

**Committee and Date****Cabinet****10 September 2025**

Item

Public



Children's Services Ofsted Report and Next Steps

Responsible Officer:

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1. Synopsis

- 1.1 This report summarises the recent three-week Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), of Shropshire Children's Services and outcomes achieved.
- 1.2 It also outlines the work undertaken to drive the service to achieve Outstanding as its recent final judgment, including actions taken by the service after the November 2023 Ofsted focussed visit that identified areas for improvement in specific child protection practices.
- 1.3 These actions outlined below, renewed governance, performance and management approaches that underpin the services delivery model are intended to enable the service to retain the Outstanding judgement going forward. The continuous improvement model in place are responding to challenges effectively and secure developments robustly.

- 1.4 A Children's Improvement Board was established with cross party representatives and officers working together, alongside SLIP, (service led improvement partner) activities and Department for Education advice and support accessed.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report provides the background and updated position relating to the recent Ofsted ILACS inspection visit 16th June 2025 to 4th July 2025, where Shropshire Children's Services achieved the Outstanding overall rating.
- 2.2. This is an overall improvement since the ILACS judgement of Good overall achieved in February 2022.
- 2.3. The judgements made are as follows and can found in the published Ofsted report.

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children in care	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding

- 2.4. Inspectors' comments highlighted below are in the published report and describe their key findings and professional reasons for their judgement.
- 2.5. Children in Shropshire achieve positive outcomes and demonstrate measurable progress due to effective services that comprehensively address their needs and mitigate risks.
- 2.6. Since the last ILACS inspection in February 2022, and particularly since the subsequent focused visit in November 2023, which identified a decline in child protection practice, senior leaders have taken purposeful action to implement a wide range of evidence-based improvements across the service. These improvements are having a discernible and positive impact, enabling vulnerable children, care leavers and families to make and sustain significant change, ultimately improving their lives

- 2.7. Senior leaders are ambitious, family focused and firmly child centred. Taking a whole-council approach, they have worked closely with political leaders and multi-agency partners, demonstrating unwavering commitment to improving outcomes for children and care leavers.
- 2.8. Leaders have cultivated a culture of ambition and continuous improvement. All areas of service are characterised by many areas of excellence, compassion, and a resolute focus on outcomes. Listening to children, understanding their lived experiences and acting on their views are strongly embedded in practice.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That Cabinet acknowledges this outstanding achievement and the positive impact on the lives of children, young people and families.
- 3.2. That Cabinet acknowledge the Council wide commitment to sustaining and embedding this outstanding achievement, at the same time recognising the preventative benefits that doing so will bring to children, young people and families.
- 3.3. The report to be shared with Full Council on the 25th September 2025.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. Children's Services maintenance of these high standards must be continued to avoid the risks of having an inadequate or requires improvement judgement in the future.
- 4.2. These judgements often lead to significant additional spending requirements and improvement work requiring additional funding of £10-15m upwards, with higher costs often aligned to external intervention imposed on Local Authorities as a result. This could include Department of Education advisors and external reviewers being recommended. This can reduce the autonomy of the service, including requiring structural changes, and therefore impact the whole council.
- 4.3. Children's Services are securing a clear plan to address next steps recommendations made for development by Ofsted, alongside working together across the council and system partners through the Ambitions Board to continue to build on the achievements to date.
- 4.4. It is essential to retain the outstanding practice seen across many areas of Children's Services that is enabling the children, young people and their families of Shropshire to thrive.

4.5 Risk table

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

	DCS quarterly updates evidence what we know, what we are developing and improving, what our next steps are for addressing this. This framework allows the service to have transparent conversations about challenges that are identified quickly and responded to quickly with robust remedial actions. Monitoring of the challenge is put in place until resolution is secured.
Imposed spend on the council by DFE because of Ofsted determining standards and outcomes have deteriorated through their annual engagement meeting reviews with the DCS and intelligence gathering including performance tools nationally used re the CHAT Tool.	Potential for imposed spending against the budget for improvements required to safeguard children. Often more than £10-£15m depending on the issues noted. Can include increased staffing, resources and services, specialist support and intervention, and DFE advisors oversight

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. Shropshire Council continues to manage unprecedented financial demands as budgeted for within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy approved by Council on 27 February 2025 and subsequent updates. It is also addressed in our monitoring position presented to Cabinet monthly. Significant management action has and continues to be undertaken to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all reports provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. Where non-essential spend is identified within the Council, this will be reduced. This may involve
 - scaling down initiatives,
 - changing the scope,
 - delaying implementation, or
 - extending delivery timescales.
- 5.2. The Ofsted Inspection does not consider the financial implications of the delivery of services, instead focussing on the quality of delivery and experiences.
- 5.3. Given sufficient time, the outstanding practice evident in Children's Services will reduce the numbers of children and young people in the care of the Local Authority. Evidence from other areas who have sustained and embedded outstanding practice demonstrates that this leads to reduced costs in this area and the ability to re-direct funding into even greater preventative services. This further strengthens the numbers of children and young people coming into care and enables greater family orientated support to be provided safely. This is the basis for the national Children's Social Care reforms, Families First Partnership (FFP).

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. The rural nature of Shropshire and the statutory requirement to ensure children and young people are safe, is for the majority of children's practitioners visits to be face to face. In the hub and/or at other locations like community venues or even school

depending on the families and the situations circumstances. This does place a demand of workers across the service to travel to family homes. This places a demand on energy fuel and consumption.

- 6.2. Where the service can use the Teams function is used for meetings to reduce the impact of our workforces use of their cars, However some of the service's statutory functions require face to face time to be secured: including child protection multi agency case conferences, legal meetings, direct work sessions with children, young people and their families, court directed events and family time being some examples. Where the service can, and it is appropriate, we do use the Teams function comprehensively across the services. Of course, this is also reliant on the families access to a laptop and internet in their own homes too.

7. Background

- 7.1. Following the Good overall judgement ILACS in 2022 Shropshire Children's Services agreed a vision to underpin the next steps of the services development. Delivering this vision has been the focus of the service since the ILACS 2022 by implementing the beliefs and behaviours that underpinned the vision set out below.
- 7.2. **By treating our children and young people with respect, love and trust and with the right amount of encouragement we can inspire them to dream big, build relationships and connections that matter, and together with kindness and a sense of belonging we can do great things.**
- 7.3. Children and young people should live in their family homes and their communities when safe to do so and their needs can be met. They will be supported to access services in their communities that enable their families to thrive and children to secure good outcomes without escalating into statutory child protection or Looked After services.
- 7.4. We should work together with families at the earliest opportunity to enable and empower Shropshire's families and young people to achieve their best lives.
- 7.5. Our Early Help services enable families to access preventative support, reducing and preventing the risk to children and young people of experiencing significant harm. Through this approach the numbers of referrals now coming through to the social care service have reduced and we continue to build strong partnership relationships, securing positive interventions, assessments and parenting support across Shropshire.
- 7.6. We deliver this through a culture of evidence based restorative practice and strengths-based relationships that we know can change lives. Our leadership and practice are underpinned by these behaviours and values.
- 7.7. Children and young people subject to child protection plans will experience a social work intervention and partnership approach that enables them to be safer and remain in their family homes and communities. We will make timely decisions about when their needs cannot be met in their home environment and securing their permanence plans as quickly as we can.

- 7.8. We are aspirational for the Children we look after in our care when they cannot live in their birth family. Strong corporate parenting support across the council enables us to parent and support our children as our own, encouraging them and advocating for them, to be the best version of themselves and to live their best life.
- 7.9. Children and young people should have the benefit of being able to grow up in a family, either their own or foster care. When they do have to live in a children's home for a period, we are aspirational in always working towards them moving back into a family environment when they are ready to do so.
- 7.10. Children should make excellent progress in our care. Plans are creative and in line with the wishes and feelings of the child. Long term support is provided to families where children have returned home or to connected carers through Stepping Stones.
- 7.11. Our care leavers deserve high quality support and ongoing relationships as we stay connected, and we ensure they are accessing education and employment opportunities at the right time for them.
- 7.12. A focussed visit was undertaken by Ofsted (as part of their usual routine) in November 2023, Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for children subject to a child protection plan, with a particular focus on the quality and impact of pre-proceedings interventions. This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. This identified some key areas of practice within specific areas of the service that required improvement work to be secured.
- 7.13. During the Focused visit in November 2023 the Executive Director of People and the Chief Executive agreed the implementation of an Improvement Board to address the challenges experienced in Children's Services that inspectors had seen. This included caseloads being too high at that time, high turnover of staff in specific teams, and the need to reduce drift and delay with child protection plans and securing permanence for some children.
- 7.14. An Improving Outcomes for Children plan was agreed underpinned by the practice principle that "All children have the right intervention, at the right time, and live with a family, theirs or another one, where it is safe and right for them to do so"
- 7.15. December 2023 The establishment of the Children's Improvement Board was approved by full Council with the priority of the drawing up of a Children's Improvement Plan. Key areas of improvement were identified service wide with a focus on Children in need, child protection and public law outline matters.
- 7.16. The Initial Meeting was held on the 5th of Dec 2023. Executive Directors, Local Government Improvement Advisor, Cross party members and other relevant council department Assistant Directors were members. The Chief Executive Chaired the meeting.
- 7.17. The Children's Improvement Plan was developed. The Cabinet and the full council supported this.

- 7.18. The Board met monthly and received reports on progress and challenge updates against the action plan, including Quality Assurance Reports.
- 7.19. The Action plan had seven areas of development and was applied across the service where relevant.
- 7.20. The Board had a performance dashboard that measured the progress of key areas of improvement, e.g., caseloads, social workers/ agency social workers, changes in social workers, as well as the performance measures as per the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) dashboard.
- 7.21. Staffing capacity was addressed and 19 additional permanent posts agreed, 4 social workers, 4 Specialist Child Protection Social Workers (pilot), 3 additional Team Managers, 5 additional Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO), and a Permanence Coordinator. Legal Executive to progress Special Guardianship Orders conversions and Placement with Parents discharges.
- 7.22. Sector Led improvement partnerships (SLIP) were agreed and commissioned to support the service developments of Quality Assurance (QA) and Audit, Front Door, and Early Help.
- 7.23. DfE Improvement Advisor, Gladys Rhodes White, was invited by Shropshire Council to offer high challenge, support and expectations into the system and offer critical friend conversations of improvements being undertaken.
- 7.24. The Shropshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership worked together to start driving the "Turning the Curve Agenda", spotlight sessions were held, and the Partnerships operating model has been evaluated and re-established in line with Working Together 2023 requirements. The national agenda for reform of children's services is understood and planning for the transformation and implementation is underway. A recently appointed Families First Partnership (FFP) Strategic Lead will be driving the implementation of the national Families First Agenda, under the direction of the Director of Children's Services.
- 7.25. Progress has been made as a result and good/outstanding outcomes for children and young people have become increasingly consistent and impactful on their lives. This is evidenced through the continuous improvement work embedded in the system, including weekly performance check and challenge meetings, auditing, feedback from children, young people and their families, senior leadership review and management oversight.
- 7.26. SLIP work has been undertaken with Wiltshire Local Authority (LA) reviewing and learning re QA, audit and closing the loop – this is ongoing.
- 7.27. We are completing more child journey audits, increasingly being judged as good and outstanding. Theme led dip sampling is embedded in the system and proactive challenge is in place through the management structure, and support is applied to resolve challenges timely and effectively. Our audit practice and performance oversight through the leadership team is evidencing positive impacts for young people and their families.

- 7.28. We are learning from these outcomes, providing immediate remedial actions including training if required, engaging the team managers and seeing closing the activity in children and young people's records.
- 7.29. The Independent reviewing officer (IRO) footprint is seen in children's records and offers appropriate support and challenge when required. IROs are gathering children's wishes, feelings and views and the Independent Chair scrutiny work has increased.
- 7.30. Caseloads have reduced across the service and are now mostly manageable, and social workers told the inspectors when asked. Caseload management is a specific issue in different teams and management oversight and supervision facilitates the workers throughput as needed. .
- 7.31. Early help referrals have significantly increased, and weekly transfer meetings are securing timely transfer to the right team at the right time. Monitoring is consistently embedded.
- 7.32. The number of changes of social worker has significantly reduced over the last 9 months.
- 7.33. Early help provision and pathways are continuing to support children and families, and they are benefitting from this quickly at the point of referral. This is reducing the likelihood of families requiring social work intervention.
- 7.34. We are completing assessments more quickly and have clear performance oversight embedded avoiding drift and delay.
- 7.35. If children need to come into care for their safety this is done in a timely and effective manner
- 7.36. We are starting more and completing Public Law outline (PLO processes) more effectively. This is the work undertaken alongside families prior to court proceedings being instigated to avoid the proceeding if possible. Pre proceedings work, including commissioning of specialist assessments and support services is embedded and care proceedings are being completed more quickly. Care Proceedings are timelier.
- 7.37. We are securing permanence outcomes for children including Special Guardianship Order (SGO) and Adoption plans securing their futures and forever families.
- 7.38. Service managers are chairing legal planning meetings and decision making is collaborative with legal colleagues and operational managers.
- 7.39. The service has completed the work with the SLIP Wiltshire LA to improve the experience for families of the pre proceedings and legal pathways. This has influenced the development of the procedures and practice guidance that has been updated.
- 7.40. The July 2024 focused visit by Ofsted looked at the local authority's arrangements for children in care, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. There were positive reflections made, and good practice seen in these areas, with

practice improvement recommendations made to further enhance the services provided.

- 7.41. Additional service developments continued to be implemented, including a project team to review and oversee all children and young people that were subject to Placement with Parents (PwP) and living at home with their parents on care orders. Alongside practice learning, they identified those children that they could take back to court to have care orders revoked, enabling the children and their families to no longer require statutory intervention. This also applied to children and young people where special guardianship orders were identified as their permanence plan.
- 7.42. The project team developed and delivered good practice workshops across the service to support the timeliness of practice and improvements became embedded in the system.
- 7.43. The case management teams progressed permanence outcomes within their caseloads to. Adoptions, Special Guardianship Orders and Placement with parents' arrangements, revocation of care orders have continued to progress and become timelier.
- 7.44. Permanence tracking, check and challenge is embedded in the system and fortnightly reviews and weekly performance meetings are supporting with high expectations, challenge and support for this work to be progressing. Additional fostering panels and agency decision maker (ADM) time is also agreed to enable children's outcomes to be secured.
- 7.45. The corporate parenting strategy (2024-27) was influenced by the voice of care experienced children and young people. This included the council pledge and the Care Leavers Local Offer, both of which were co-produced with care experienced children, young people.
- 7.46. The corporate parenting strategy was presented to full Council on 12th December by the Lead Member and care experienced young person (Co-chair of Corporate Parenting Steering Board). There was an emphasis on bringing love back into the system, shaping and delivering services with care and compassion.
- 7.47. Participation and listening to the voice of children and young people is subject to continuous improvement and this was seen as a strength during the recent inspection
- 7.48. Establishing the new DCS role according to statutory guidance will allow exclusive attention to children's services. This will help sustain current standards and support ongoing improvements aligned with the Families First Partnership (FFP) national agenda for change.

ILACS Inspection Preparation and Outcomes

- 7.49. Preparation for the ILACS inspection picked up further pace in October 2024 with the appointment of an Ofsted improvement lead, working with the senior leadership team to focused on the specific requirements and information needed to successfully engage in the three-week inspection programme.

- 7.50. Weekly Ofsted and performance meetings were held addressing the requests for information sought by Ofsted.
- 7.51. Annexe A requirements are the eleven child-level data lists that cover the period of 6 months before the date of notification. This requires continuous review, updates and collaboration across performance, reporting, LCS and operational teams.
- 7.52. A self-evaluation framework is required to include cross service information, gathering evidence that demonstrates what we know about social work practice, what we are doing to address the challenges, and having identified the challenges ourselves, what remedial actions do we have in place to address them.
- 7.53. The last 6 months of service audits are also required with moderation and closing the loop activity evidenced. In addition to specific documents needing to be gathered and sent to the inspectors for their review. They chose up to 12 of these children for deep dive review and would be talking with social workers directly about their work.
- 7.54. Week one the inspectors are off site, but require the information as outlined above, we start organising their diaries and embedding the logistics plan for week two and three when they will be on site.
- 7.55. A council project team was put in place and was responsible for ensuring the logistics, evidence gathering, and communication with inspectors, the service, partners, SLT and members was planned for and put in place.
- 7.56. The service also held biweekly Assistant Director update sessions with all of children's services to give updates, share performance challenges, or audit learning and secure remedial actions collaboratively with practitioners and their managers directly.
- 7.57. Performance and practice challenges increased further into the new year 2025, with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), closing the loop activity – ensuring actions from audits are completed.
- 7.58. Team Managers were engaged and responding proactively, receiving tools to support their focus areas. Monthly End to End meetings and Performance Management Group engage the Team managers directly every other week as a check in, discussion with them about a practice issues, auditing together and challenges in the system to seek solutions are ongoing.
- 7.59. SLT weekly performance and business meetings have oversight and provide challenge, continuing to drive the readiness for Ofsted across the teams. Through a culture of children first, high support and high challenge, alongside high expectations for the service children and young people receive.
- 7.60. The team are also focussed on collating good practice examples and enabling the frontline workers to be able to demonstrate the very best of their practice when inspectors call in their children's records.
- 7.61. After a three-week period of working with Ofsted inspectors, Shropshire Council Ofsted ILACS Inspection ended on Friday 4th July 2025.

- 7.62. The inspection held over a three-week period, included detailed case work analysis, data review, and interviews with partners, children, and families, and assessed the service across four key areas including:
- 7.63. The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families – outstanding
- 7.64. The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection – outstanding
- 7.65. The experiences and progress of children in care – outstanding
- 7.66. The experiences and progress of care leavers – good
- 7.67. Overall effectiveness – outstanding
- 7.68. This achievement reflects significant progress since the overall good judgement secured in 2022, and Ofsted focused visits undertaken in 2023 and 2024. It also builds on the current ratings of our six children's homes rated good and outstanding.
- 7.69. It's great that Ofsted's findings and judgement have recognised this organisational achievement and highlighted your dedication and ongoing commitment to children, young people and their families.
- 7.70. The following outlines the considerable work and complexity of an ILACS three-week inspection and the demands it placed upon services and practitioners already undertaking their day jobs to safeguarding children and young people in the community.

Day one Monday 16th June 2025

- 7.71. The inspectors were offsite for the first week, but the service and project team worked with them daily to be prepared for their arrival on the following Monday for the fieldwork they planned to undertake across the operational teams.
- 7.72. The DCS had a set up meeting with the inspectors and they outlined their requirements for the inspection; they had specific lines of enquiry for Shropshire from the focused visits and performance data and advised they would be seeking evidence to assure themselves these matters were or had been addressed whilst undertaking their work in the service.

Week one

- 7.73. The Timetabling for week two and three was agreed, this requires planning and set up of the meetings expected (usually 4 meetings per inspector), in addition to visits being arranged to meet children and young people in their home and or group that they are attending.
- 7.74. We had four inspectors on site week one and six onsite week three including an HMI for schools, in addition to a specific inspector that undertakes a Quality assurance role.

- 7.75. There were over **95** bespoke meetings arranged, with the DCS, Ofsted Keeping in Touch meetings, staff, partners, adults' services and the Virtual school, CAFCASS, Local Judiciary, Chief Executive, Portfolio Holder and children, young people and their families spoken with. In addition, there were internal keeping in touch meetings held sometimes twice daily with operational Service Managers and relevant internal colleagues joining.
- 7.76. From day one the senior leadership team were working alongside their operational teams and social workers to quality assure their children's records, offer support and be available for debriefing staff as they meet with inspectors to secure any key lines of enquiry. Including during their weekends.
- 7.77. The project team managed all enquiries, performance and children's records system (LSC) colleagues, senior leaders PAs, and support staff oversaw the governance of the inspection and managed the flow of information from and to the inspectors themselves, as well as ensuring the inspectors diary was secured and all meetings and feedback were successfully implemented and understood.
- 7.78. The IT team secured the inspectors laptops and access to systems and building management colleagues ensured the Ofsted requirements in terms of room bookings and locations was in place.

Day Two

- 7.79. Uploading of Annexe A data requests, these 11 lists of data reflect the whole range of interventions and support being provided for children young people and their families, as well as our care leavers information.
- 7.80. At the time of inspection **2092** children and young people were allocated to social workers, with more being subject to referrals made into the front door requesting potential service.
- 7.81. A list of all the services auditing activity over the last 6 months is also required, **199** completed audits were listed with judgements and children's ID numbers being provided for this period.
- 7.82. The inspectors choose **12** audits benchmarked against the Annexe A data; they interrogated these in relation to the quality and impact of audit practice for the children and young people involved. They also ascertain if the audit judgements are reflective of an organisation that knows what good looks like.

Day three

- 7.83. Ofsted require the **Information used by the local authority to manage services for children and young people**, we call this The Library in children's services, it expects a wide range of documents used as evidence to assure inspectors again, we know what good looks like. We uploaded **315** separate documents by 12 noon that day to meet the requirements of the Ofsted requests.

Day four

- 7.84. The local authority shares the documents set out below for each of the 12 children's case records that inspectors chose from the audit list. This included

each Child's assessment, Child in need, child protection, care or pathway plan, Chronology, and supervision record. These are collated and quality assured by a team of people prior their upload onto the Ofsted portal.

Ofsted Inspectors are on site weeks two and three:

- 7.85. The inspectors met with social workers, early help practitioners, education colleagues, Personal Assistants to Care Leaver (PA's), Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO's), legal colleagues, Permanence Tracking Officers, CAFCASS, reviewed commissioning work, the judiciary and children, young people and their families, including foster carers and adoptive parents. These **69** meetings all required timely planning, room bookings, team calls arranged as part of the timetabling exercise.
- 7.86. Inspectors met with our care leavers group and spent an evening in Chelmaren Home speaking with children about their lived experience in Shropshire's services.
- 7.87. **92** social workers (including disabled Children's team), and early help practitioners, fostering and adoption workers, independent reviewing officers and virtual school colleagues, all attended meetings with the inspectors directly.
- 7.88. A project team offered daily support to organise, manage, and ensure all activity was timely, planned and secured each day.
- 7.89. The final feedback meeting that included the Chief Executive, The Leader and Portfolio Holder and Senior leadership Team and DFE advisor was held on Friday 4th July 2025. Where the Outstanding judgement was announced internally.
- 7.90. Following this the report is written, shared with the Local Authority as a draft for any factual inaccuracies or challenges if required, and subject to Ofsted's rigorous internal Quality Assurance process.
- 7.91. The DCS, Tanya Miles, was able to share the Outstanding judgement with staff, council colleagues, children and young people and partners during a planned event on Friday 8th August 2025. This also included the official handover to the new DCS, David Shaw.
- 7.92. The report was published on the 12th of August 2025, following the Ofsted Quality Assurance process agreeing the findings and final judgment of Outstanding that was made.
- 7.93. We are very proud of our children, young people and their families, and care leavers who all continue to thrive and achieve their aspirations including education, employment, and training opportunities.
- 7.94. We are very thankful for a staff team that demonstrate their care and advocacy for the children they are working with every day, and this was reflected in conversations, in their records and in the feedback received from the children themselves.
- 7.95. We were also proud that the inspection itself was organised, calm and responsive to all the requirements Ofsted made of us as an organisation. This reflected a professional organisation that knows itself well.

- 7.96. We are pleased that our social work practice, collaboration across teams and services in the council and multi-agency working has been seen by the inspectors and judged as outstanding.

'By treating our children and young people with respect, love and trust and with the right amount of encouragement we can inspire them to dream big, build relationships and connections that matter and together with kindness and a sense of belonging we can do great things.'

- 7.97. The recent ILACS has evidenced successful implementation of the vision set "putting love back in the system", this contributed significantly to the outstanding outcome achieved.
- 7.98. The services self-evaluation shared with inspectors demonstrated clear evidence that we knew ourselves well, we were focussed on the right challenges and that the vision of putting love back in the system, alongside a collaborative culture across the service and council had secured the improvements needed in the service. Most importantly the outcomes for our children and young people were consistently good and they were seen to be achieving and thriving whilst being supported by their social workers, and the teams of workers around them.
- 7.99. Direct practice was subject to significant scrutiny and the inspectors found evidence in children's records, speaking with social workers and speaking directly with children, young people and their families that assured them about the outstanding impact our children's workforce was having in their lives.

The outcomes noted below were all evidenced as the inspectors worked through the system and services during their time with us in Shropshire.

We have increased early help provision and pathways and more children and families are benefitting from this.	We have decreased numbers of referrals into social care by applying thresholds appropriately and access to the right service for the need presented.	We are completing assessments more quickly and have clear performance oversight embedded.	We are starting more Public Law Outline (pre court proceeding meetings), more quickly and resolving matters more quickly.
We are securing permanence outcomes for children including Special Guardianship Orders and Adoption plans securing their futures.	We have more children leaving care than coming into care.	If children need to come into care for their safety this is done timely and effectively.	We keep most of our children close or within Shropshire if they do become looked after.
We are enabling more children to live either with their family, or within a family environment, stepping them back from residential care effectively when it is right for them.	We know our care leavers needs and enable them to access the offer effectively, keeping in touch and supporting them in the community with education employment and training when appropriate for them.	We are demonstrating our aspirations for our children and young people on their records, that show good understanding of their needs and good outcomes for them.	We are completing care proceedings more effectively .

- 7.100. The outcomes outlined above were observed throughout the inspectors' visit as they engaged with our systems and services in Shropshire. The service remains

committed to embedding the continuous improvement cycle, which now forms an integral part of everyday practice. By maintaining high standards and robust quality assurance processes, we are well positioned to swiftly address any challenges or reductions in performance, ensuring effective remedial action when necessary.

- 7.101. With the conclusion of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB), a new Ambitions Board for Children in Shropshire is being established. Like its predecessor, this cross-party group will be chaired by the Chief Executive, DCS, Lead Member and attended by multi-agency senior leaders and specialised services. The Ambitions Board will drive the council's vision for children and young people, with agendas focused on sustaining current successes and further enhancing service delivery and outcomes.
- 7.102. An Ofsted Service Development Plan must be submitted to Ofsted by 19th November 2025; this will form the foundation of the Ambitions Board's work. The inaugural meeting, set for 18th September 2025, will bring together members to co-design the Board's initial priorities, with these and other service improvements incorporated into Shropshire's Ambitions Plan for Children and Young People 2025–2028. Updates on progress towards delivering the Ofsted Development Plan will be reported to Overview and Scrutiny through the performance report.
- 7.103. The plan will specifically address Ofsted's two recommendations: ensuring meaningful and sustained participation of children, care leavers, and their families in all aspects of strategic planning and service evaluation (including fostering) and strengthening our response to the emotional well-being and mental health needs of care leavers.
- 7.104. Our focus will include building on the strengths of the care leavers' service, which recently achieved a 'good' judgement in its first Ofsted ILACS review, with the goal of securing an 'outstanding' outcome in the next inspection, expected in three years' time.
- 7.105. We will include the priorities agreed together at the first Ambitions Board in the Ofsted Service Development Plan, calling it **Shropshire's Ambitions Plan for the children and young people of Shropshire 2025 – 2028**.
- 7.106. The Families First national agenda is setting the scene for the overarching national requirements of children's services development going forward.
- 7.107. A Families First Partnership (FFP) Strategic Lead, Natasha Moody, has been appointed to drive this agenda for Shropshire across services, the community and all our partnerships. There will be briefings and information shared as the programme of work and plans are secured.
- 7.108. Shropshire Youth Services was announced as one of only 12 national pathfinder areas for the Local Transformation Fund, supported by the National Youth Agency to help create youth services that are sustainable, inclusive and genuinely impactful.
- 7.109. Shropshire continues to participate in the national SEND and AP Change Programme, including the development of the latest phase of exploration to inform national reform in this area. Particular focus is being placed on developing

inclusive mainstream practice across all education settings and a range of other specific developments.

- 7.110. These are significant opportunities for Shropshire Children's Services alongside partners and council colleagues to further develop services and practice that will enable children, young people and their families to have increased access to preventative and early help services to prevent escalation and build upon our current youth offer in the community to offer impactful services and additional community opportunities that will enable young people to feel heard and seen in Shropshire.
- 7.111. This outstanding judgement also creates a good opportunity for the service to attract the permanent workers needed going forward. There is work continuing to secure updated adverts and communications that include this achievement to endeavour to encourage more applications going forward.

8. Additional Information

- 8.1. The link to the Ofsted ILACS schedule is below for information only, this schedule is updated regularly by Ofsted, it is helpful to retain the link going forward to ensure that you are viewing the most up to date version.

[Inspecting local authority children's services - GOV.UK](#)

- 8.2 This schedule outlines the nuts and bolts of the process and what Ofsted are looking for in their evidence gathering when working in the Local Authority during an inspection. This includes data, a library of evidence, direct conversations with the workforce, partners, judiciary and children, young people, and their families.
- 8.3 The Chief Executive and Portfolio holder meet with Ofsted Inspectors to talk with them about the council's vision for children and young people in Shropshire
- 8.4 We share a comprehensive self-evaluation with them; this includes a leadership overview of work delivered to date.
- 8.5 The self-evaluation answers 3 questions:
- What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice in your local authority?
 - How do you know it?
 - What are your plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?
- 8.6 We were judged good by Ofsted during the last full ILACs held 7th Feb 2022. Two focused visits were held in the Local Authority since that full inspection these are undertaken in relation to a specific theme and help over several days in the Local Authority:
- Children's Service Focused visit 23/11/23 Child Protection work.
 - Children's Services focused visit 30/07/24 Children Looked After.

Local Government Association national advice and guidance is embedded below:

Is your council in a strong position to continue to improve outcomes for children and young people and their families?

<https://search.app/nXwDPKxemnTMwZfJ8>

View the top tips from portfolio holders for children's services.

<https://search.app/QvHNJYocmuko2L4i8>

The following guide offers a high-level overview for all councillors of key issues with regard to child safeguarding.

<https://search.app/xwqhkpBJXqSJvPag9>

Every councillor has a role to play in embedding corporate parenting principles and doing all they can to support children in care.

<https://search.app/uLBSkbKacafccREM8>

Is your council doing all it can to improve outcomes for children and young people? This document, specifically developed for chief executives.

<https://search.app/wVkWXG6JVfssDrZG7>

Must-Know_-Childrens-services-guide-to-effective-cross-council-working-_Local-Government-Association

<https://search.app/nySX4j5V2c48KcMT6>

9. Conclusions

- 9.1. Shropshire Children's Services have demonstrated the positive impact of collaboration with partners (external and internal) and council services to achieve the outstanding judgement following the recent ILACS inspection.
- 9.2. The service is continuously striving to maintain the high standards of practice achieved and looks forward to the impact of the significant national agendas for change further enhancing the outcomes for the children, young people and families of Shropshire.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Local Member: All

Appendices [Please list the titles of Appendices]

Appendix A - Inspection of Shropshire local authority children's services