together health, education and community services to make it easier for families to access early, joined-up support.

On 7 July 2025, the Department for Education published 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life' – a landmark strategy bringing together early years and family services to improve child development, backed by close to £1.5 billion over the next 3 years. This investment will help meet the Plan for Change ambition to ensure that a record 75% of children aged 5 achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028, reinforcing our commitment to early intervention and boosting long-term outcomes.

Best Start Family Hubs (BSFH) funding has now been extended to every local authority in England. This funding brings together the strongest elements from the legacy of Sure Start, Family Hubs Transformation Fund and the Family Hubs and Start for Life programmes to create more of an integrated, accessible system of support for families across the country.

Alongside this Readiness Check, we issued delivery guidance designed to help all local authorities to prepare for delivery of Best Start Family Hubs from April 2026. This check is intended to identify opportunities, risks and areas where additional support may be needed. Your input is essential to help us do that.

As you prepare for the publication of your Best Start Local Plans by 31 March 2026, this survey also seeks your input on broader aspects of Best Start in Life delivery. We are keen to understand the actions you are currently taking to drive progress towards achieving your GLD target.

Please complete this survey by Monday 12th January 2026.
We will collect this information before we process your first grant payment of FY2026/27. Any delays to the submission of your responses may delay your payment. There may also be additional assurances and/or clarifications that we will seek following submission of the survey.

If you close the survey part way through, you can reopen it using the same link to continue your response.

Introduction for Family Hubs and Start for Life Local Authorities

This government is committed to raising the healthiest generation of children ever and making sure that every child has the best start in life. The foundations for lifelong success, health and learning are laid in early childhood. Families must be supported to provide the nurturing care that children need to thrive, with a particular focus on the 1,001 critical days. This support should be embedded at the heart of our communities and bring together health, education and community services to make it easier for families to access early, joined-up support.

On 7 July 2025, the Department for Education published 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life' – a landmark strategy bringing together early years and family services to improve child development, backed by close to £1.5 billion over the next 3 years. This investment will help meet the Plan for Change ambition to ensure that a record 75% of children aged 5 achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028, reinforcing our commitment to early intervention and boosting long-term outcomes.

Jointly funded by the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Social Care, Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies brings together the strongest elements of Sure Start and the Family Hubs and Start for Life programmes to create more of an integrated, accessible system of support for families across the country.

Best Start Family Hubs (BSFH) delivering Healthy Babies services, will play a crucial role in delivering the '10 Year Health Plan for England: fit for the future' (July 2025), supporting the shifts from treatment to prevention and from hospital to community. They will provide a physical space for health services to be delivered within the community, forming part of Neighbourhood Health architecture, and will strengthen the delivery and integration of health services within the local community, with a particular focus on the period from conception to age 2.

Alongside this Readiness Check, we issued delivery guidance designed to help all local authorities to prepare for delivery of Best Start Family Hubs from April 2026. This check is intended to identify opportunities, risks and areas where additional support may be needed. Your input is essential to help us do that.

As you prepare for the publication of your Best Start Local Plans by 31 March 2026, this survey also seeks your input on broader aspects of Best Start in Life delivery. We are keen to understand the actions you are currently taking to drive progress towards achieving your GLD target.

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If you close the survey part way through, you can reopen it using the same link to continue your response.

<u>What the survey includes</u>

The survey is divided into two parts: Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies in the first half of the survey and questions about wider Best Start in Life delivery in the second half.

In Part 1 – Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies, we are asking about:
- Best Start Family Hub site location
- Parenting & HLE Evidence Based Interventions (EBIs) in BSFHs
- BSFH Data
- BSFH Branding
- Healthy Babies
- BSFH Funding

In Part 2 – Best Start in Life delivery, we are asking about:
- Best Start Local Plans
- FRAS & Universal Entitlement
- School Based Nurseries
- Early Years Pupil Premium
- Reception
- Support Needs

The survey has been tailored to your local authority based on whether you have previously received funding from Family Hubs Transformation Fund, Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme or the Development Grant. Therefore, the questions you see may be slightly different to another local authorities' questions.

If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact the team at BestStart.FAMILYHUBS@education.gov.uk.

Thank you for your continued commitment to improving outcomes for children and families.

Part 1: Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies

Section 1: Best Start Family Hub sites

This section focuses on your Best Start Family Hub sites.

Currently, more than 600 family hub sites operate across 88 local authorities, funded through the Family Hubs Transformation Fund and the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. On average, this equates to around 7–8 hubs per local authority, though numbers vary based on size and local need. From April, Best Start Family Hubs (BSFHs) will need to meet a specific definition, as set out in the programme guide. This definition provides a clear framework to help local authorities identify appropriate sites and distinguish BSFHs from predecessor provision. It also underpins the national commitment to open up to 1,000 BSFHs by the end of 2028.

2. Have you identified at least one site to become a BSFH by April 2026?
    Please note, a BSFH site needs to meet the definition as set out in the delivery guidance.

- Yes (please specify how many)
- No

3. If selected 'no' - What are the barriers to identifying a BSFH? Select all that apply.
   - Lack of suitable physical premises
   - Unable to sufficiently engage local community on site location
   - Unable to locate appropriately trained staff
   - Unable to offer full range of core services
   - Branding/naming convention not available from April
   - No digital offer in place for the hub to link to
   - No outreach services connected to the hub site
   - Other (please specify)

4. If selected 'no' - What is the earliest date you will have identified a BSFH site?

5. If selected 'yes' - please provide the following information for your BSFH sites.

	What is the official, public name of the site?	What is the primary postcode for the site?
Site 1		
Site 2		
Site 3		
Site 4		
Site 5		

6. How many of your sites are located in areas within the 30% most deprived Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in England?
   If needed, please use this online tool to find out if your sites are within the 30% most deprived Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in England.

   - 0-9%
   - 10-19%
   - 20-29%
   - 30-39%
   - 40-49%
   - 50-59%
   - 60-69%
   - 70-79%
   - 80-89%
   - 90-99%
   - 100%

7. If less than 100% - What is the rationale for locating some or all of your site/s outside the 30% most deprived LSOAs in England?

Local authorities should make location decisions on the basis of achieving the ambition for 70% of hubs located in the most deprived 30% of areas nationally with some flexibility to go below 70% where there is a strong rationale. This question is to understand the reasons why sites may not be located in the most deprived 30% of areas nationally.

- The site(s) are physically located outside a deprived area but predominantly serves deprived communities
- The site(s) are located in an area where there is a high proportion of children eligible for free school meals, not achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD), or there is a high degree of inequality in GLD achievement
- To accommodate health services, Healthy Babies services or wider health objectives
- To accommodate transport links or other local accessibility issues such as rurality, sparsely populated or dispersed communities
- To facilitate co-location of BSFHs with other provision such as nurseries, schools or Family Help teams
- Our local authority has no or very few areas within the 30% most deprived in England
- To build on an existing family hub or children's centre site
- Other (please specify)

8. If less than 100% - Where BSFHs are not located in 30% most deprived LSOAs in England, how will you reach disadvantaged families?

    Local authorities should make location decisions on the basis of achieving the ambition for 70% of hubs located in the most deprived 30% of areas nationally with some flexibility to go below 70% where there is a strong rationale. This question is to understand what actions you will take to ensure you are still reaching disadvantaged families where hubs may not be based in the most deprived 30% of areas nationally.

    - Outreach support workers
    - Outreach sites/Community venues
    - Voluntary, community and faith sector partners
    - Statutory delivery partners, e.g. Family Help teams, health partners
    - Peer support networks
    - Early years settings and schools
    - Other (please specify)
    - None of the above

9. Are you planning to close any of your existing Family Hub sites?

    To be clear, local authorities should under no circumstances stop funding existing family hubs or Sure Start Children's Centres, or successful provision delivered by partners on behalf of the local authority just to achieve the ambition of 70% of hubs to be located in the most 30% deprived areas nationally. However, we understand you may need to close family hub sites for other reasons.

    - Yes – please state how many sites you are planning to close

5

- No
- N/A – we do not have any existing Family Hub sites

10. In total, approximately how many Best Start Family Hubs do you plan to have open by the end of March 2029?

    On average LAs on the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme have 7–8 hubs per local authority, though numbers vary based on size and local need. Please set a target that reflects local ambition and ensures families can access support.

    - 0
    - 1
    - 2
    - 3
    - 4
    - 5
    - 6
    - 7
    - 8
    - 9
    - 10
    - 11
    - 12
    - 13
    - 14
    - 15
    - 16
    - 17
    - 18
    - 19
    - 20
    - 21
    - 22
    - 23
    - 24
    - 25
    - 26
    - 27
    - 28
    - 29
    - 30
    - More than 30 (please insert number)
    - Don't know yet

Section 2: Parenting Evidence-Based Interventions (EBI) for 3–4-year-olds

In this section, please tell us about the interventions and activities that you will use Best Start Family Hubs funding to deliver.

Selecting programmes from the Parenting EBI menu aligns with the BSiL strategy's commitments to provide a consistent, evidence-based offer with clearer funding rules.

11. Which **Parenting** intervention(s) have you selected to deliver from April 2026? Select all that apply.
    - Child-Parent Psychotherapy
    - Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC)
    - Family Check-Up for Children (FCU)
    - Generation Parent Management Training Oregon (GEN PMTO)
    - Incredible Years Preschool
    - Incredible Years Preschool +ADVANCE Parent Training Curriculum
    - ParentChild+
    - Parents as First Teachers (PAFT)
    - Schoolchildren and their Families
    - Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
    - Triple P – Enhanced Triple P (Level 5)
    - Triple P – Family Transitions
    - Triple P – Level 4 Group Triple P
    - Triple P – Level 4 Standard Triple P
    - Triple P – Level 5 Pathways
    - Triple P – Selected (Seminars) Stepping Stones
    - Triple P – Standard Stepping Stones + Group
    - Triple P Level 3 Discussion Groups
    - Triple P Online
    - Video-Interventions to promote positive parenting and sensitive discipline (VIPP-SD)/ Healthy Start, Happy Start
    - Other
    - Have not selected an intervention yet

12. If selected 'have not selected an intervention yet' – Why is this?

13. If selected 'other' – Which Parenting EBI(s) have you selected that are not included on the menu?

14. If selected 'other' – What is your rationale for selecting those EBI(s)? Select all that apply.
    - Evidence of impact on improving child development outcomes
    - Alignment with local needs and priorities
    - Strong track record of engagement and completion rates
    - Availability of trained workforce and resources
    - Cost-effectiveness and value for money
    - Partnership opportunities with local organisations

- Funding previously agreed to use this intervention
- Other (please specify)

15. If selected 'other' – For the intervention(s) not listed on the Parenting EBI menu, have you or the supplier submitted supporting evidence under the exemption process as set out in the guidance? *Guidance on submitting supporting evidence under the exemption process will be shared shortly.*
    - Yes
    - No

16. If one EBI selected – Are you on track to deliver your Parenting intervention from April 2026?
    - Yes
    - No

17. If multiple or 'other' selected - Are you on track to deliver your Parenting interventions from April 2026?
    - Yes, all of them
    - Yes, some of them
    - No

18. If 'yes, some of them' selected – Which ones are you on track to deliver? Select all that apply.
    - Child-Parent Psychotherapy
    - Empowering Parents Empowering Communities (EPEC)
    - Family Check-Up for Children (FCU)
    - Generation Parent Management Training Oregon (GEN PMTO)
    - Incredible Years Preschool
    - Incredible Years Preschool +ADVANCE Parent Training Curriculum
    - ParentChild+
    - Parents as First Teachers (PAFT)
    - Schoolchildren and their Families
    - Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
    - Triple P – Enhanced Triple P (Level 5)
    - Triple P – Family Transitions
    - Triple P – Level 4 Group Triple P
    - Triple P – Level 4 Standard Triple P
    - Triple P – Level 5 Pathways
    - Triple P – Selected (Seminars) Stepping Stones
    - Triple P – Standard Stepping Stones + Group
    - Triple P Level 3 Discussion Groups
    - Triple P Online
    - Video-Interventions to promote positive parenting and sensitive discipline (VIPP-SD)/ Healthy Start, Happy Start
    - Other (please specify)

19. If 'no' or 'yes, some of them' selected - What are the barriers to delivering your Parenting intervention(s) from April 2026?
    - Supplier capacity to offer training
    - Access to funding

- Workforce capacity to access training
- Recruitment of key personnel
- Integration with existing services
- Other – please specify

Section 3: HLE Evidence-Based Interventions for 3–4-year-olds

In this section, please tell us about the interventions and activities that you will use Best Start Family Hubs funding to deliver.

Selecting programmes from the HLE EBI menu aligns with the BSiL strategy's commitments to provide a consistent, evidence-based offer with clearer funding rules.

20. Which **HLE** intervention(s) have you selected to deliver from April 2026? Select all that apply.
- Auditory Verbal Therapy
- Early Talk Boost
- Early Words Together
- EasyPeasy
- Incredible Years Preschool
- Incredible Years Preschool +ADVANCE Parent Training Curriculum
- Let's Play in Tandem* (Now available in an updated form as LEAP into Learning)
- Making it REAL
- ParentChild+
- Parents as First Teachers (PAFT)
- PEEP Learning Together Programme
- Triple P – Level 3 Discussion Groups
- Triple P – Level 4 Group
- Triple P – Online
- Triple P – Stepping Stones
- Other
- Have not selected an intervention yet

21. If selected 'have not selected an intervention yet' – Why is this?

22. If selected 'other' – Which HLE EBI(s) have you selected that are not included on the menu?

23. If selected 'other' – What is your rationale for selecting those EBI(s)? Select all that apply.
- Evidence of impact on improving child development outcomes
- Alignment with local needs and priorities
- Strong track record of engagement and completion rates
- Availability of trained workforce and resources
- Cost-effectiveness and value for money
- Partnership opportunities with local organisations
- Funding previously agreed to use this intervention
- Other (please specify)

24. If selected 'other' – For the intervention(s) not listed on the HLE EBI menu, have you or the supplier submitted supporting evidence under the exemption process as set out in the guidance? *Guidance on submitting supporting evidence under the exemption process will be shared shortly.*
    - Yes
    - No

25. If one EBI selected - Are you on track to deliver your HLE intervention from April 2026?
    - Yes
    - No

26. If multiple or 'other' selected - Are you on track to deliver your HLE interventions from April 2026?
    - Yes, all of them
    - Yes, some of them
    - No

27. If 'yes, some of them' selected – Which ones are you on track to deliver? Select all that apply.
    - Auditory Verbal Therapy
    - Early Talk Boost
    - Early Words Together
    - EasyPeasy
    - Incredible Years Preschool
    - Incredible Years Preschool +ADVANCE Parent Training Curriculum
    - Let's Play in Tandem* (Now available in an updated form as LEAP into Learning)
    - Making it REAL
    - ParentChild+
    - Parents as First Teachers (PAFT)
    - PEEP Learning Together Programme
    - Triple P – Level 3 Discussion Groups
    - Triple P – Level 4 Group
    - Triple P – Online
    - Triple P – Stepping Stones
    - Other (please specify)

28. If 'no' or 'yes some of them' selected - What are the barriers to delivering your HLE intervention(s) from April 2026?
    - Supplier capacity to offer training
    - Access to funding
    - Workforce capacity to access training
    - Recruitment of key personnel
    - Integration with existing services
    - Other – please specify

29. Thinking about your Parenting **and** HLE EBIs...

What outreach and peer support approaches will you implement to improve take-up and completion rates of EBIs, both in-person and online? Select all that apply
- Community outreach events (e.g. local fairs, info sessions)
- Social media and/or digital campaigns
- Peer mentoring
- Online discussion forums or support groups
- Text/email reminders or nudges
- Incentives for participation (e.g. vouchers, certificates)
- Collaboration with local organisations or leaders
- Partnering with Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector
- Stay and Play Sessions
- Home visiting programmes
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above

Section 4: Data

This section is about the data you collect on BSFH users.

30. Do you have a registration system for your BSFHs?
*By registration system, we mean a **mandatory** process used to collect and record information about individuals attending Best Start Family Hubs, which users are required to complete to access services. This could be an **electronic registration** where users enter their information via an app or software, which is then stored in a database. Or it could be **paper-based registration** where individuals complete printed forms or a sign-in sheet, which are later filed or manually entered into a system.*

- Yes – for all BSFHs
- Yes – for some BSFHs
- No
- Not sure

31. If selected 'no' - Why not? Select all that apply.
- Too expensive
- Too difficult to implement
- Lack of appropriate software
- Service users would be put off from accessing services if they had to formally register
- Service users don't want to provide personal data when accessing services
- Data governance barriers within the LA or delivery partners e.g. concerns about data privacy
- Other – free text box

32. For the following services, do you have a way to collect individual level information on service users, such as their gender, ethnicity, or postcode?

	Yes	No	Don't know	N/A – we do not provide this service category
Parenting evidence-based interventions				
HLE evidence-based interventions				
Infant feeding services				
Perinatal mental health services				
Parent-infant relationship services				
Community drop-in services (e.g. stay and play)				

Section 5: Branding

This section is about your use of BSFH branding.

For LAs transitioning from Family Hubs Transformation Fund and Family Hubs and Start for Life to BSFHs:

33. Have you introduced branded banners, stickers and other such means to clearly associate your sites with the Best Start in Life campaign, noting it is funded by the UK government, in line with the guidance?
    - Yes
    - Not yet (please specify when you will do this)

34. Have you introduced branded banners, stickers and other such means to clearly associate your sites with the Healthy Babies branding, alongside the NHS logo, in line with guidance?
    - Yes
    - Not yet (please specify when you will do this)

35. Are you incorporating Best Start in Life and/or Healthy Babies branding into your comms materials in line with the guidance when stocks need to be renewed or they otherwise need to be refreshed? (please select all that apply)
    - Best Start in Life
    - Healthy Babies
    - Not yet (please specify when you will do this)

36. Have you been referring to your family hubs as 'Best Start Family Hubs' in your comms in line with the guidance, making clear that this is the new name for your family hubs offer?
    - Yes
    - Not yet (please specify when you will do this)

37. Are you preparing signage and other assets for your sites which display the Best Start in Life logo, identify them as Best Start Family Hubs (or part of the programme, if they do not meet the full definition) and note they are funded by the UK government, in line with the guidance?
    - Yes
    - Not yet (please specify when you will do this)

38. Does your comms refer to Best Start Family Hubs, in line with the guidance?
    - Yes
    - Not yet (please specify when you will do this)

39. Are you incorporating the Healthy Babies branding into your materials, in line with the guidance?
    - Yes
    - Not yet (please specify when you will do this)
    - No

Section 6: Healthy Babies

This section is about the Healthy Babies Services

For Family Hubs and Start for Life LAs:

40. Do you anticipate any significant changes to your FY2025/26 delivery plan as we move into FY2026/27?

    a. Infant feeding

    - Yes
    - No

    b. Perinatal Mental Health and Parent-Infant Relationships

    - Yes
    - No

41. If 'yes' selected - What is the nature of your change in delivery? Select all that apply.

    - Delivering new service(s)

    - Stopping delivery of existing service(s)

    - Changing staffing model/recruiting new staff

    - Training

    - Other – please specify

42. Please briefly describe (maximum 100 words) the changes you are planning to make.

43. To what extent are you confident that your delivery remains on track for each of the following strands?

   Please indicate a RAG rating for each strand using the following criteria:
   Red- currently off track and likely to be off-track into FY26/27.
   Amber- some activity off track but likely to be on track in advance of or early into FY26/27.
   Green- majority of activity on track and delivery is going as planned.

   a) Infant Feeding
      - Red
      - Amber
      - Green
   b) Perinatal Mental Health and Parent-Infant Relationships
      - Red
      - Amber
      - Green

44. Which of the following health services do you **not** currently offer through your BSFHs but expect to offer from FY2026/27? Select all that apply.

   - Health visiting

   - Infant feeding

   - Parent-infant relationships

   - Perinatal mental health

   - Mental health (beyond perinatal mental health and parent infant relationships)

   - Midwifery

   - Nutrition and weight management

   - Oral health

   - SEND

   - GP

   - Speech and language

   - Substance misuse

   - Vaccination

   - Social prescribing

   - School nursing

   - Health literacy

   - Other – please specify

   - None of the above

45. Which of the following health services do you expect to offer through your BSFHs from FY2026/27? (select all that apply)

- health visiting

- infant feeding

- parent-infant relationships

- perinatal mental health

- mental health (beyond perinatal mental health and parent infant relationships)

- midwifery

- nutrition and weight management

- oral health

- SEND

- GP

- speech and language

- substance misuse

- vaccination

- social prescribing

- school nursing

- health literacy

- other – please specify

- None of the above

Section 7: Funding

This section is about the previous funding you have received.

For Development Grant LAs:

46. Are you on track to spend the full amount of your development grant funding allocation?
    - Yes
    - No

47. If selected 'no' – Please provide a brief explanation for why you are not on track to spend your full development grant funding allocation.

48. If selected 'no' – How much underspend do you anticipate?

For Family Hubs Transformation Fund and Family Hubs and Start for Life LAs:

49. Are you on track to spend your full programme allocation for FY2025/26 (including any underspend from previous years) by 31 March 2026?
    - Yes
    - No

50. If selected 'no' – Please provide a brief explanation for why you are not on track to spend your full programme allocation by 31 March 2026.

51. If selected 'no' – How much underspend do you anticipate?

52. What are the associated funded strands and activities for this underspend? Select all that apply.
    - Transformation – Revenue
    - Transformation – Capital
    - Parenting
    - HLE
    - Perinatal Mental Health and Parent-Infant Relationships
    - Infant Feeding
    - Start for Life Offer
    - Parent Carer Panels

Part 2: Best Start in Life Delivery

We would now like to ask you some questions about your wider Best Start Local Plans and other programmes that form part of your Best Start in Life delivery.

Section 8: Best Start local plans

53. Are you on track to have a named contact responsible for overseeing and implementing Best Start Local plans in place from 31 March 2026?
   - Yes
   - Not yet (please specify when you will do this)

54. Thinking about your Best Start local plans, to what extent are you on track to do the following…

	Fully on track	Mostly on track	Partially on track	Not on track
Publish your Best Start local plan on your council website by 31 March 2026				
Set a bold vision for improving child development and health outcomes with local delivery partners across all sectors				
Identify the local needs of babies, children and families, and set out plans to address gaps in provision				
Describe how delivery will be carried out in partnership, tracked and tailored to continually drive progress				
Identify and scale innovative practice				

55. What, if any, are the barriers to you publishing your Best Start local plan by 31 March 2026?

Section 9: FRAS & Universal Entitlement

56. What actions is your local authority planning to take, as part of your Best Start Local Plans, to increase take up of the 15-hour entitlements (FRAS and Universal)?

57. How do you work with your Best Start Family Hubs to support parents to find out about and use the entitlements?

58. Local authorities must pass-through at least 96% of their DSG funding. Does your local authority retain any of the remaining funding?
   - Yes
   - No

59. If selected 'yes' - How much funding do you retain? (rounded to the nearest percentage)
    - 1%
    - 2%
    - 3%
    - 4%
    - Other (please specify)

60. If selected 'yes' - What do you use this for? Select all that apply.
    - Communications activity for the 15-hour entitlements
    - Outreach activity for the 15-hour entitlements
    - Supporting parents through applying for the 15-hour entitlements
    - Delivering or assessing applications for the 15-hour entitlements
    - Other (please specify)

Section 10: School Based Nurseries

61. Please estimate the potential number of projects for Phase 3 (e.g. schools that could be ready to deliver places between 2027-2030) based on your sufficiency planning and conversations with interested schools/EY providers [not including those put forward for P2]?
    We appreciate these estimates may have changed since you responded to the SBN survey in September.

    - 0
    - 1-4
    - 5-9
    - 10-19
    - 20-29
    - 30+
    - Not sure

Section 11: Early Years Pupil Premium

62. Do you monitor how Early Years Pupil Premium is spent by your local early years settings?
    - Yes
    - No

63. If selected 'yes' - How do you monitor this? Select all that apply.
    - Regular surveys
    - Conversations with EY settings
    - Workshops with EY settings
    - Other (please specify)

64. How is your local authority taking action to increase take up of EYPP?

Section 12: Reception

65. Are you aware of the 'compare your good level of development (GLD) data' report available for schools, responsible bodies and local authority areas through the view your education data (VYED) platform?
   - Yes
   - No

66. If selected 'yes' - Have you downloaded your responsible body and/or local authority area report from VYED?
   - Yes
   - No

67. If selected 'yes' – How have you used the report? Select all that apply.
   - To better understand early years outcomes in my local authority
   - To diagnose strengths and areas of improvement for early years quality
   - To support conversations with key improvement partners across my local authority
   - To compare early years outcomes in my local authority with other local authorities
   - To develop a local authority wide action plan for improvement
   - Other (please specify)

68. If selected 'yes' - Did you encounter any issues in accessing the report? Select all that apply.
   - No issues
   - Unable to sign into the View Your Education Data (VYED) platform
   - Unable to access the 'Monitor Your Child Development Data' sub-service within VYED
   - No report available to download in the 'Monitor Your Child Development Data' sub-service
   - Other (please specify)

69. Do you offer any support to schools and reception teachers with completing the EYFSP assessment?
   - Yes
   - No

70. If selected 'yes' - What does this support look like? Select all that apply.
   - Training sessions with teachers
   - Training sessions with senior leaders
   - Facilitating teacher networks to discuss example assessments
   - Other (please specify)

71. Before today, were you aware of the Department for Education's RISE reception improvement offer, which is outlined on *GOV.UK*?
   - Yes
   - No

72. If selected 'yes' - How did you find out about this offer? Select all that apply.

   - Attending a DfE reception quality conference in Summer 2025

- Attending a DfE reception webinar in Autumn 2025
- Through DfE comms (e.g. regional director newsletters, teacher bulletin, direct email or accessing the reception improvement gov.uk page)
- Word of mouth
- Through local or national support networks such as Stronger Practice Hubs
- Directly from a RISE advisor
- Other (please specify)

73. If selected 'yes' - Have you shared this offer with schools in your local authority area?
- Yes
- No

Section 13: Support Needs

74. Are there any areas of Best Start in Life delivery that you need more support with?
- Best Start Family Hubs
- Healthy Babies
- Best Start Local Plans
- FRAS and Universal Entitlement
- School Based Nurseries
- Early Years Pupil Premium
- Reception
- Other – please specify
- None of the above

75. Please briefly explain what you need more support with.

Families First Partnership: Briefing Note

Background

After considerable work undertaken by the government to review the system including Stable Homes Built on Love the government have committed to transforming the system of support for children to seek to rebalance the system so that more children get access to timely help and support, their primary aim is to,

'Transform the whole system of help, support and protection, to ensure that every family can access the right help and support when they need it, with a strong emphasis on early intervention to prevent crisis.'

The Families First for Children Pathfinder programme has demonstrated that for safeguarding partners, effective transformation of family support means considering how services from universal to social care interventions interact as a connected system. The FFP programme will support safeguarding partners to bring together targeted early help, child in need, and multi-agency child protection into a seamless system of help.

Collaboration among all partners and relevant agencies, including voluntary and community sector organisations that work with children and adults, is essential to tailor approaches for diverse needs such as: disabilities, mental health issues, domestic abuse, sexual abuse, substance misuse, and harm outside the home including exploitation and online.

Services should address the needs of children of all ages, embedding a whole family approach this means that understanding the needs of the adults in the household is important. This transformation programme is made up of multiple component parts and needs to align and integrate with local plans and the way of working to ensure it is fit for purpose locally and places the voices and needs of Shropshire's children and families at the centre.

There are clearly defined national expectations but also local flexibility to afford us to develop this in a way that meets our needs. Time is of the essence as by April 2026 the Department for Education are expecting us to be in a position to deliver several key aspects of this programme to a standard they call minimum expectations. This will require prioritisation by partners to deliver all aspects with just 6 months to realise ambitious changes.

Minimum Expectations

(Full Details can be found here The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide)

Key Deliverable 1: Family Help

Expectations

Delivering Family Help will mean, as a minimum,

- Bringing together family support workers (or equivalent) and social workers into a single service. This will cover a broad continuum of need – from targeted early help through to multiagency child protection - that responds more flexibly to a range of contexts, needs and harms;
- Safeguarding partnerships should work together to publish a refreshed threshold document by the end of the transformation year (March 2026) to confirm the changes and remove the need for handovers, building on assessments and plans as needs change. This should set out a broad

continuum of Family Help, showing the range of needs for all children that will be supported – with an emphasis on fluidity and prioritising family experience, as opposed to gatekeeping against rigid thresholds;

- Safeguarding partners should update their local protocol for assessment and support;
- Safeguarding partners should consider how Family Help can address the needs of a diverse range of children (from babies, including pre-birth, to teenagers) and families, including but not limited to children with SEND, those from minority ethnic backgrounds and children with a parent in custody.

Local Flexibility

- Team structure: It will be for local partnerships to determine where the new teams will be based and how many teams they will have. For local partnerships that have an existing locality model, there could be multiple teams based in settings across their area (more information can be found in 'multi-disciplinary family help teams).

Key Deliverable 2: Family Help Practitioner Lead Role

Expectations

Safeguarding partners should establish the FHLP role, building on their current practice. To support implementation, Safeguarding partners, should:

- Have a shared practice framework across agencies, that covers the end-to-end system of help, support and protection, in line with the National Framework outcomes and the requirements of Working Together;
- Publish local protocols for assessments and support, including clarifying who can act as an FHLP for children receiving support and services as a child in need and the skills, experience, oversight and accountability requirements outlined in Working Together.
- Plans for providing social work oversight should also be clarified;
- Develop a multi-agency workforce development plan outlining the training, knowledge and skill levels for the Family Help workforce including the FHLP role.

Local Flexibility

- Choosing the right lead practitioner: Local authorities and partner agencies can use flexibility in selecting lead practitioners, as per Working Together, which confirms that the lead practitioner does not always need to be a social worker when providing support and services to children in need.
- The safeguarding partnership should have clear processes in place to identify the most suitable lead practitioner to support families across the Family Help continuum of need and consider how practitioners from across the partnership could be appointed as the FHLP, including under Section 17.

Key Deliverable 3: Multi-Disciplinary Family Help Teams

Expectations:

- Local partnerships should set up, or build on existing multi-disciplinary teams, to include co-working between a wide range of practitioners including family support workers (or equivalent), social workers and other alternatively qualified or specialist roles.

- Examples of services that practitioners might work in include:
  - domestic abuse o substance misuse
  - children and adult mental health
  - SEND – including the Designated Social Care Officer Role, as encouraged in Working Together
  - parental conflict or school attendance support teams or prison and probation or public health
  - youth justice or youth work or adult social care
  - police
  - victim support including wider sexual abuse support o health visiting
  - midwives, sexual health and school nursing
  - employment advisors to support parents who are out of work
  - homelessness and housing
- While these new multi-disciplinary family help teams may be based on an extension of existing teams – local partnerships should refer to population needs assessments to determine the different agencies, services and practitioners that should be part of their multi-disciplinary teams. Local partnerships may want to update these assessments as part of their transformation activity.
- When setting up multi-disciplinary teams, safeguarding partners should consider how to effectively join up Family Help with existing SEND services, to improve access to support for children with special educational needs, and disabilities.

Local Flexibility

- Structure of teams (size and location):   on the size and location of teams will depend on local circumstances. Local authorities, with partners, could consider using family hubs, where they exist, as a location to base these teams.
- The role of individual practitioners within the team: Multi-disciplinary practitioners in the team could perform a number of functions – e.g. they could: provide direct support to families; triage or provide advice at the front door; provide consultative support to FHLPs as part of TAF or a link back to their home organisation to help facilitate appropriate support. Local partnerships have discretion to determine these arrangements based on their local circumstances and workforce.
- Co-location of teams: While the co–location of services and practitioners makes it easier for families to access the services they need; it will be for local partnerships to determine their local arrangements. This includes how the teams are resourced across agencies and the flexibility of working arrangements to meet the needs of families.

Key Deliverable 4: Family Help Assessment

Expectations Safeguarding partners should:

- Develop family help assessments and plans in line with Working Together, which sets out principles for high-quality assessments and plans. These should be accessed and jointly monitored by all the agencies working with the child, young person and family;
- Establish an assessment which can be tailored to the level of need identified within a family, including adapting appropriately for children with SEND and disabled children and their

families, taking into account previous interventions and wider contextual factors including for example where a parent is imprisoned;

- Ensure practitioners consider the needs of the whole-family as part of the assessment and that the child, young person and family voice is captured and reflected in the plan – whilst being clear the needs of the child are paramount;
- Adhere to the maximum timelines for child in need assessments set out in Working Together;
- Coordinate with other assessments that are ongoing (such as an Education, Health and Care assessment, or a Prevention and Diversion Assessment), or if previously completed, practitioners should use assessments to build a complete picture of the child and their family (as set out in Working Together);
- Develop family help plans that provide clear, measurable outcomes for the child or young person and set expectations for families, with reviewable actions to track progress. Plans should specify the agencies and practitioners involved, the services available, and how success will be measured. Regular reviews should assess whether progress has been made to meet the child or young person's needs;
- Have robust oversight arrangements as required by Working Together through the local protocol for assessment and support;
- Seek consent prior to an assessment being completed, adhering to legal frameworks and guidance around consent and children and young people;
- Build on any previous assessments or plans that might have been put in place in universal/community based early help.

Local Flexibility

- Internal timelines: Working Together requires that assessments for a child in need should be completed within 45 days, areas retain flexibility to set timescales for targeted early help
- The practitioner who leads the assessment: assessments can be led by a range of practitioners, and it is for local partnerships to determine appropriate oversight and sign off arrangements;
- Reviews: local safeguarding partners can determine their process and timelines for reviewing plans. There should be mechanisms to review the effectiveness and impact of the plan;
- Naming conventions: local safeguarding partners can determine the title of their assessment and plans. Local partnerships should continue to be mindful of the language used and this could be reviewed during the co-design process including seeking the views of families on terminology

Key Deliverable 5: Front Door

Expectations

- Move towards an integrated front door, where contacts and referrals can be triaged to the right level of service; this should include families being connected to universal and community services if required.
- Local partnerships operating Multiagency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) should review/explore how their functions might align more strongly with other places where families might come into contact with services, for example, separate early help front doors;

- Consider the range of practitioners and agencies that could be brought into the integrated front door - this could include for example education, police, health and youth workers.

Local Flexibility for triaging at the front door

- location: local partnerships can determine the location of their front door – for example, in areas where there are family hubs, we would encourage these areas to consider the role family hubs could play in providing an access point to services;
- Co-location: local partnerships can determine whether teams are co-located physically or virtually;
- Make up of front door teams: local partnerships can determine the practitioners and agencies at the front door, for example, including considering those with SEND, youth work or domestic abuse expertise, or from services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS);
- Links to the Multi-agency Child Protection Team (MACPT): local partnerships can determine the most efficient way to align with and work alongside MACPTs. Ensuring swift action in identifying and protecting children from significant harm when such referrals are made; the extent of the digital offer to support families and practitioners to navigate services;
- Considering out of hours services, to support the identification of need outside core working hours.

Key Deliverable 6: Establishing the Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams

Expectations:

Safeguarding partners will:

- Nominate a core membership of dedicated, experienced, highly skilled and suitably qualified social workers (including into the new LCPP roles), police officers, registered health practitioners and persons with experience of education;
- Determine which other relevant agencies (such as probation, domestic abuse services and youth workers) should be involved in the MACPT according to local demographics, needs and harm profiles;
- Decide the location, number of teams and staffing arrangements for local MACPTs;
- Determine how MACPTs integrate with and build on existing arrangements in the wider system (such as local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs or equivalents), whilst retaining a distinct identity and clear focus on direct multi-agency child protection activities;
- Agree, allocate and transparently set out multi-agency resourcing;
- Agree the shared vision, structure, and practice framework that includes senior management oversight and accountability for delivery and delegated decision making (as part of strategic, statutory multi-agency safeguarding arrangements);
- Set out how operational decisions and the related responsibilities of different agencies will be made and quality-assured for children who are the focus of section 47 enquiries and child protection plans. This should include medical assessments and multi-agency investigation procedures (which will depend on the type(s) of significant harm identified);
- Establish a mechanism for triaging, reviewing and acting on referrals sent to the MACPT, including links to the MASH or other front door referral teams and responsibilities for out of hours services;

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- Consider and set out the role of the MACPT, including the LCPP, in supporting transitions out of child protection, including reunification, role in the Public Law Outline and pre-proceedings and transitions between child and adult services (often referred to as transitional safeguarding) and Family Help or universal services;
- Consider and set out chairing arrangements for child protection conferences within the MACPT, whilst ensuring clear ongoing quality assurance;
- Set out access to group and individual reflective and clinical supervision and training
- Consider how the team will quality assure child protection plans. Quality assurance should have regard to whether proposed actions clearly correspond to goals, whether these goals are adequately progressed, and whether plans meet needs arising from contextual factors identified during assessments;
- Establish the MACPT(s) as a local centre of expertise accessible to all child and family practitioners across the multi-agency system, through overseeing, supporting and evidencing best practice in child protection;
- Set out reporting requirements aligned with the requirements in Working Together for Safeguarding Partner Yearly Reports.

MACPT members should work together to:

- Promote a sense of collective responsibility among agencies to protect children;
- Provide child protection advice and expertise across the multi-agency system;
- Build upon or conduct thorough assessments of children's needs by considering various perspectives and expertise from across the team, as well as the wider system;
- Ensure that interventions are prompt, evidence-based and tailored to the child and family's needs, proactively addressing issues before they escalate;
- Use resources efficiently by pooling expertise and services from various agencies;
- Facilitate better communication and information sharing among practitioners and agencies.

Local flexibility:

- Some pathfinder local partnerships have aligned MACPTs with the local authority's locality structure; others have established specialist MACPTs to respond to particular needs or harms, for example exploitation. These decisions will be for local area partnerships to determine as they prepare to implement change and should be informed by local safeguarding partner readiness assessments, intelligence about harm types and what is working well locally in child protection practice.

Expectations Specific

MACPT functions include:

- Chairing strategy meetings and child protection conferences;
- Leading section 47 enquiries;
- Leading or overseeing multi-agency and single investigations (as required);
- Gathering information about whether a child is suffering significant harm, to support decision making;
- Build in family group decision making and family network engagement into child protection processes;

- Overseeing the development, review and closure of child protection plans;
- Input to onward planning for children and families (including continued support from Family Help or supporting reunification);
- Initiating emergency action (Emergency Protection Orders, Police Protection Orders); • deciding whether to move into pre-proceedings and the Public Law Outline (PLO) process; • providing relevant evidence to subsequent court proceedings;
- Providing advice and consultation for practitioners who need multi-agency child protection expertise;
- Maintaining an understanding of local patterns of significant harm and agency responses;
- Oversight of all children who are the subject of section 47 enquiries or on a child protection plan and a clear line of sight to and from the local safeguarding partnership. Working Together currently requires child protection conferences to be chaired by a social worker independent from the line management for the lead practitioner. The LCPP role will fulfil this function.

Key Deliverable 7: Information for Families

Expectations

Through both Family Help and MACPTs, local areas should:

- Build positive, trusting and co-operative partnerships with parents wherever possible;
- Set out their engagement, information and support offer for all parents and carers in child protection;
- Provide clear, accessible information and signpost support for all parents and carers from the point a section 47 enquiry is initiated. This should cover the process, what they can expect, what is expected of them, and their rights;
- Work with parents and carers, including those with lived experience of child protection, those living in areas of high deprivation and from diverse communities to design and deliver the service;
- Develop and implement a plan to reach a wide range of parents and carers including fathers and male carers, those who are neurodiverse and parents and carers where the harm is extra-familial, and parents are a protective factor;
- Consider innovative approaches to working with parents and carers who may be unwilling or unable to participate in decisions about their family;
- Adapt responses to meet the diverse needs of parents and carers including parents/ and carers of disabled children, parents and carers that are disabled, with mental health needs and/or who have English as an additional language; address all types of extra-familial harm children can experience outside the home and identify actions to address contexts of harm and the dynamics of extra-familial harm, including escalating risk and recognising and challenging system/structures drivers of harm.
- Consider the views of the child/young person when agreeing a plan; their acceptability of any actions will be key to ongoing engagement and ensure that the desired goals reflect what the child/young person needs.
- Understand the family members' background, ethnicity, religion, financial situation, education, sex, ages and sexual orientation, and potential barriers certain groups may experience in seeking and accessing help and support;
- Have in place relevant and appropriate arrangements to support

Key Deliverable 8: Family Group Decision Making

Expectations

- Ensure FHLPs identify a child's family network and engage them in decision making;
- Offer FGDM through family help, multi-agency child protection and care and consider offering FGDM at every decision point, including at the point of reunification;
- Consider how FHLPs can use the information about needs, any safeguarding concerns, risk or previous harm to inform decisions about wider family members who should be invited to engage in FGDM. MACPTs will operate as a local centre of child protection expertise and will provide consultancy and support across the system of help, support and protection. FHLPs will be able to consult with the MACPT on concerns about safety and wellbeing, including where FGDM is agreed;
- Agree when offering FGDM would not be in the child's best interest and set this out in a transparent way in line with their local protocol for assessment and support required by Working Together;
- Ensure family plans are integrated into, and given sufficient weight within, family help and child protection plans.

Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

Family Group Decision Making: Family group decision-making (FGDM) is a term used to describe a voluntary process that enables a family network to come together and make a family-led plan in response to concerns about a child's safety and wellbeing, working alongside skilled professionals. The plan will include offering practical support to parents and carers, whilst prioritising the safety and wellbeing of the child

Multi-Disciplinary Working: A range of practitioners and professionals from different backgrounds working together, to enable the best outcomes for children, young people and families.

Multi-agency working: Working across organisations to meet children, young people and families' needs including effective information sharing, joint decision-making and co-ordinated interventions, to facilitate effective help, support and protection. This includes in child protection where individuals from different 9 agencies come together into a single team to deliver statutory child protection functions whilst remaining connected to their parent agency.

Action Log: Children's Transformation Plan

Action ID	Date Action Raised	Source of Action (ie. raised through which forum and by whom)	Action Area	Action Owner	Action description	Action due date	Status	RAG rating
A_001	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Stakeholder Mapping	Gareth Profitt	Develop a Stakeholder Mapping Excersize to understand the range and influence of people we need to communicate with		Not Started	Blue
A_002	29.01.25	Good Practice Guide	Communications Plan	Gareth Profitt	Develop a communication plan to highlight the range of ccommunication needed and mechanisms to achieve good communication		Not Started	Blue
A_003	29.01.25	Good Practice Guide	Staff Engagement	Gareth Profitt	Create reflective spaces for staff to consider and work through the reforms, providing 'high support, high challenge' to ensure the success of the reforms		Not Started	Blue
A_004	29.01.25	Good Practice Guide	Define the vision and Shropshire's why	Natasha Moody	Co-design the vision for the programme with a clear understanding of why these reforms are critical to our success.	Mar-26	In Progress	Green
A_005	29.01.25	Good Practice Guide	Set Up Feedback Mechanisms	Jo Cox	Create mechanisms to provide feedback on the implementation including what works and even better if		Not Started	Blue
A_006	29.01.25	Good Practice Guide	Operational Guidance	Jennie Lowe	Update operational guidance to reflect the changes needed to implement the reforms	TBC	Not Started	Blue
A_007	29.01.25	Local Need	Communication Resources	Gareth Profitt	Develop a suite of resources which people across the partnership can use to share information, cascade key messages and secure feedback	TBD	Not Started	Blue
A_008	13.11.25	Local Need	Advocates	Jessica Sharma	Work with children to understand the role of advocates in the new system of support	TBC	Not Started	Blue
A_009	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Co-Design Reforms	Gareth Profitt	Map the mechanisms to engage those with lived experience in the design of the reforms.		Not Started	Blue
A_010	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Theory of Change		Develop a theory of change to reflect the national frameworks		Not Started	Blue
A_011	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Success Measures	Jess Edwards	Define the success measures so that we have a robust measurement and evaluation framework	Apr-26	Not Started	Blue
A_012	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Project Governance	Natasha Moody	Set up a multi-agency governance board with thematic workstreams	Jan-26	Completed	Blue

A_013	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Second Key Personel	Natasha Moody	Secure the personel in key partneragencies health and police	Jan-26	In Progress	Green
A_014	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Set up the PMO	Charlie Saywell	Set up the PMO to provide clear roles and responsibilities for success	Jan-26	In Progress	Amber
A_015	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Exit Planning	Steering Group	Define the exit arrangements for the governance so that we are clear about when the additional project structure can stop and how we transition into BAU		Not Started	Blue
A_016	04.11.25	DCMS Application	Staffing	Helena Williams	Appoint staff to key roles	Dec-25	In Progress	Amber
A_017	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Alignment across Reforms	Natasha Moody	Map and align the reforms into a single programme of change	29.10.25	Completed	Green
A_018	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Exit Plan	TBD	Develop an exit plan for how we transition into BAU	31.12.25	Not Started	Blue
A_019	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Transition Planning	TBD	Develop a Plan to transition teams into locality, co-located teams	31.03.26	Not Started	Blue
A_020	29.10.25	Programme Guide	Information Sharing	Jo Cox	Establish the information sharing agreements required to secure effective information sharing		Not Started	Blue
A_021	29.10.25	Programme Guide	Practice Framework	Jennie Lowe	Develop a partnership practice framework for each of the component aspects of the reforms.	31.03.26	Not Started	Blue
A_022	29.10.25	Programme Guide	Family Help	Health Lead	Define the multi-disciplinary compostion of the Family Help team and how they link with comminity services		Not Started	Blue
A_023	29.10.25	Programme Guide	Family Help	Donna Ward	Recruit Family Help Lead Practitioners		Not Started	Blue
A_024	29.10.25	Programme Guide	Family Help	Jennie Lowe	Develop the partnership shared practice framework for Family Help		Not Started	Blue
A_025	29.10.25	Programme Guide	Family Help	Jennie Lowe	Develop a multi-agency workforce development plan		Not Started	Blue
A_026	29.10.25	Programme Guide	Family Help	Donna Ward	Design processes to identify and allocate lead practitioners		Not Started	Blue
A_027	29.10.25	Programme Guide	Family Help	Jennie Lowe	Establish management and supervision structures for FHLP		Not Started	Blue
A_028	29.10.25	Programme Guide	Family Help	Kay Fletcher	Make changes to the system to reflect the single integrated system of support across TFH and CIN		Not Started	Blue
A_029	29.10.25	CEO assurance	Family Help	Jeanette Hill	Define the role of the LCPP		Not Started	Blue
A_030	29.10.25	Programme Guide	MACPT	Police Lead	Develop and Use Local Needs and Harms Profile to inform the design of the MACPT		Not Started	Blue
A_031	29.10.25	Programme Guide	MACPT	Jess Edwards/ Jennie Lowe	Determine the number, composition and location of the MACPT		Not Started	Blue
A_032	29.10.25	Programme Guide	MACPT	Police Lead	Promote a shared vision and identity for the MACPT		Not Started	Blue
A_033	29.10.25	Programme Guide	MACPT	Police Lead	Define how the MACPT will integrate with the Front Door, Court Teams and Children in Care		Not Started	Blue
A_034	29.10.25	Programme Guide	MACPT	Police Lead	Assess how well the MACPT are engaging with children and families		Not Started	Blue
A_035	29.10.25	Programme Guide	MACPT	Police Lead	Design the management and supervision system for MACPT		Not Started	Blue

A_036	29.10.25	Programme Guide	MACPT	Police Lead	Design the assurance processes for MACPT		Not Started	Blue
A_037	29.10.25	Programme Guide	FGDM	Jo Cox	Assess the current use of FGDM	Dec-25	Completed	Green
A_038	29.10.25	Programme Guide	FGDM	Maxine Elis	Identify opportnities to expand the use of FGDM		Not Started	Blue
A_039	29.10.25	Programme Guide	FGDM	Maxine Ellis	Aling FGDM with the processes across TFH and CIN		Not Started	Blue
A_040	29.10.25	Local Need	Reporting	Tim Compton	Automate the data for the submission of the data returns		Not Started	Blue
A_041	29.10.25	Local Need	Integrated Information	Laura Dowbiggin	Integrate a range of data and information to develop a household composition of need and information to support key workers to know who else is working with the family.		Not Started	Blue
A_042	29.10.25	Grant Condition	Reporting	Natasha Moody	Complete and submit the reporting requirements for DfE	19-Dec-26	Completed	Green
A_043	29.10.25	Grant Condition	Finance	Stephen Walters	Determine the total grant allocation for all reforms including what is allocated and where this is aligned to the future programme requirements or not	31-Jan-26	In Progress	Green
A_044	29.10.25	Local Need	Finance	Natasha Moody	Automate the finance reporting for DfE retuns	28.11.25	Not Started	Blue
A_045	29.10.25	Grant Condition	Finance	Natasha Moody	Define the allocation of the funding for all aspects of the programme	19.12.25	Not Started	Blue
A_046	29.10.25	CEO assurance	Sufficiency	Alan Potter	Sufficiency Strategy and Plan which is aligned to workforce plans	31.01.2025	Not Started	Blue
A_047	29.10.25	CEO assurance	Self Assessment	EL/NA and NM	Self Assessment Completed	30.10.25	Completed	Green
A_048	13.11.25	Good Practice Guide	Roll Out Approach	Natasha Moody	Options Appraisal for Roll Out approach	Nov-25	Completed	Green
A_049	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Self Assessment	Natasha Moody	Assess the current culture and practice using the national frameworks and feedback from staff	Nov-25	Completed	Green
A-050	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Practice Principles	Jennie Lowe	Co-Design Practice Principles with the partnership workforce	TBD	Not Started	Blue
A_051	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Leadershp Support	Natasha Moody	Seek leadership buy in and support for the change programme (internal and within the partnership)to secure the right support and for them to champion the change.	Jan-26	In Progress	Red
A_052	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Leading the change	Natasha Moody	Leadership at all levels secured and evidenced through the re-evaluation following the initial self assessment	Sep-26	Not Started	Blue
A_053	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Embed Continuous Learning	Jennie Lowe		TBD	In Progress	Amber
A_054	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Threshold Document	Jane Rose	Review the threshold document to reflect the transformation ambitions.	Mar-26	Not Started	Blue
A_055	29.10.25	Local Identified	Skills Audit	Jennie Lowe	Undertake a skills audit to asses the skills of the partnership workforce (note RPC, DA)	Mar-26	Not Started	Blue

A_056	29.10.25	Local Identified	Workforce Plan	TBD	Develop a workforce plan to ensure that the skills of the workforce reflect the needs and harms profile and the voice and experiences of children and families	May-26	Not Started	Blue
A_057	29.10.25	Knowledge Hub	Safeguarding Partnership	Jane Rose	Communication of changes and describe the change of SSCP	TBD	Not Started	Blue
A_058	29.10.25	CEO Assurance	Kinship	Scott Champman	Develop a Kinship Strategy and Plan to ensure that kinship is considered throughout our work	TBD	Not Started	Blue
A_059	29.10.25	CEO Assurance	Workforce Plan	Jennie Lowe	There is a workforce plan that includes a SW induction programme	TBD	Not Started	Blue
A_060	29.10.25	CEO Assurance	Workforce Plan	Jennie Lowe	Defined plan to reduce agency spend	Mar-26	Not Started	Blue
A_061	29.10.25	Programme Guidance	Meeting Need				Not Started	Blue
A_062	29.10.25	RPC Annual Report	Needs and Harms Assessment	Ash Molloy	Ensure that RPC data feeds into the overarching RPC	Dec-25	Completed	Green
A_063	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Language	TBD	Ascertain how the language we use gets in the way of us being effective.		Not Started	Blue
A_064	04.11.25	DCMS Application	Practice Standards	Jennie Lowe	Develop Practice Standards that define what good looks like	TBD	Not Started	Blue
A_065	04.11.25	DCMS Application	Youth Provider Charter	Ian (YPF)	Develop and embed a Youth Provider Charter	TBD	Not Started	Blue
A_066	04.11.25	DCMS Application	Leadership	LGA	Secure leadership support and buy in for the Youth statutory duties.	Jan-26	In Progress	Green
A_067	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Co-Design	Natasha Moody	Dedicate 4-6 months on Co-Design before implementation	28.02.26	In Progress	Green
A_068	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Co-Design	Natasha Moody	Ensure that the reforms are owned by and impemented by the partnership	01.09.26	In Progress	Green
A_069	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Co-Design	Natasha Moody	Faciliate a session to co-design the model of delivery	31.01.26	In Progress	Green
A_070	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Co-Design	Jo Cox	Develop a Business Case that describes the ambitions of all the transformation and seeks to align our resources to accomplish the ambitions	28.11.25	In Progress	Green
A_071	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Co-Design	Stephen Humphries	Map and Gap the mechanisms to engage children and young people to ensure that there is a clear plan to engage children (universal - specialist)	TBD	Not Started	Blue
A_072	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Co-Design	TBD	Integrate family voice into outcomes framework	Apr-26	Not Started	Blue
A_073	29.10.25	Good Practice Guide	Need Assessment	Jess Edwards	Conduct a needs analysis that illustrates the needs of households across Shropshire and informs the composition of the teams we have in place	31.12.25	In Progress	Green
A_074	04.11.25	DCMS Application	Local Offer	Jo Cox	Coproduce a local offer for young peopler	TBD	Not Started	Blue
A_075	04.11.25	DCMS Application	Engagement	Youth Engagement Worker	Develop mechanisms to ensure that youth democracy is embedded and influences the way we work	Aug-26	Not Started	Blue
A_076	29.10.25	RPC Annual Report	RPC Data	Ash Molloy	Ensure that the PC data is in place through all assessments.	30.09.26	In Progress	Amber
A_077	29.10.25	RPC Annual Report	Integrated Assessment	Donna Ward	Build an assessment that has the ability to follow the child and family and be intuitve to meet their needs.	May-26	Not Started	Blue
A_078	04.11.25	DCMS Application	Local Need	Amanda Cheesman	Conduct a JSNA to understand the needs of young people in Shropshire	TBD	Completed	Green
A_079	04.11.25	Statutory Duty	Sufficiency	Alan Potter	Publish a sufficiency strategy	Jan-26	In Progress	Green

A_080	11.12.2025	Local Need	Systems	Family Hub Delivery Lead	Data System to record attendance and impact of Family Hubs		Not Started	Blue
A_081	18.12.25	Schools	Automation	David Baker	Explore whether push notifications can be developed based on demographic factors	Mar-26	Not Started	Blue
A_082	18.12.25	Schools						
A_083	12.11.25	DfE BSiL Survey	Children's Centre Premises	Charlie Saywell	Determine the previous and existing Children's Centre's	30.11.25	In Progress	Green
A_084	18.12.25	Schools	Local Offer	Jo Cox	Redesign of the Local Offer (co-designed with C&F) fix broken links	TBD	Not Started	Blue
A_085	18.12.25	Schools	Communications	TBD	Roles and Responsibilities of different partners, roles and how the system works effectively		Not Started	Blue
A_086	18.12.25	Early Years Settings	Pathways	TBD	Defined pathways established these are unclear to some settings and schools.		Not Started	Blue
A_087	18.12.25	Schools	Integration Panels	TBD	Review the Integration Panels, who attends, what is the purpose and outcomes achieved in the last 12 months		Not Started	Blue
A_088	18.12.25	Schools	Communications	TBD	Map as is, 'referrals' across the multi agency partnerships	TBD	Not Started	Blue
A_089	18.12.25	Schools	Communications	TBD	Local Networking events and opportunities to explore as a multi-agency	TBD	Not Started	Blue
A_090	18.12.25	Early Years Settings	EY Forum	Julie Johnson	Find out whether Early Years Forum is still running and how impactful it is	Jan-26	Not Started	Blue
A_091	18.12.25	Schools	Inclusion	TBD	Ensure that the offer is accessible for ESOL		Not Started	Blue

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6 November 2025

Dear Tanya Miles,

As previously communicated you will receive funding from the Department for Education to deliver Best Start Family Hubs. This is a key part of the *Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life* strategy, which sets out the government's continued focus on enhancing early years and family services.

The integration of health services in Best Start Family Hubs is fundamental to delivering improved outcomes for babies, children and their families. This is why the Government will prioritise funding the continuation of existing Start for Life services. At this time, it is not possible to extend Start for Life funding for enhanced services to new LAs. The Government remains committed to supporting all local areas to strengthen and join up family services and we look forward to working with you to develop your Best Start local plans and neighbourhood health services.

This letter sets out the provisional funding allocations that you will be eligible to receive for the financial years 2026-27 to 2028-29. These are outlined in Annex A.

Payment of your funding allocations is subject to meeting the expectations of the programme. We reserve the right to withhold or reduce 2026-29 funding if local authorities do not meet these expectations.

We will share information in due course to support you and your partners in the delivery of the programme and we will also share further guidance ahead of April 2026 on service and delivery expectations, reporting and support.

If you have any questions about this letter, please email:
beststart.familyhubs@education.gov.uk

We look forward to working with you to continue to improve outcomes for babies, children and families through delivery of this important programme.

Yours sincerely,

Sachin Shah

Deputy Director,
Best Start Family Hubs Delivery,
Department for Education

Sarah Harriss

Deputy Director,
Start for Life Programme,
Department of Health & Social Care

Annex A: Provisional funding allocations for Shropshire Council

The allocations below are provisional. However, we hope that by providing this information now, you can begin planning delivery.

This annex provides you with information on the following:

1. Your provisional funding allocation
2. Your provisional funding allocations for 2026-27, 2027-28 and 2028-29
3. Your distribution of funding by strand

1. Your local authority's provisional programme allocation

Your provisional allocation for financial years 2026-29 of the programme is **£2,321,300.**

2. Distribution of funding by strand

To support you in planning delivery, we have also provided details of how the provisional allocation for your local authority is divided across the programme's strands.

We recognise that local authorities require flexibility through delivery and spending is unlikely to match the exact percentages set out in Table 1 below. We will expect spending to be broadly in line with the distribution in Table 1 (which is specific to your local authority) over the life of the programme. The only exception to this flexibility is for capital spend, which should only be used on capital activities.

Table 1: Distribution of your funding allocation across the relevant programme strands for financial years 2026-27, 2027-28 and 2028-29.

Strand	%[1]	2026-27 Allocation [2]	2027-28 Allocation	2028-29 Allocation
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - programme	47%	£406,900	£332,700	£341,700
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - capital	11%	£81,400	£83,000	£84,600
Parenting support	18%	£133,800	£135,500	£141,400
Home learning environment support	25%	£189,100	£191,400	£199,800
Total		£811,200	£742,600	£767,500

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[1] The distribution of funding has been rounded to one decimal place. The sum of percentages across strands may not total 100% due to this rounding.
[2] The allocation for 2026-27, 2027-28, 2028-29 has been rounded to the nearest 100 pounds. The sum of the allocations across strands may not total the maximum funding allocation due to this rounding.

3. **Methodology**

In determining funding allocations for each local authority, we have taken into account the different pressures they face. These include variations in population size, which affect service demand, as well as fixed costs that remain broadly consistent across areas. To support the government's commitment to giving every child the best start in life, the funding model also prioritises areas with higher levels of disadvantage, ensuring that resources are directed where they are needed most.

Each local authority's total funding allocation is made up of two components:

1. **A fixed amount** for each strand of the programme (see Table 2).

Table 2: Fixed amounts allocated to each local authority for each programme strand

Strand	Fixed percentage	Fixed amount
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant – programme (DfE funded)	50%	£782,356
Parenting support (DfE funded)	22%	£167,435
Home learning environment support (DfE funded)	22%	£167,435

2. **A variable amount**, distributed with a 4:1 weighting between the population of children in relative low income to the general population of children not in relative low income. This adjustment for the relative level of deprivation is included as all local authorities in England will receive this funding.

The funded strands each target a specific age group. Therefore, the population figures used reflect the most relevant age ranges for each strand's objectives (see Table 3).

Table 3: Age ranges used when calculating each local authority's relative population size

Strand	Age range used[3]
Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - programme	0 to 19
Parenting support	3 and 4
Home learning environment support	3 and 4

To allocate funding within the deprivation element, we have used the Department for Work and Pensions' Children in Low Income Families[4] dataset.

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[3] Estimates of the population for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics
[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics

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Message to all safeguarding partner leaders following the provisional local government finance settlement

Dear all,

Last November, Government more than doubled direct investment in prevention to over half a billion pounds for 2025/26 and launched the Families First Partnership (FFP) programme. Since then, many safeguarding partnerships have made a strong start at transforming services. But we must and will go further.

The local government policy statement, published on 20 November, confirmed over **£2.4 billion for FFP over the next three years,** including £866 million of new funding (£319 million from the Transformation Fund announced at the Spending Review and £547 million confirmed in the Policy Statement) – all ringfenced for prevention. This investment should strengthen partnerships' ability to identify and respond to harms inside and outside the home, ensuring children and families receive support to stay safely together.

To realise these ambitions, **funding must add to – not displace – existing investment in prevention** (such as targeted early help and child in need services and any other non-statutory spending). We recognise the tough budget decisions safeguarding partners face, but deprioritising prevention risks perpetuating the cycle of late, costly and disruptive interventions. To rebalance the system, drive down costs and improve outcomes for children and families, safeguarding partners must sustain existing shared spend on prevention. This funding should be used alongside existing prevention spend to provide additional investment in support. We will monitor spend through quarterly FFP returns and support you in demonstrating the impact of increased investment to your residents, Councillors and local partners. We expect these reforms and additional investment to shift the overall profile of spending towards earlier help for families. Draft grant conditions have been published alongside the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

Stronger partnership working is essential. Statutory safeguarding partners already share a statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children – this must now translate to joint action, funding and shared accountability for

delivering reform. Colleagues in health, police and local authorities must work hand-in-hand with education providers, childcare settings and other agencies to meet the needs of their communities. They should work together to agree how reform will be delivered, resourced and designed to suit local context – while recognising the opportunities reforms to ICBs, police and local government provide to improve local service delivery.

In 2025/26, we set expectations for local authorities to work with their safeguarding partners to co-design and plan the end-to-end system. In years 2 and 3, partnerships should focus on delivery and adapting multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to facilitate the changes needed to our shared systems. Alongside this, we expect safeguarding partnerships to ensure dedicated and expert roles in multi-agency child protection teams. Partners should first consider how existing resource can be reorganised and sustained to achieve reform goals in the long term. Local authorities can also use grant funding to support safeguarding partners to deliver reforms suited to their local context. Mechanisms, such as section 75 agreements with health partners, can support this approach.

We expect all safeguarding partnerships to evidence delivery of reforms through quarterly monitoring data and delivery plans, signed off by all lead safeguarding partners and submitted by the local authority. We also encourage local authorities to participate in the voluntary targeted early help annual data collection (TEHADC), which is vital for understanding the impact of reforms and is likely to become mandatory in future.

FFP is central to the most significant reform of children's services in a generation. Through landmark legislation in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill and increased investment, distributed through the new Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) formula, we will shift the focus of the children's social care system to early support to keep families together and fix the broken care market to put children first. This transformation is complex, but essential.

Thank you all for your continued dedication and to all staff across children's social care, police, health, education for your continued hard work.
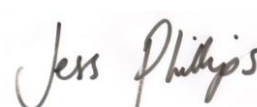

Yours sincerely,

Josh MacAlister MP

Minister for Children and Families

Ashley Dalton MP

Minister for Public Health and Prevention

Jess Phillips MP

Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls

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To: Tanya Miles – Shropshire Local Authority Interim Chief Executive
            Simon Whitehouse – ICB Chief Executive

cc.   James Walton – S114 Officer
            David Shaw – DCS Lead,
            Vanessa Whatley - Chief Nursing Officer ICB Executive Lead for SEND,
            Laura Powell - SRO for SEND (STW ICB)

15 December 2025

Dear Tanya and Simon,

Thank you once again for your continued efforts to improve support and opportunities for children and young people. Every child in our country deserves the best possible start in life – backed by education and care systems that meet their needs before issues escalate, where every child feels like they belong, and which set them up for life and work. We are committed to raising standards and unlocking opportunity for all children.

Further to the Secretary of State for Education's letter to the Education Select Committee on 22 October, the government will publish the full schools white paper in the new year, building on the work already done to create a system that's rooted in inclusion, where every child receives high-quality support early on and can thrive in their local school.

We want all schools to be inclusive by design, so children in every corner of the country can have their needs met in their community. That is why the Department for Education is prioritising investment in specialist and adapted places, with last week's announcement confirming at least £3 billion investment over the next four years to create 50,000 SEND places in mainstream schools across England. This builds on the £740 million we've already invested to create 10,000 places to deliver adaptations and expand specialist units.

We know that delivering lasting change will take collective commitment and sustained effort from all of us, working together to build the inclusive system our children deserve. We are committed to supporting you to do this.

We are keen to work with local authorities towards a system that enables every child to achieve and thrive. In the new year, following publication of the schools white paper, we will ask every local area to produce a Local SEND Reform Plan, setting out how they will move to a new special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system built on the 5 [principles set out by the Secretary of State](): early, local, fair, effective and shared.

- **Early.** Children should receive the support they need as soon as possible. Intervening upstream, including earlier in children's lives when this can have most impact, will start to break the cycle of needs going unmet and getting worse.

- **Local**. Children and young people with SEND should be able to learn at a school or college close to their home, alongside their peers, rather than travelling long distances from their family and community. Special schools should continue to play a vital role supporting those with the most complex needs.

- **Fair**. Every school education setting should be resourced and able to meet common and predictable needs, including as they change over time, without parents having to fight to get support for their children. Where specialist provision is needed for children and young people in mainstream, special or alternative provision, we will ensure it is there, with clear legal requirements and safeguards for children and parents.

- **Effective**. Reforms should be grounded in evidence, ensuring all education settings know where to go to find effective practice that has excellent long-term outcomes for children and young people.

- **Shared**. Education, health and care services should work in partnership with local government, families, teachers, experts and representative bodies to deliver better experiences and outcomes for all our children and young people.

We will also ask, as part of the Local SEND Reform Plan, for more regular data submissions, focused on the key indicators of improvement. These will form a vital foundation for implementing SEND reforms in a way that reflects the unique contexts of local areas and is underpinned by data and evidence. Full details of expectations of these plans will be published alongside the schools white paper. The government will also set out further details on our support for local authorities with historic and accruing deficits and conditions for accessing such support through the upcoming Local Government Finance Settlement. Support provided to local authorities will be linked to assurance that they are taking steps to

make that system a reality, in conjunction with government confirming the detail of SEND reform.

Local authorities should not wait for these details to assess their current plans to ensure they are realising best outcomes and value for young people. Like all areas of spend, we continue to expect local authorities to make sure they are doing all they can locally to manage their system effectively, ensuring the money is being spent in line with best practice. This is a joint effort, with shared responsibility between government, local authorities, health partners, and schools. System wide change will take time, and our children and young people only get one chance. We must therefore begin this essential work now and your leadership and partnership is critical to this.

It is crucial that you use this time to work together as local system partners to agree the key actions that you will take now to prepare your system for change. For all local authorities, it is crucial that you are working with education providers in your area to ensure that your offer is high-quality. For those of you with special and AP free school pipeline schools, we expect you to be talking to your trusts and working with them to develop your local offer – recognising the expertise that high-quality trusts can bring. We are introducing an early version of the Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Tool – a practical resource, developed through the Change programme. We strongly recommend that local area partnerships use it to assess the maturity of their current practice, and plan the changes needed to strengthen their local system. This will be an integral part of the Local SEND Reform Plan.

We recommend that you:

- bring your local partnership together to start planning the changes needed to strengthen your local SEND system

- review your data and agree a baseline for your current system performance

- use the Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Tool to assess the maturity of your current practice across education, health and care

- draw on inspection outcomes, learning from departmental programmes, and sector best practice to ensure you are working towards the delivery of high-quality services that are underpinned by the five principles for SEND reform

To help with this, we have attached with this letter:

- The Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Tool (Annex A) and guidance (Annex B)

- Enabling inclusion – starting points for local areas (Annex C)
- a summary of learnings and insights from the Department for Education's Change Programme (Annex D)

Support with preparations

We aim to collaborate with local authorities to ensure every pound spent in the SEND system delivers maximum benefit for children. That is why we are disseminating best practice and case studies from previous programmes focussed on efficient spending, such as Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value, and providing all local authorities with SEND and financial advisers to help consider how these learnings can be applied. These advisers will also play a key role in supporting you to prepare and plan for reform, helping you to review your data, embed best practice and drive progress toward the delivery of high-quality, inclusive services for children and young people. They will also share the priority metrics we recommend you use to baseline your performance.

Working alongside Department for Education officials and in partnership with NHS England, they will engage with you in the coming weeks to consolidate what this means for your local area and agree the best way to support you. In addition to your usual contacts, your DfE Head of Vulnerable Children's Unit (VCU) is Naomi Sharp, who can be contacted at Naomi.SHARP@education.gov.uk.

We will create opportunities for local authorities to share good practice and collaborate through Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA) forums. The Local Government Association (LGA) will provide additional support to collect examples of high-quality, inclusive SEND practice and insights from change programme areas and share them through these forums.

We will continue to support learning from partnership projects such as the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) and Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS).

We are acutely aware that our reforms to SEND are some of the most critical this government will deliver, and that is why it is vital we take the time to listen and get it right. We know you are working hard to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND in your area, in a challenging system, and we want to work with you to achieve the best outcomes for them and their families.

Thank you, again, for all of your hard work. We look forward to continuing the work to secure the best outcomes for children and young people and their families.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Amanda Doyle OBE
National Director for Primary Care and
Community Services and SEND executive
lead, NHS England

Dr Tim Coulson CBE
Director General, Regions Group
Department for Education

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Annex A: Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Tool (see separate attachment)

Annex B: Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Guidance (see separate attachment)

Annex C: Enabling inclusion – starting points for local areas

Enabling inclusion across a local area

Starting points for strengthening the support for mainstream settings to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND:

3 areas of focus	Starting points for local areas
Foundations of effective and trusting local partnership for inclusion Putting in place the system conditions for leadership and governance across the local area to ensure that changes are based on co-production across partners, including the voices of children, young people, and their parents and carers.	**Review and strengthen local SEND and AP partnership arrangements** by completing the Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Tool and use results to help prioritise further actions.
Shared ways of working to direct resources to needs across the local area Align operations across the local area to reduce fragmentation, ensuring partners work towards a shared vision for inclusion. This includes integrating data,	Build a **shared understanding of local workforce capacity** and development needs across partners Build a **shared picture of current and future needs** across the local area and how these can best be met Establish a **shared vision supported by a framework of outcomes and accountabilities** for partners

workforce strategy, funding and establishing a clear operating model for supporting settings.	Develop a **shared model for settings to access specialist support**, advice, and training
Support for mainstream settings and practitioners to meet needs Shift focus from reactive statutory support toward collaborative work with early years settings, schools and further education providers. Create a shared understanding of and commitment to inclusive practice, while building system capacity to identify needs and provide support.	**Facilitate collaboration between settings**, including outreach from specialist settings and providers Develop **common expectations and resources** for ordinarily available inclusive practice Ensure universal and targeted **support from specialists is well-targeted** to build capacity for early support Develop a **consistent data-informed view of inclusion at setting level** to inform support and challenge

Annex D: Insights from the Change Programme

Change Programme learning and insights from the REACh Consortium

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Date	Topic	Responsible Officer	Notes	All Member Briefing	Task and Finish Group	Report to committee	Previous topic to review
22/04/26	Quarterly Performance Report	TM/DS	Standing item to provide assurance and identify areas for further consideration			✓	
22/04/26	Safeguarding Annual Report and Business Plan	DS/NM/SM	To provide assurance and identify areas for further consideration			✓	
TBC	Dedicated Schools Grant deficit recovery plan	DS	Statutory recommendation from external auditors and the Improvement Plan			✓	
TBC	Statutory minimum service level	TM/DS	Recommended by Audit Committee			✓	
TBC	Children Looked After Numbers	DS/SM	Why is Shropshire an outlier compared to statistical neighbours and West Midlands?			✓	
TBC	Continuing Health Care	TM/NM	Possible T&F Group to explore this topic, hearing from officers, public and health partners		✓		
TBC	Prevention and Adult Social Care (ASC)	TM/NM/LT	What are Shropshire Council doing and what should be done to prevent and delay the requirement for ASC?			✓	
July 2026	All Member-Children's Social Care Annual Reports and Ofsted Inspection Outcome/Action Plan	DS	To develop awareness, understanding and provide assurance	✓			
TBC	Families First Partnership	DS/NM	Follow up on progress from 14/01/2026				✓
Latter 2026	All Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030	DS	12-month review following Cabinet decision				✓
Latter 2026	Telecare	NM	12-month review following Cabinet decision and call in				✓

Other identified areas of interest from Committee discussions, including topics for briefings:

- Education Place Planning and Sufficiency
- Specialist School Transport
- SEND Accelerated progress Plan (APP) Update
- Sensory Impairment Briefing
- Complaint trends and outcomes as discussed at Cabinet 09/07/2025

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