



People Overview Committee	<u>Item</u>
30 March 2021	<u>Public</u>

People Overview Committee Work Programme

Responsible officer

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1.0 Summary

1.1 This paper presents the People Overview Committee's proposed work programme for the 2021-2022 municipal year.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Committee members to:

- agree the proposed committee work programme attached as **appendix 1**
- suggest changes to the committee work programme and
- recommend other topics to consider.

3.0 Background

3.1 The work programme provides the opportunity for the committee to plan its work for the next twelve months. In planning its work, it should aim to produce a programme that features a combination of:

- scrutiny of council priorities, through its corporate plan (The Shropshire Plan)
- forthcoming policy proposals, as listed in the Forward Plan and from discussions with officers and administration members.
- community priorities that the public bring to the attention of elected members.
- priorities for action resulting from the council's financial and capital strategies.
- the work of our partners, for example the Marches Local Enterprise partnership or
- following up on previous recommendations from the committee.

3.2 In addition to the above, the council's financial strategy task and finish group last year considered the council's financial strategy for children's services. The group has forwarded the following topics to the People Overview Committee to consider as priorities for its work programme:

- Investment in early help programmes
- Social worker training and recruitment
- The Stepping Stones project

- Council-owned and managed residential care provision

3.3 Shropshire Council's overarching corporate plan, The Shropshire Plan, is currently in draft stage and has yet to be approved by Council. The Plan, when approved, will contain:

- Corporate priorities which the People directorate will be responsible for delivering;
- Plans and policies which together will deliver the priorities of the corporate plan; and
- A suite of performance management information that will allow elected members to scrutinise both the delivery of plans and policies, but also to determine whether those plans and policies had resulted in the expected change in performance.

3.4 Shropshire Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions is attached as **Appendix 2**. The relevant section of the interim report of the Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group is attached as **Appendix 3**. There will be an opportunity for further scrutiny of the Shropshire Plan when it has been approved by Council in May this year.

4.0 Next steps

4.1 Officers will present a refreshed work programme at each committee meeting. In addition, the committee will meet informally between committee meetings to discuss which topics they wish to scrutinise at future meetings.

<p>List of background papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</p>
<p>None</p>
<p>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)</p>
<p>All</p>
<p>Local Member</p>
<p>All</p>
<p>Appendices</p>
<p>Overview and scrutiny work programme</p>
<p>Extract from report of Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group – January 2022</p>
<p>Forward Plan of Key Decisions – March 2022</p>

Appendix 1

Overview and Scrutiny work programme for municipal years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023

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Topic	Objectives	Participants	Information required	Date
Responding to the Covid-19 pandemic	Understand how Shropshire Council is responding to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, with regard to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• early help• safeguarding• education	Executive Director, Children's Services Portfolio Holder		11 Aug 2021
Briefing School Place Planning	Understand how the council forecasts the demand for school places, the funding available to build school capacity, and how it works with schools to increase capacity when required.	Service Manager, Business Support		21 Sep 2021
School Place Planning	Scrutinise <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the methodology for planning school places and• the historical, current and planned capacity of primary, secondary and special school places.	Service Manager, Business Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current and planned capacity in primary, secondary and special schools in Shropshire• Comparison with neighbouring local authorities	29 Sep 2021

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Topic	Objectives	Participants	Information required	Date
School exclusions	Scrutinise exclusion rates by local authority.	Executive Director, Children's Services Portfolio Holder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School exclusion policy • School exclusion rates by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ year of exclusion ○ primary/secondary ○ mainstream/SEND • Benchmarking with other local authorities • Commissioning of places in pupil referral units 	17 Nov 2021
Corporate Parenting Panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the role and work of the corporate parenting panel. • Scrutinise the panel's work in achieving good outcome for looked-after children. 	Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Portfolio Holder		17 Nov 2021
School Rebuilding Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An update on the Government's Schools Rebuilding Programme, in relation to funding for schools in Shropshire. 	Service Manager, Business Support		17 Nov 2021
BRIEFING Stepping Stones	Overview of the Stepping Stones project, which seeks to move looked after children from residential into foster care.	Assistant Director, Children's Social		11 Jan 2022

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Topic	Objectives	Participants	Information required	Date
		Care and Safeguarding		
Stepping Stones	Scrutiny of the Stepping Stones project, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationale for project • Objectives • Achievements to date 	Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Portfolio Holder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information required to be determined. 	30 March 2022
Youth services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutinise implementation of recent review of youth services. • Examine the effectiveness of the changes resulting from the implementation of the review findings. 	Executive Director, Children's Services Portfolio Holder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current youth work capacity and services • Other data to be determined by the committee 	30 March 2022
CAMHS	Strategy Moorhouse GAP analysis	Executive Director, People Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin CCG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	9 May 2022

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Topic	Objectives	Participants	Information required	Date
SEND written statement of action	Scrutinise progress in delivering the outcomes of the SEND written statement of action.	Executive Director, People Portfolio Holder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written statement of action Ofsted inspection findings 	9 May 2022
Committee Planning Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify priorities for the 2022-2023 municipal year Outline objectives for identified priorities 	Executive Director, People Portfolio Holder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shropshire Plan Service plans Mid-term financial strategy 	Late May 2022
Ofsted inspection – findings and action plan	<p>Understand the findings and recommendations for action from the recent Ofsted inspection of the council's services for children and young people.</p> <p>Scrutinise the council's proposed action plan to address any recommendations arising from the inspection.</p>	Executive Director, People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted inspection findings Any subsequent action plan to address Ofsted's recommendations. 	June 2022
Virtual School Head	Overview of the work of the virtual school head for looked after children	Virtual School Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demographic information on current virtual school cohort. 	June 2022
West Mercia Youth Justice Service			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information required to be determined. 	June 2022

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Topic	Objectives	Participants	Information required	Date
Safeguarding and community safety partnership annual report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of the objectives of the safeguarding partnership. • Identify potential areas of scrutiny for the committee. 			
Closing the gap - Pupil attainment	Scrutinise performance in Shropshire in closing the attainment gap of children from deprived backgrounds	Executive Director, Children's Services Portfolio Holder	Pupil attainment, divided by pupil premium, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key stage 2 • Key stage 4 • GCSE 	Late 2022
Post-16 destinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse the outcomes of school leavers. • Identify services to support school leavers not continuing into education, employment or training. 	Executive Director, Children's Services Portfolio Holder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational outcomes for children aged 16 and over • Comparison with previous years • Benchmarking with other local authorities 	Late 2022

Appendix 2

Extract from interim report of financial strategy task and finish group

8. **Medium-term financial strategy: children's services**

- 8.1 In September 2021 the group discussed the ongoing pressures on children's services arising from increased demand for its services. The group noted the significant increase in the number of children becoming looked after by local authority, rising from 504 in March 2021 to 571 in September 2022.
- 8.2 At this meeting the group received benchmarking data that provided a comparison of spending on children's services compared to both local authorities in the West Midlands and statistically comparable local authorities such as Wiltshire and Devon. Shropshire Council spends less per head on children's services than any other local authority in the West Midlands and has done so since at least the 2014-2015 financial year. In the latest year for which there is data available, the 2019-2020 financial year, Shropshire Council spent £719 per head of population aged 0-17, compared to a mean spend of £952 and a spend of £1,464 in Stoke on Trent. This suggested that there was limited, if any, capacity to cut costs further, although the group noted the high cost of agency social workers discussed in paragraph 8.6 below. Instead, to avoid increased costs through increased demand on high-cost services such as residential care, Shropshire Council would have to look to new ways of working.
- 8.5 The group discussed key strands of the council's work to bring down immediate costs and to redesign services that produced better outcomes at a lower cost.
- 8.6 ***Social worker recruitment***
The group noted an almost £1 million expenditure on agency social workers, asking why Shropshire Council spent so much on agency staff. It heard that there was a national shortage of social workers. This shortage was a chronic issue, with the demand for qualified social workers rising despite the number of newly qualified workers remaining static nationally. As a result of this shortage, many social workers were instead choosing to work for staff agencies, affording them greater flexibility and often better pay. This had in part created a chicken-and-egg situation, with increasing shortages of qualified staff creating a growing market for agency staff.

The council has recognised that as a rural area with a low-wage economy, it is unable to compete with urban local authorities to recruit social workers. Although the council conducted a round-the-year recruitment campaign, it tended to attract social workers in their first year of practice, meaning that they both required ongoing additional support and could only take on limited caseloads.

The council had therefore embarked on a programme of training and developing its own workforce through apprenticeships. This was a long-term project that would take years before it produced a consistent supply of trained workers. In 2020 the council had recruited eight people to its apprenticeship programme, with a further six recruited in 2021.

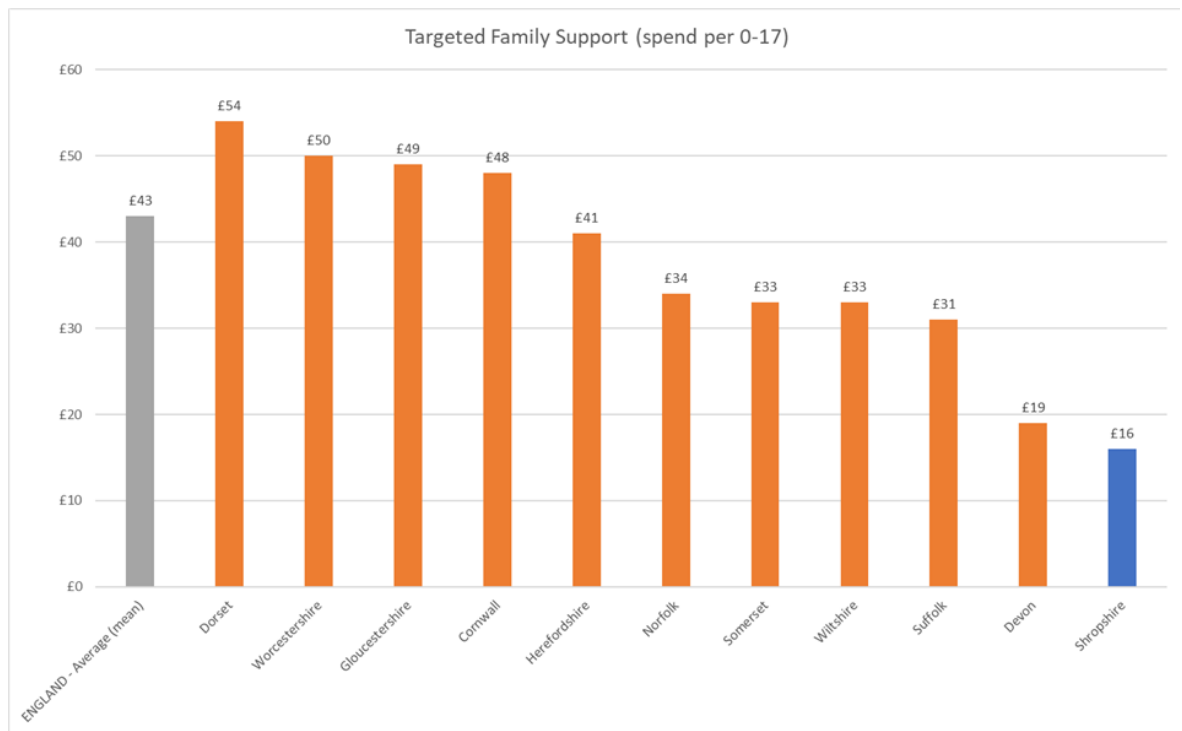
The group supported this approach. It recognised that longer-term investment in staff not only had the potential to reduce agency costs, but to also create a committed workforce with strong local knowledge.

The group therefore recommended that the People Overview Committee continue its ongoing scrutiny of the recruitment and development of social workers.

8.7 Investment in early help

The group heard from officers that reductions in funding for early help for troubled families had resulted in cases of neglect and other disfunction worsening to the point where more resource intensive support was required. This could be seen in increasing numbers of children becoming looked after, as well as an increase in the number of children being excluded from mainstream education. The reduction in funding was across the public sector, with cuts in funding for police community work and educational support in schools.

Benchmarking with other local authorities shows that in the 2018-2019 financial year, expenditure on early help in Shropshire was significantly lower than the England average spend of £43 per child aged 0-17 compared to a spend of £16 in Shropshire. This spend was half of that in similar local authorities, as can be seen in the chart below.



The group heard that spending had been allocated in the medium-term financial strategy to fund early help, with investment of just over £500,000 in the next financial year (2022-23) and £400,000 for the following year to create a preventative demand management model. The expectation in the strategy is that the increased investment would result in lower costs after 2024-2025

8.8 Stepping Stones

Perhaps the most significant invest to save project within Children’s Services was the Stepping Stones project. This project used restorative family therapy to keep children at risk of family breakdown out of residential care and in the family home. The project also sought to work with children to allow them to move from more intensive residential care into more mainstream residential care, or from residential care back into the family home.

The council has budgeted just over £2 million from invest to save funding to Stepping Stones, of which almost £500,000 had been spent in the year to date as at 31 December 2021. The project so far has resulted in 20 children avoiding residential care and 6 children stepping down from more intensive support or leaving residential care altogether, reducing care costs by £1.68 million in the year to date. The project has an overall savings target of £6.4 million.

The group noted that the project had a target of reducing the number of children needing high-cost residential care from 60 to 20. The group agreed that this would be a significant challenge for the local authority, with the resultant financial

risk to the council of investing in Stepping Stones project while also paying for greater numbers of residential care than planned for.

8.9 **Local authority residential care**

A 2018 report from the People Overview Committee had highlighted the high and fast-rising cost of private residential care. As Shropshire Council had few children's residential home placements, it was almost entirely reliant on the private sector market for residential care. This was a significant cost to the local authority, with packages of care costing up to £400,000 per year being increasingly commonplace. Following the People Overview Committee's report, the council embarked on an invest-to-save to increase its residential care capacity.

The increase in the number of children becoming looked after was a national issue, although the rise in Shropshire since the pandemic had been higher than in other local authorities. In addition, the children the council looked after had increasingly complex issues, resulting in a greater reliance on specialist residential care. This was again a national issue, which had resulted in increased demand for specialist residential care, which in turn had resulted in years of rising costs. It was now commonplace for residential care for the most complex children to cost £8,000 per week.

To date the local authority has set up two new two-bedroom children's homes for some of the council's most complex looked-after children. Although these homes cost the local authority £805 per child per week, they still provide an annual cost saving to the council of £44,000 per child in addition to being able to keep children within the local area.

The council is also currently building a further 4-bedroom children's home for children aged 16 and older, to provide supported but increasingly independent living for children as they transition into adulthood. If successful, this should have the additional benefit of reducing adult social care costs in future years.