

Shropshire Council

Local Youth Transformation Pilot Youth Service Review

Final Draft Report

July 2025

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1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this review is to support the development of proposals by Shropshire Council for delivery of the Government's Local Youth Transformation Pilot (LYTP). The purpose of this programme, as set out in Government guidance, is

"To rebuild a high-quality offer for young people and transition back local youth services leadership to local authorities, testing ways to best rebuild local authority capability to ensure a local youth offer which addresses the needs of young people and supports government priorities."

In Shropshire this represents quite a task; the youth service has been decimated over the last ten-plus years and exists only as a shadow of its former self. However, this also represents the biggest opportunity as the Council are not having to reconfigure deeply embedded arrangements within an entrenched system. Instead, they have the opportunity to reimagine and reinvent an approach to youth service for Shropshire that is fit for purpose for the next decade and, in doing so, lay the foundations for its future development – in ways that meet the needs of young people in Shropshire.

Shropshire context

Shropshire is a unitary authority in the West Midlands, on the border with Wales. It is located south of Wrexham, with Staffordshire to the East and Herefordshire to the South. It has been a unitary authority since 2009, incorporating a total of 5 different geographical areas, and has been under Liberal Democrat control since 2025. Shropshire is a large, predominantly rural area with no cities, 22 towns and 135 town and parish councils.

Youth Provision in Shropshire has historically been delivered through a fragmented system with separate strands of activity, led by the local authority, VCSE partners, schools and town and parish councils. A recent report from the YMCA shows that Shropshire are in the bottom 5% of local authorities spending on Youth Services, a 98% reduction since the national policy of austerity was introduced in 2010 ([Beyond the Brink | YMCA England and Wales](#)). There has been no funding for universal services for the last two years. Across all youth services on 2023-24, Shropshire's net spend was just £3 per capita, considerably lower than the English national average of £34. Over the same period of time, total schools' net expenditure in Shropshire dropped from £139.6m in 2015/16 to £120.4m in 2023/24, a 13.7% decrease. In the report we get into more detail around this.

Summary of approach

The review was conducted by a small team led by the LADC and supported by the case lead and two NYA young assessors. The review was based on the NYA's nine essentials of a youth service as well as the broader strategic and systems change experience of the review Lead.

At the heart of the work was a three-day visit curated by the local authority which offered the review team the opportunity to spend time with the youth work team and conduct a series of interviews and visits with key people and organisations, including young people, in Shropshire. This gave us a great overview of the current system, the local authorities plans, and the challenges and opportunities afforded by the LYTP. The visit was supplemented by a desk-based evidence

review, including critical documents shared by the local authority team, surveys with young people and youth work providers, and a youth work profile prepared by the NYA team.

Key findings and recommendations

As a result of national funding cuts the Council's youth provision is 98% of what it was a decade ago. Not only is there is little existing, formal provision on which to build, but there is a lack of appreciation within the Council and its partner agencies as to the value of youth work as an approach. The review therefore quickly narrowed its focus to the strategic building blocks of a future youth work system, as made clear by the scale of ambition, the energy of the teams, the political commitment, and the significant challenges that need addressing.

In Shropshire, this is where the greatest leverage from the LYTP will be achieved. The focus of the proposals in the EOI and the scope of ambition in Shropshire is to establish foundations to support the future growth and development of the youth work offer in Shropshire. In the review we identified eleven core elements of that future system, shown in the table below.

SYSTEM ELEMENTS		Foundations for the future	Prioritisation and capacity	Place-based coordination	High quality delivery	Nine Essential Criteria
1	Vision and Purpose					
2	System leadership					
3	Partnership working					
4	Youth voice and engagement					
5	Local needs assessment					
6	Local youth offer plan					
7	VCFSE engagement					
8	Workforce planning					
9	Neighbourhood geography					
10	Community infrastructure					
11	Quality of delivery • Quality of practice • Curriculum • Monitoring and evaluation • Safeguarding					

These elements are illustrated in the diagram below which is an attempt to visualise the core components of a new system of youth services in Shropshire – establishing robust foundations for the future. Five priority areas are then summarised.

2. Background and process

This report has been prepared as part of the support available to Shropshire Council, which is one of the 12 local authorities (LAs) selected for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) Local Youth Transformation (LYT) pilot programme. It aims to help the Council, its partners and staff understand the National Youth Agency's (NYA) recommended approach for conducting a local review of current youth work provision and to inform their planning for the implementation phase of the LYT project.

Pilot LAs participating in the LYT programme have until the end of March 2026 to submit bids for DCMS transformation funding, allocate and spend the funding, and put in place a sustainable approach for long-term youth work. This report is intended to support that process.

Review aims

This review has therefore been tailored to the individual needs of Shropshire Council and its partners and taken as its starting point the vision and ambition for change set out in the Expression of Interest (EOI). By placing a critical lens on these initial proposals, this review should enable the council, its partners and young people reflect on and test local youth work provision, assessing its strengths and identifying areas for improvement that can be included in the more detailed LYT pilot bid and programme.

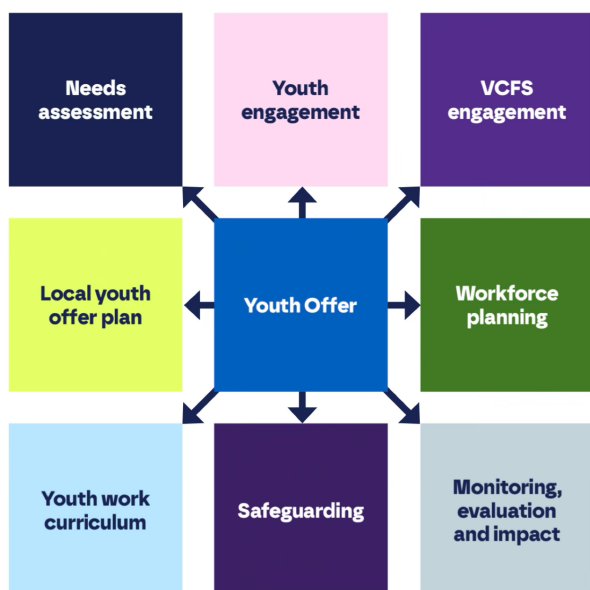
Review process

The review has been an interactive exercise intended to support the development of robust arrangements to meet these aims. During the review, the team examined evidence from various sources including community profiling, service mapping, workforce analysis, stakeholder consultation (young people, VCS statutory partners), and a light touch review against their statutory duties.

The LYT review team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information to ensure they were familiar with the Local Authority and the challenges it is facing, including the Council's EOI. The team then spent three days onsite during which they:

- Heard from a range of people, including: young people, lead members, senior leadership team, front-line practitioners and managers and partners
- Visited local teams and partners
- Undertook visits to different settings, observing sessions and talking to professionals.

This work has been informed by the NYA's guidance on meeting the Local Authorities statutory duties as set out in Section 507B of the Education Act. This guidance sets out 9 essentials of a quality youth service (below). The guide includes a checklist for each of the nine elements, which was a useful framework to sense-check the opportunities for change.



Local Youth Transformation Review Team

The LYT Review Team was selected for its collective expertise and capacity to deliver a high-quality, credible, and robust review. Members are sector-experienced consultants with extensive knowledge of youth work and children's services. The team included senior professionals with a strong track record in local government and the VCSE sector, supported by Young Assessors who brought their lived experience and young person's lens to the review. Their combined insight and credibility brought depth and rigour to the review process:

- Case Lead: Tony Challinor, National Youth Agency (NYA), Associate
- LADC: Ian Burbidge, Young People's Foundation Trust
- Young Assessors: Kiera Finney, Richy Agyemang, NYA
- Research Associates: Chris Milner and Caroline Craig, NYA

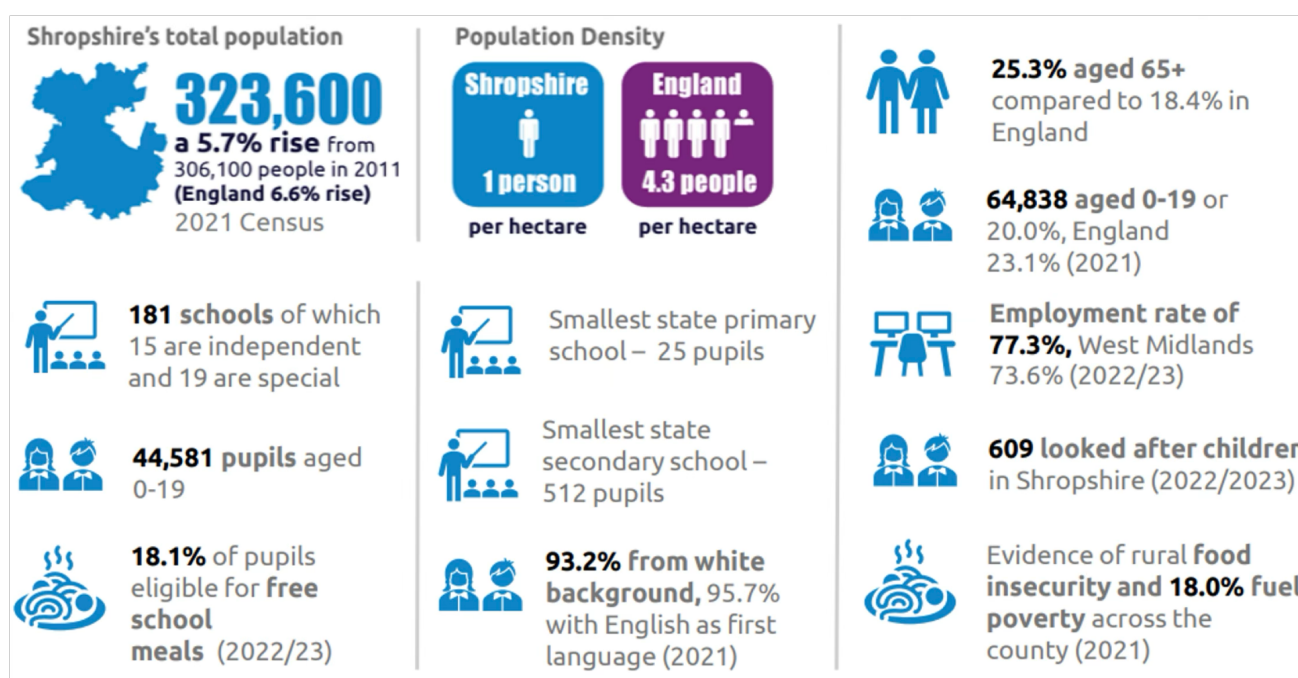
This report provides a summary of the team's findings. It builds on the final meeting led by the LYT team at the end of their on-site visit on 11th July 2025. By its nature, the LYT Review is a snapshot in time.

3. Strategic context

Shropshire is a unitary authority in the West Midlands, on the border with Wales. It is located south of Wrexham, with Staffordshire to the East and Herefordshire to the South. It has been a unitary authority since 2009, incorporating a total of 5 different districts, and has been under Liberal Democrat control since 2025. Shropshire is a large, predominantly rural area with no cities, 22 towns and 135 town and parish councils.

Socio-economic context

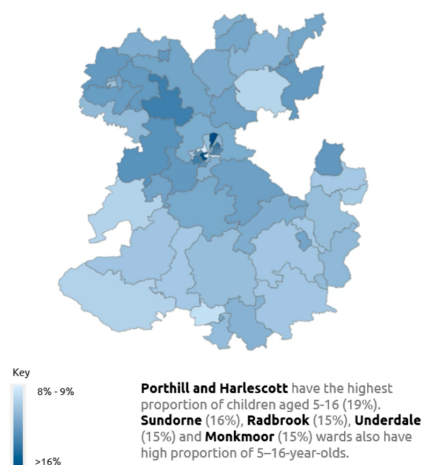
As with many sparsely populated rural areas, areas of acute poverty often exist alongside affluent communities. Poverty is also hidden in pockets too small to show up on national statistics. However, it remains a significant challenge for service delivery.



According to 2019 IMD figures, just 5% of Shropshire's total population live within areas classed as being amongst the most deprived 20% in terms of overall deprivation. Shropshire's 2025 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) notes 2.9% (or 388) of young people aged 16-19 live in the top 5 most deprived areas (LSOAs) of Shropshire: Harlescott, Ludlow East, central Oswestry, Monkmoor and Meole Brace.

The JSNA details the main areas where Shropshire's rates are worse than the national average regarding - the percentage of households in fuel poverty (18% in 2021); number of children (161 in 2024) aged 0-4 years who are Looked After and; emergency admissions (2595 per 10 000 in 2021-22). The average caseload for children and family social workers in Shropshire was 19.6 in 2024. This is higher than Statistical Neighbours (16.1) and England (15.4).

Shropshire's School-aged children (5-16)



40,527
aged 5-16s
in 2021, a 2% fall
from 2011

12.5%
aged 5-16s
of Shropshire's
population

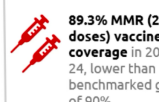
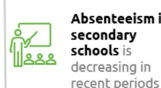
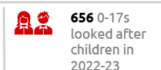
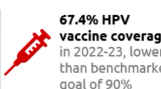
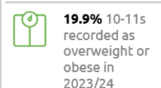
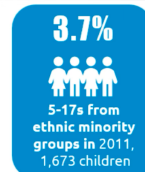
127 primary schools,
19 secondary and 4
special schools

39,176 pupils aged
5-16

18.1% pupils
eligible for free
school meals



Overall deprivation is low in Shropshire. However, 1,336 or 3.3% of school-aged children aged 5-16s live in the top 5 most deprived areas (LSOAs) of Shropshire: Harlescott, Ludlow East, central Oswestry, Monkmoor and Meole Brace.



The most recent Ofsted inspection of Shropshire local authority children's services in 2022 found all to be good except the 'experiences and progress of children who need help and protection', which required improvement to be good.

In 2024, 121 of every 10,000 children in Shropshire were considered 'looked after'. This has risen considerably since 2016 when the figure was just 48. This rise does not reflect changes at a regional and national level where, since 2023, rates have remained the same. There are many potential reasons behind these figures in Shropshire including a lack of families accessing Early Help, shortage of foster carers and the lack of a service (pre Covid) working to support families with children at risk of becoming looked after.

Shropshire's Children in Need rate (per 10,000) has been rising since 2023, when rates for England and statistical neighbours are falling. According to the most recent JSNA, Shropshire's rate of children (0-18 years old) in care is also above the national average, which could go some way in explaining this figure. Shropshire has a slightly lower percentage of pupils receiving support for Special Educational Needs (SEN) compared to the rest of the country. In 2024, the percentage of 16-17-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) was 2.7%, below statistical neighbours as well as the national average (3.2%)

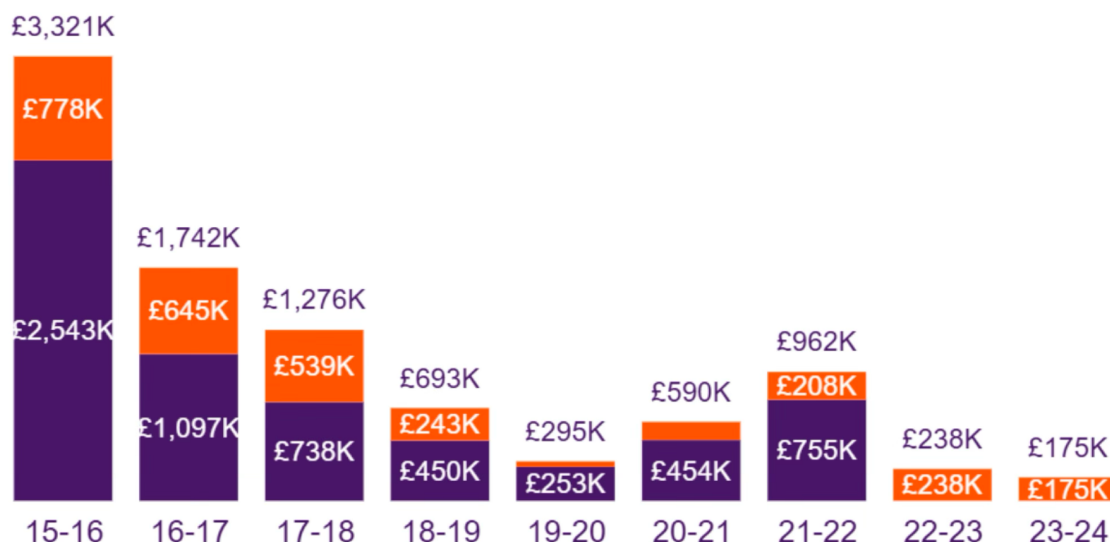
Youth work legacy

A recent report from the YMCA shows that Shropshire are in the bottom 5% of local authorities spending on Youth Services (£3.86 per young person) a 98% reduction since the national policy of austerity was introduced in 2010 ([Beyond the Brink | YMCA England and Wales](#)).

Spending on Youth Services has therefore fallen drastically in the last ten years, dropping from £3.3m in 2015-16 to just £175k in 2023-24 – a decrease of £3.1m in total. There has been no funding for universal services for the last two years. Across all youth services on 2023-24, Shropshire's net spend was just £3 per capita, considerably lower than the English national

average of £34. Over the same period of time, total schools' net expenditure in Shropshire dropped from £139.6m in 2015/16 to £120.4m in 2023/24, a 13.7% decrease.

● Universal Services ● Targeted Services



Youth Provision in Shropshire has historically been delivered through a fragmented system with separate strands of activity, led by the local authority, VCSE partners, schools and town and parish councils. Most of the provision is aimed at and attended by 8-12 year olds. The gap and need is for something that looks different for older teenagers.

The VCSE sector is central to the universal offer. Shropshire Youth Agency are commissioned to provide infrastructure support to a network of voluntary youth clubs, many of which are run by volunteers. These clubs offer inclusive and accessible provision to a wide range of young people including those from low-income families, rural areas, and communities where statutory services are less visible. Town and Parish Councils also commission SYA and other providers to deliver youth sessions, particularly in larger market towns.

While this mixed economy has enabled broad reach across a large rural geography, it has also resulted in variation in quality, access and co-ordination. The local authority recognise this and are actively restructuring towards a more integrated locality-based model.

Survey Insights

This review process has drawn on surveys of providers (14 combined), young people (363 responses), and town and parish councils (44 councils). The first two form a separate report which is provided as an annex. Headlines are as follows.

Provision

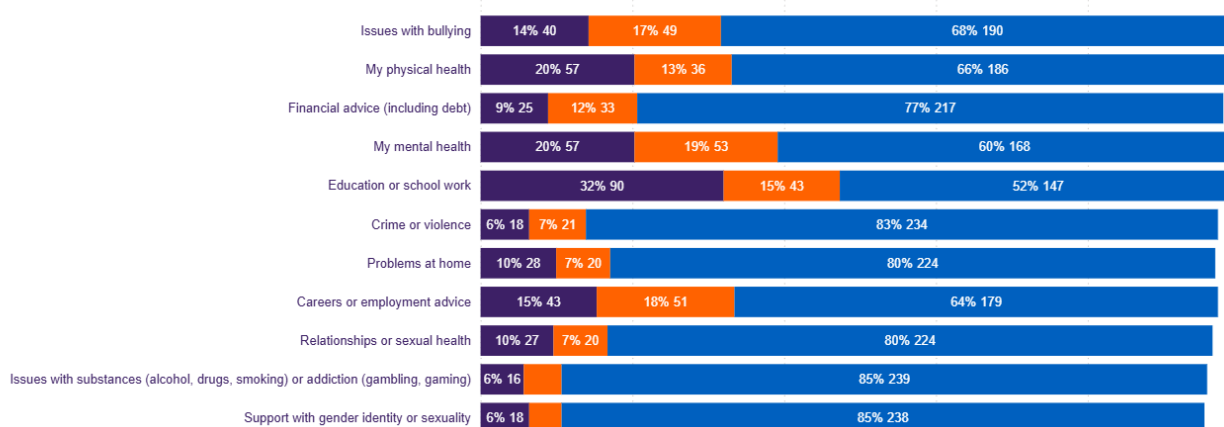
- The most commonly attended organised activity amongst young people in Shropshire is sports or athletics clubs (outside school), which 20% attend most days and a further quarter (24%) attend at least once a week.

- Very few young people in Shropshire benefit from youth work (youth clubs or youth groups) most days. Almost eight in ten young people in Shropshire have never been to a youth group or club.
- Detached youth work was one of the least frequently attended activities, used most days by only 3% and weekly by 6% of respondents¹. As 65% never use detached, this does mean over a third (35%) Shropshire young people have interacted with youth workers on the streets before.
- Half of Town and parish councils noted that provision was clearly insufficient.

Needs

- The survey of young people finds mental health is the area of greatest unmet support – one in five (19%) young people in Shropshire want mental health support but do not receive it. A similar proportion (18%) of young people would like careers or employment advice. Support with bullying is in similar demand, with 17% wanting support with this.
- The most commonly selected area young people receive support is education or school work. One third (32%) of young people receive support in this area. This is likely to be through school, but could also be out-of-school support. This is lower than seen across the other 11 LYTP areas, with 46% of young people receiving support for education or school work (although it is still the most selected support area).
- Mental and physical health are joint second, with one in five (20%) young people receiving support in these areas. Almost as many (19%) young people say they want support for their mental health, but do not receive it.

● I currently have support in this area ● I don't currently access support in this area, but would like to ● I don't need or want support in this area

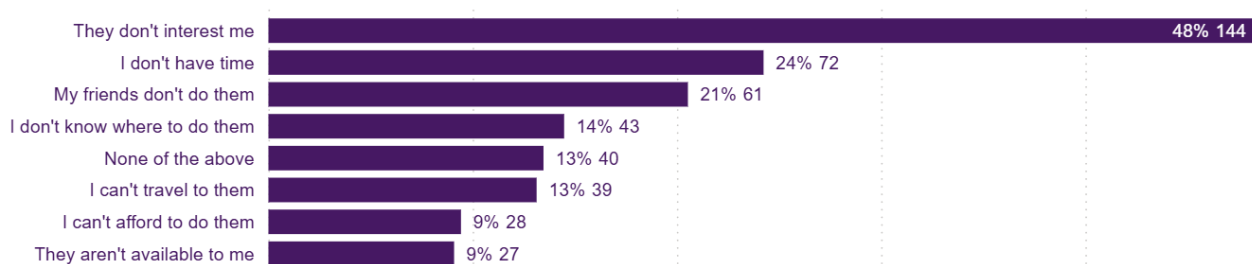


Support use amongst young people in Shropshire (n=280)

- Top issues for Town and parish councils were lack of facilities/activities (81%), poor transport (74%), mental health and isolation (62%), cost of living pressures (55%), and anti-social behaviour and vaping (48%).

¹ There is a methodological question as to whether young people know what detached youth work is as it is primarily a term used by professionals. Young people might understand this term as 'meeting a youth worker on the street'.

Barriers to participation



Reported barriers to participation in listed youth provision (n=297)

- Whilst not considered one of the main barriers to participation, 13% of young people report being unable to travel to some of the activities and support types listed. Public transport and reliance on parents or guardians to provide travel is mentioned by young people across the wider survey of young people in all LYTP areas.
- Town and parish councils also noted transport, distance and cost and low awareness as access issues, suggesting a youth bus scheme or similar as an option.

4. A framework for system change

The forthcoming development of the strategic youth partnership, pilot programmes with schools and investment in locality youth workers reflect a system level commitment to shift from fragmentation to alignment, creating a connected, youth led eco-system built on shared values, data and governance. This section explores that reimagination, which is framed as a strategic 'systems change' piece of work.

The core strategic shift is to establish Youth Workers as trusted, locality-based connectors, embedded within communities working relationally with young people and bridging the gap between universal, targeted and specialist services.

From...	...to
Reactive casework	Relational prevention
Fragmented services	Connected systems
Consulting young people	Youth-led governance
Isolated delivery	Shared, values-led delivery

A new service	Building blocks
Youth workers as trusted locality-based connectors	Youth insight panels in each locality
Embedded within communities	Strengthen VCSE infrastructure
Working relationally with young people	Place-based delivery pilots
Bridging universal, targeted and specialist services	

A critical question this review has considered is the extent to which these strategic shifts are feasible and to help define the opportunity space. In particular, this shifts the focus for the LYTP programme beyond simply improving the youth offer, because as we have seen the service has barely survived. A radical reimagination of the wider system is required before we consider in more detail the critical aspects of the NYA nine elements of an effective youth service.

To facilitate these shifts, and to realise the Government's ambitions through the LYTP of "rebuilding a high-quality offer for young people and transition back local youth services leadership to local authorities...", the Council must lead work to reimagine a youth work offer that is ambitious and meets local needs. This will require the local authority to embrace a systems leadership role, which will entail convening partners, providers and young people to co-create a vision for the future of the service and lead its realisation. This framing is critical to the rest of the work in Shropshire and the recommendations that follow in this report. It will enable the reconfiguration of resources, relationships, power and practice across the system.

The insights and recommendations in this report are therefore based upon a framework of a possible new system for youth work in Shropshire which has the NYA nine essentials at its heart. This should be helpful for the local authority as it attempts to embrace systems leadership and take others on the journey. The following section shows how these aspects fit together in Shropshire to comprise a new system for youth work.

Foundations

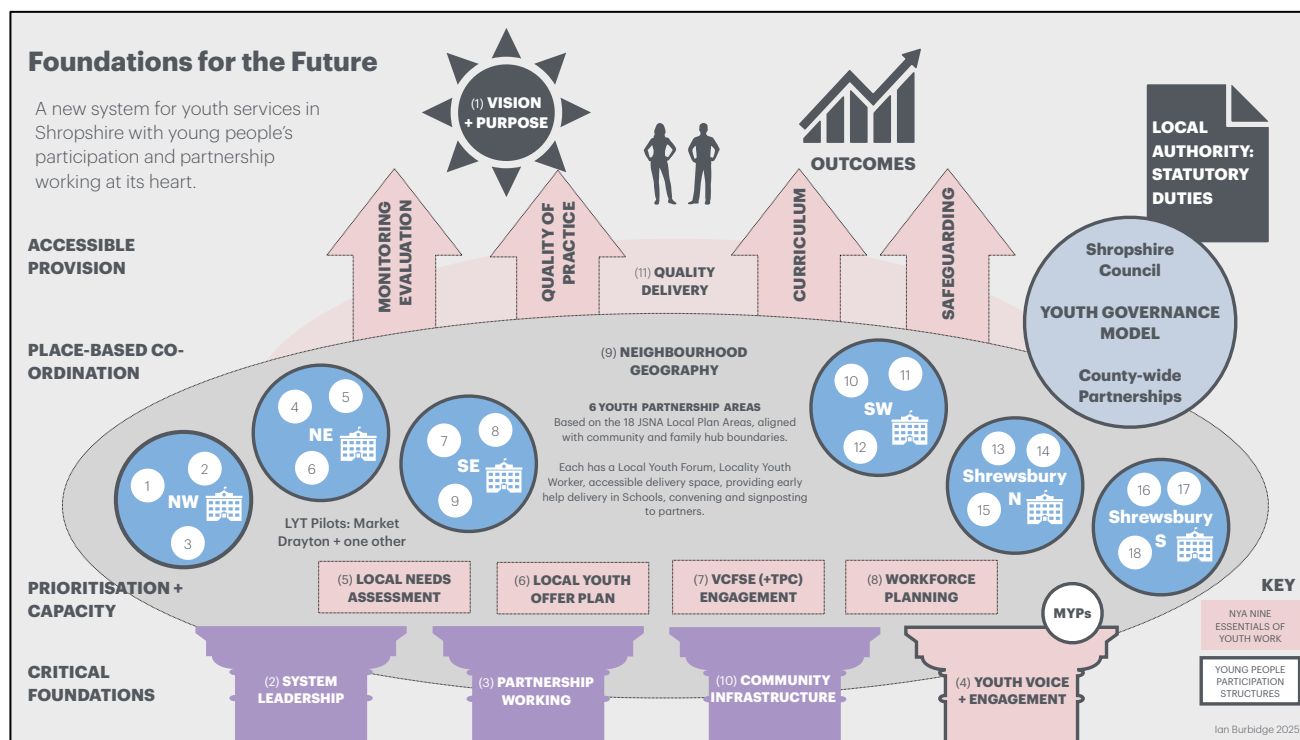
To achieve this level of change the review has drawn both on the NYAs nine essentials of a youth service, the review team's experience, and the LADCs expertise in systems change. We have identified eleven elements which in turn form the structure of this report. These are shown below:

SYSTEM ELEMENTS		Foundations for the future	Prioritisation and capacity	Place-based coordination	High quality delivery	Nine Essential Criteria
1	Vision and Purpose					
2	System leadership					
3	Partnership working					
4	Youth voice and engagement					
5	Local needs assessment					
6	Local youth offer plan					
7	VCFSE engagement					
8	Workforce planning					
9	Neighbourhood geography					
10	Community infrastructure					
11	Quality of delivery - Quality of practice - Curriculum - Monitoring and evaluation - Safeguarding					

The system in Shropshire is mapped across four critical levels, illustrated below:

- *Core foundations for the future*, on which the success of the new system depends, including systems leadership (change), partnership working, youth voice and community infrastructure
- *Prioritisation and capacity*, four of the NYA essentials that ensure the youth work offer is strategically developed and delivered, with a focus on identifying need, developing the offer, harnessing the value of the VCFSE, and workforce
- *Place-based co-ordination* on a local geography that supports partnership working and creates a structure across the county on which future developments and improvements can be built. This is considered essential in such a large, sparsely-populated rural area.

- Both the above support the *high quality delivery* of youth services, as set out in the remaining five NYA essential areas of quality, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation and safeguarding.
- All of this work and activity is necessary but not sufficient. Without a compelling *vision and purpose* for the future of youth work (in its broadest sense) there is a risk that the goodwill and energy for change will dissipate over time and not achieve the impact that is possible.



Theory of change

The diagram above illustrates how the core aspects of a new system for youth services could fit together in Shropshire. The thesis for this work is that by putting these core building blocks in place (through this programme) the team can develop a solid foundation for the future. This emerging new system for youth work can be scalable with future investment, can maximise resources within the system, can amplify youth voice, can provide mechanisms for joining up services, can identify and be responsive to needs, and can be a springboard for future development.

Critical analysis

The rest of this report represents a critical analysis of the work needed to realise these strategic shifts and put in place the building blocks to create a new system for youth work that is for the future. Specifically, the review has found that there is goodwill and energy for change within the team and leadership at Shropshire Council. Inevitably, some will be worried about what change might mean for them. But maintaining a focus on the needs of young people will offer a coordinating principle that partners can coalesce around.

The next section considers each of the 11 challenges / themes in turn with a critical assessment, gap analysis, summary of the core challenge(s), opportunities and recommendations.

5. Core challenges

The eleven elements in the table on page 14 are each covered in turn in this section.

Vision and purpose

The LA should lead work to develop a clear vision for the future of youth provision in Shropshire.

The Youth Strategy 2024-2026 sets out the ambition to ‘create a Youth Offer for Young People in Shropshire which will put their needs at the forefront and prioritises their wellbeing by creating opportunities that will help them reach their full potential and live their best lives’. Shropshire Council is fully committed to working with partners to deliver a coordinated approach to deliver youth services for young people based on their needs and interests and fully informed by their engagement and participation.

The team at Shropshire Council are passionate about the potential this opportunity provides and have clearly done a large amount of preparation over recent months, including initial engagement with partners and senior leadership. There are lots of ideas and plans for change that the team are pursuing.

Challenge	Opportunity	Recommendations
How to co-create with young people a compelling vision for the impact that a new youth work offer can achieve in Shropshire over the next several years.	By convening young people and key stakeholders in an ongoing conversation around purpose and practice, the team can lead the reinvention and reconfiguration of the systems and processes that deliver youth work to Shropshire’s communities. A compelling and clear vision will form an essential ‘north star’ to guide the work of all involved and ensure that the focus of the necessary (and sometimes difficult) changes remains on the benefits of these changes for Shropshire’s young people.	The council should lead work with partners and young people to establish a compelling vision for change, defining what youth provision might look like in 2030 and 2035. Partners could, with young people, co-develop a Manifesto or Shropshire Compact to set out the core commitments and principles that signatories will abide by in order to support the change that is possible.

Systems leadership

The LA should step into its facilitation and convening role to lead change across the system

Systems leadership is not one of the nine essentials of a youth work offer, but it is included here because it is foundational to the Council's ambition and, while not an explicit focus of the Shropshire Council's plans, is at the heart of their approach. This is crucial in terms of putting in place the structures and relationships that can support and nurture the emergence of a new system for youth work over the coming years. However, it is unrealistic to drop a new, integrated service model into a broken system and expect it to succeed.

Youth work has been systematically disinvested in over the last 15 years as a result of a sustained national policy of austerity, which has in turn reduced other important public services, especially those that have a core prevention element, and contribute to the wider increase in the needs of young people. Historically the Local Authority has hosted the Youth Work team, with some support from the voluntary sector. Senior leaders, though, recognise that the future can't be a recreation of the past in terms of the Local Authority owning all delivery. The critical role for the Local Authority remains ensuring delivery is provided in response to need through a mixed economy of providers.

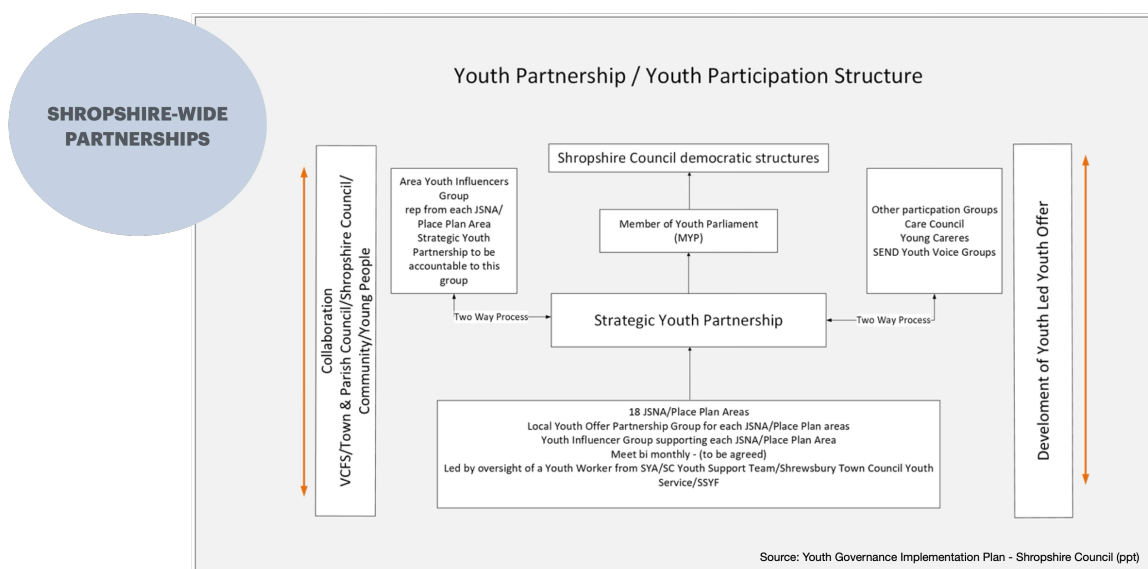
Challenge	Opportunity	Recommendations
How to change a broken system and create a new paradigm for youth work in Shropshire	The opportunity is to take a longer-term perspective and reinvent the youth service. Taking the best of what we know works from past experience but reimagining it to be fit for purpose by 2030, bringing innovation and new ideas and to how it can centre young people at its heart.	The council should convene a multi-agency innovation team drawn from across the system and, with external support, lead a systems change process that challenges the status quo, develops and tests out bold ideas for change, and generates momentum for change.
How will the LA shift towards and fulfil a system leadership role in this space	To rethink and redesign an offer that is appropriate for Shropshire and the needs of its young people. This will likely entail a mixed economy of provision, which in turn will necessitate a potential shift of roles and resources within the system. This will not be without its challenges. The council's core role is to 'steer not row'.	The council should articulate its systems leadership role, including clear definition of the system around youth work, mapping out the relationships with other teams and organisations. The council should lead work to clarify roles within the system, helping ensure that the youth team, other council teams, and core partners, fulfil clear roles that maximise their strengths and reduce duplication across the system.

Partnership working

The LA needs to foster and embed collaboration across the system

The Shropshire youth strategy sets out the ambition of creating a local youth partnership: “Shropshire Council is committed to the development of a local Youth Partnerships which will have oversight of the local youth offer within Shropshire to ‘make sure’ that there is a sufficient level of Youth Work in localities within Shropshire. This will be a collaboration of Youth Work Providers, wider Youth Sector, community and voluntary sector, Town and Parish Councils, business and Young People”.

Headline partnership arrangements are illustrated below, however these don’t reflect the full picture of relevant bodies in Shropshire that, to a greater or lesser extent, need to be plugged into this work. This broader partnership mapping has a local component, as we will see with the section on neighbourhood geography (below), as well as a county-wide aspect with strategic bodies.



Youth work has become a bit of a Cinderella service over the last 15 years; it is not a service used to having significant influence or profile. There is senior level buy-in, albeit within a council that has significant financial challenges. The funding offers an opportunity to redesign the way the system works but this will require the input and commitment of a range of services.

There may be a challenge for the youth service to persuade partners of the importance of this work and to encourage them to get engaged, not only across the local public services but including the range of providers in Shropshire.

Challenge	Opportunity	Recommendations
How might the youth service develop its profile and persuade other teams to collaborate?	To harness the energy for change that the team, and those closely connected with it, clearly display. This can help the team to take others with them on this journey. There could be very real momentum developed through this work, and it must be nurtured and sustained (because it can easily dissipate on contact with the 'immune response to change').	The team need to secure comms and advocacy support to develop and share the case for change. It is critical to secure not only senior-level buy-in, but support at all management tiers within the council, and across partners. A hearts-and-minds offensive will help promote and elevate the potential and importance of youth work. This piece of work needs executive level sponsorship as well as political commitment, through a dotted-line reporting arrangement to the programme lead. Links are proactively made, or strengthened, with key organisations in the system, including housing providers, Police, DWP (who also operate two youth employment hubs in Shropshire) and Young Carers. A mapping exercise may be a useful approach. The Youth hub areas will provide a helpful focus for this.
How can the team effectively develop multi-agency partnerships?	Partnership working can support the joining up of services around young people and the prioritisation and effective delivery of services, maximising the resources in the system, especially through the sharing of information, intelligence, and learning.	The team should map relevant public and voluntary sector partnerships across Shropshire that are relevant to the delivery of youth services and seek to streamline and/or strengthen connections between them. The team might consider hosting a 'good practice' in partnership working retreat to draw the learning out from teams that are good at this in Shropshire, perhaps with some external input and/or facilitation. A practical guide might be an output from this work, establishing common principles and guidelines – 'just enough' structure to support their effective operation.

LA Strategic Programme Action Plan

- Stage 1 - Establish steering group
- Stage 4 - Engage partners and stakeholders

Youth voice and engagement*

Youth participation is a rights-based approach that ensures young people influence decisions affecting their lives and communities and is essential to meaningful provision design.

Shropshire has a variety of means through which young people are consulted, engaged, and heard. These have generally been developed on an ad hoc basis over time. This has resulted in a range of mechanisms for listening to or engaging young people, as well as identifying their priorities and needs, but these tend to be based on consultation exercises or one-off opportunities such as involving young people on an interview panel.

A core challenge for the Council, as set out in the introduction, is to make the shift towards embedded structures and processes that make the engagement and participation of young people the norm as core part of the way the Council, its partners and team's work. Some ideas are set out in the recommendations below but as a headline we advocate a review, perhaps using the Hear by Right framework (or similar), to identify current practice and opportunities to take Youth Voice to the next level, positioning Shropshire as an exemplar authority.

The establishment of youth panels in the six neighbourhood areas (see Neighbourhood Geography below), integrating the MEPs into this framework, exploring opportunities to establish young people's engagement that influence Council policy development, governance and decision-making processes. Just as there are Scrutiny panels and impact assessments (such as 'Health in all policies'), Shropshire could pilot arrangements to have young people's scrutiny and develop a Young People in all policies approach.

This presents a key opportunity, therefore, to reframe participation as a core part of how services are planned, delivered and improved. A youth governance model could create clear, ongoing pathways for young people to contribute to strategic forums such as the Corporate Parenting Board, SEND partnerships, and service commissioning.

To make this shift, the Council will need to invest in participation infrastructure: staffing, training, youth facilitation, and formal integration into leadership and planning structures. Including this need in the assessment will support the development of a more consistent, inclusive, and transformational approach to youth voice fully aligned with the ambition for system reform.

Challenge	Opportunity	Recommendations
How to engage young people, hear their voice, and embed mechanisms for them to truly influence things	There are opportunities to embed youth voice at all levels of the new system in Shropshire and to bring coherence to the range of mechanisms for engaging and embedding youth voice across Shropshire and its core public services.	Design and pilot arrangements for the new local Youth engagement panels Develop a governance structure that sets out how young people will be engaged and can participate, and the infrastructure required to support that. Co-design, pilot and test strategic mechanisms to give voice to young people, such as an annual Shropshire Youth Assembly, a council youth scrutiny panel,

		young people-led impact assessments against new policy proposals, etc.
How to join up the various engagement mechanisms for young people	To bring coherence to these various mechanisms so that engagement is coordinated (duplication is avoided) and young people can see the value of getting involved.	To review (perhaps using a framework such as Hear by Right), align and systematise all the various mechanisms and involve young people in how they want to be engaged and heard. Consider the relationships between existing engagement mechanisms, the proposed area forums, the ideas above, and the youth MPs. Embed these within core council processes.

Local needs assessment*

A systematic and comprehensive data led approach to understanding the needs of young people to inform youth work provision.

There is a range of data about local need, of which the headlines are summarised in the section (context) above. The Children and Young People's JSNA offers significant helpful data around the challenges faced by young people in Shropshire. A critical challenge in rural localities is the often-hidden nature of need and poverty and the need to identify and respond to emerging issues.

Of particular note (though not exclusive) from our visit and interviews were issues around:

- Mental health
- Neurodiversity and autism, currently with around an 18 month wait for initial assessment
- An exponential rise in home schooling, with attendant issues
- Behavioural challenges arising from the rise of toxic masculinity
- County lines and broader issues around community safety

There are a range of services and providers that are supporting young people in Shropshire, although generally fragmented and of varying quality and cost. It can be difficult to know who is providing what in which area and for which groups of people and to join these up.

Challenge	Opportunity	Recommendations
How to identify, understand and address the needs of young people	Youth workers offer a localised and specialised resource in communities to understand needs and emergent issues and challenges and help contextualise the quantitative data. This intelligence can really help prioritise and direct service provision.	Bring qualitative and quantitative data together to ensure resources are targeting needs. This can be achieved by aligning the area engagement panels with the JSNA localities.
How to join up, coordinate and improve services for children and young people	It will be important to put in place sufficient structures and processes that support the coordination of effort and reduction of duplication, which will drive efficiencies across the system. Clarification of roles and strengths within these structures will be vital.	The EOI proposes the testing of area-based arrangements in two of the six areas. It would be sensible to select (after a process) two contrasting areas that offer different learning about how to do this in practice.

Local youth offer*

A co-produced plan by the Local Authority and VCFS that articulates the scope, accessibility, and intent of youth provision in the area based on need.

Youth Provision in Shropshire has historically been delivered through a fragmented system with separate strands of activity, led by the local authority, VCSE partners (over 1,200 voluntary groups in Shropshire as a whole), schools and town and parish councils (135).

There are limited providers of youth work in the county, borne out by responses to the survey.

Challenge	Opportunity	Recommendations
To ensure that a coherent youth offer exists in Shropshire and is delivered through a mixed economy of providers	To develop a roadmap towards securing sufficient local provision (provided by the council and/or partners) over a period of time. This can provide a coherent approach to delivery through a range of providers and maximising the resources, expertise and knowledge in the system. In turn, any gaps can be identified and addressed.	The council should consider expediting the planned development of a youth offer plan, working with young people and existing providers.

NYA Guidance Toolkit - relevant questions

- Do services meet needs?
- What are the gaps for improvement?

LA Strategic Programme Action Plan

- Stage 3 - Develop a youth plan offer

VCFSE engagement*

Collaboration with Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector (VCFSE) partners to deliver a comprehensive and diverse youth offer.

With over 1200 voluntary sector groups in Shropshire, there are a wide range of organisations that provide more informal opportunities and activities for young people (such as sports clubs), with – as we have seen - far fewer providing specific youth work. However, there is still a function to be met in ensuring that those informal groups and clubs have access to, and know how to access, the training and support they need to ensure that their delivery meets required standards, such as around child protection.

Yet this sector is, as in many areas, underdeveloped and often relying on legacy contracts and working arrangements. The fiscal environment is clearly tough. Perhaps as a result, there has been a blurring of roles between different organisations and functions, and the current investment in infrastructure support to the sector needs rethinking and recommissioning.

It is good practice for infrastructure support to be delivered by an organisation dedicated to that end. It is a conflict of interests when both support to the sector (which includes helping smaller organisations to access contracts and funding opportunities) and winning and delivering contracts, are done by the same organisation because the infrastructure provider is potentially competing for contracts with the very organisations it is established to support. These roles must be kept separate, and a Young People's Foundation (YPF) is one such model that can deliver this. Part of the available funding could be an investment in such an option.

The Council needs to tread carefully in considering how best to facilitate such a shift. This requires more than a blunt recommissioning exercise; we are instead suggesting a complete rethink as to how to deliver infrastructure support. Establishing a YPF is not a competitive, commissioning exercise but one of collaborating with the National YPF Trust to establish one.

Of course, unpicking legacy arrangements can be a painful and public process but this is not one to shy away from if the vision is to be realised and young people are to benefit.

Challenge	Opportunity	Recommendations
How can the council ensure that it is effectively supporting the VCSEF sector?	To clarify the roles and strengths that different organisations can play in the engagement and delivery of the new youth work offer. In particular, investing in a clear infrastructure support offer, which may include training, but which (for reasons of good governance) should not be held by an organisation or body that is also responsible for direct delivery.	The infrastructure support contract needs to be recommissioned, and this process affords the ideal opportunity. However, prior to the commissioning team being asked to lead a technical procurement process, a review of the current offer and good practice from elsewhere should be made. As part of this review, the council should consider establishing a new, independent Young People's Foundation, utilising the national model, to provide this

		functionality in Shropshire. Setting up a new trust specifically for this purpose may help navigate any potential tensions in the system. The council can then work with the newly-commissioned infrastructure support body to grow a mixed economy of provision by developing the market, ensuring quality, and commissioning training.
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NYA Guidance Toolkit - relevant questions

- Is there coherence in the engagement with the sector?
- Are their good communications and networking with the sector?

Workforce planning*

Developing a capable, qualified, and supported workforce to deliver a high-quality statutory youth work offer.

Due to the sustained lack of investment there are few trained youth workers and those that are working in the area are stretched in terms of capacity and the demand in communities for their services. Proposals from the Local Authority are to deploy their seven youth workers across the six proposed youth areas.

Challenge	Opportunity	Recommendations
How to recruit, develop and retain a quality workforce - not only in youth work but also critical services such as education	To maximise the resources there are in the system, to be a champion youth work and its value, and find opportunities to make a route into youth work a clearer and easier option for young people.	The LYTP opportunity may help to resource the development of training pathways, apprenticeships, and qualifications. Could there be a specific Shropshire offer?

NYA Guidance Toolkit - relevant questions

- Is there a training needs assessment?
- Do you evaluate training effectiveness?
- Is there a workforce development plan?

LA Strategic Programme Action Plan

- Stage 6 - Implement training and development

Neighbourhood geography

Enable collaboration and coordination of youth work and services for young people at a local geography that makes sense for Shropshire, while also offering a means of piloting change on contrasting areas.

As illustrated in Appendix 1 there are 18 local plan areas covering Shropshire (within the JSNA, so detailed profiles exist). They are aggregated into six local youth partnerships (see also sections on Partnership working, Youth voice, and Community infrastructure). The intent is that they align with the community and family hub boundaries (below) to aid local joining up of services and signposting to them.



Each LYP will therefore cover a geographical area of the county:

- Southeast - 4 secondary schools covering town and small parishes
- Southwest - 4 secondary schools covering Town and Parish Councils
- Northwest - 4 Secondary Schools covering Town and Parish Councils
- Northeast - 4 Secondary Schools covering Town and Parish Councils
- Central North (Shrewsbury) - 2 secondary schools with a number of wards/localities
- Central South (Shrewsbury) - 3 secondary schools with a number of wards/localities.

Proposals are for each of the six local youth partnerships to have a youth worker and youth engagement panel in each. The youth workers will be attached to these Local Youth Partnerships and deliver outreach and group work, as well as connecting young people to the opportunities and services that exist in their area. They will also deliver a targeted youth work offer and mentoring within schools. Testing out these prevention hubs in schools is seen as a core part of the pilot.

Alongside schools each area will identify spaces (such as libraries and community halls) that young people can access. This is described as a 'spaces in spaces' or TriZone approach, for which plans already exist. Such branding could usefully help young people recognise whether there is a youth worker available in their community, for example, school, library or community space.

It is suggested that this is tested in one of the six areas and Market Drayton has already been identified as one of two pilots.

Challenge	Opportunity	Recommendations
How can neighbourhood structures offer an organising principle for collaboration and service delivery?	For the local authority and its partners, especially the VCSEF sector and town and parish councils, to come together in these geographies to share knowledge, practice, needs, and coordinate delivery.	Test out arrangements in two of the six areas and ensure that the learning is captured and utilised. Capture the learning and build this into best practice guides. It is also necessary to ensure that an appropriate geography is used as a co-ordinating principle. For example, can the council and partners establish and support, however light touch, 18 area-based arrangements? This review is a perfect opportunity to test this out and determine the most appropriate way forwards for Shropshire.

Community infrastructure

Appropriate spaces, and young people's access to them, remains a critical challenge for the delivery of effective youth work and services in Shropshire.

There is a need for spaces in communities that are trusted by young people. Few former youth centres are still available and many communities, especially in more rural parts of the county. The council are working towards creating a "spaces within spaces" model, which involves a Tri-Zone model of youth hubs based in schools, libraries and the community (such as village and community halls). This is to become the home for multi-disciplinary teams including social prescribers and family support / early help teams.

Transport and access to services is a real challenge in terms of young people accessing formal service and youth work provision as well as more informal clubs and groups and activities in the area. This is in terms of both the provision and affordability of public transport. During term time, the nature of school bus transport makes it difficult for young people to attend sessions after school as they then have no way of getting home.

Challenge	Opportunity	Recommendations
How to identify appropriate and trusted spaces for the delivery of youth work?	To redefine what constitutes a safe space that young people are confident to use and identify appropriate spaces in the pilot communities (and beyond). This mapping can usefully be piloted in the initial communities.	To work with parish councils and schools, in particular, alongside young people, to identify and create safe, trusted and accessible spaces for the delivery of youth work.
How can partners enable and ensure fair access to opportunities?	To work with young people to develop a wide range of ideas to improve issues around rurality and access. This could be developed into a set of mini 'experiments' to test out a wide range of the preferred ideas. Those that show promise can then be developed in more detail.	To engage with other relevant partners, especially schools, to consider options to reconfigure transport provision and access to services. There is an opportunity to utilise some of the funds to identify, develop and test local innovations in this regard. The local youth hubs could be provided with an innovation budget to do this, with social innovation support commissioned to curate the design process.

Quality of delivery*

The Council needs to consider its role in ensuring quality delivery of the wider service, independent of provider, in line with the NYAs nine essential criteria.

Five of the essential criteria have already been covered and the remaining four, relating mostly to the quality of delivery, are covered below, highlighting the most relevant questions from the guidance that surfaced during the review.

Essential Criteria	Purpose	NYA Guidance Toolkit - Questions
Quality of practice	High quality youth work delivers the best outcomes for young people. Underpinned by a clear set of principles, practice guidance and values that are led by the needs and aspirations of young people.	- Is there an effective support structure in place to support the development of youth work? - Are their effective Quality assurance system in place? - Are their enough trained staff and volunteers?
Curriculum	Use of the NYA Youth Work Curriculum offers greater understanding of youth work practice and provides an educational framework and a standardised approach.	- To what extent does this shape and inform the youth work offer? - How are you implementing it locally?
Monitoring and evaluation	Enable continuous improvement and demonstrate the impact youth work makes in young people's lives.	- Have you ensured their is sufficiency of provision against the local needs analysis? - How do you collect data to help evaluate the impact of services?
Safeguarding	Excellent youth work is underpinned by the principle that the welfare of young people is paramount.	- Are safeguarding training and resources provided? - Do you conduct regular checks and audits of organisations? - How do you ensure that referral pathways are clear?

Recommendations

The council should expedite their plans to co-ordinate the implementation of the National Youth Agency (NYA) Statutory Duty Toolkit and complete an assessment against the nine essential criteria. In doing so the council needs to be clear about the different roles within the system and how accountability for quality delivery will be identified and fulfilled.

6. Gap Analysis and Recommendations

As we have seen, the focus of the review was on the strategic building blocks of a future system, as this is where the greatest leverage from the LYTP will be achieved. However, clear questions have been posed against all nine of the Essential elements of a Youth Offer, per the NYA guidance, and a peer review of this wider offer will be an important option for the team once they are establishing the clear foundations recommended in this report.

This review highlights 16 critical challenges to inform the work, and answering them will help the team close the gap between where they are and where they can be as a result of this programme. The twenty recommendations are intended to help the team, and their partners, to close this gap and reinvent the youth service system in Shropshire, thus providing the foundations upon which a future, reinvented system of youth work can be based.

The challenges and recommendations are reprised below.

Element	Challenge	Recommendations
1 Vision and Purpose	How to co-create with young people a compelling vision for the impact that a new youth work offer can achieve in Shropshire over the next several years.	R1. The council should lead work with partners and young people to establish a compelling vision for change, defining what youth provision might look like in 2030 and 2035. R2. Partners could, with young people, co-develop a Manifesto or Shropshire Compact to set out the core commitments and principles that signatories will abide by in order to support the change that is possible.
2 System leadership	How to change a broken system and create a new paradigm for youth work in Shropshire	R3. The council should convene a multi-agency innovation team drawn from across the system and, with external support, lead a systems change process that challenges the status quo, develops and tests out bold ideas for change, and generates momentum for change.
	How will the LA shift towards and fulfil a system leadership role in this space	R4. The council should articulate its systems leadership role, including clear definition of the system around youth work, mapping out the relationships with other teams and organisations. R5. The council should lead work to clarify roles within the system, helping ensure that the youth team, other councils teams, and core partners, fulfil clear roles that maximise their strengths and reduce duplication across the system.

3	Partnership working	How might the youth service develop its profile and persuade other teams to collaborate?	R6. The team need to secure comms and advocacy support to develop and share the case for change. It is critical to secure not only senior-level buy-in, but support at all management tiers within the council, and across partners. A hearts-and-minds offensive will help promote and elevate the potential and importance of youth work. R7. This piece of work needs executive level sponsorship as well as political commitment, through a dotted-line reporting arrangement to the programme lead. R8. Links are proactively made, or strengthened, with key organisations in the system, including housing providers, Police, DWP (who also operate two youth employment hubs in Shropshire) and Young Carers. A mapping exercise may be a useful approach. The Youth hub areas will provide a helpful focus for this.
		How can the team effectively develop multi-agency partnerships?	R9. The team should map relevant public and voluntary sector partnerships across Shropshire that are relevant to the delivery of youth services and seek to streamline and/or strengthen connections between them. R10. The team might consider hosting a 'good practice' in partnership working retreat to draw the learning out from teams that are good at this in Shropshire, perhaps with some external input and/or facilitation. A practical guide might be an output from this work, establishing common principles and guidelines – 'just enough' structure to support their effective operation.
4	Youth voice and engagement	How to engage young people, hear their voice, and embed mechanisms for them to truly influence things	R11. Design and pilot arrangements for the new local Youth engagement panels R12. Develop a governance structure that sets out how young people will be engaged and can participate, and the infrastructure required to support that. R13. Co-design, pilot and test strategic mechanisms to give voice to young people, such as an annual Shropshire Youth Assembly, a council youth scrutiny panel,

		young people-led impact assessments against new policy proposals, etc.
	How to join up the various engagement mechanisms for young people	R14. To review (perhaps using a framework such as Hear by Right), align and systematise all the various mechanisms and involve young people in how they want to be engaged and heard. R15. Consider the relationships between existing engagement mechanisms, the proposed area forums, the ideas above, and the youth MPs. Embed these within core council processes.
5	Local needs assessment	How to identify, understand and address the needs of young people
		R16. Bring qualitative and quantitative data together to ensure resources are targeting needs. This can be achieved by aligning the area engagement panels with the JSNA localities.
		How to join up, coordinate and improve services for children and young people
		R17. The EOI proposes the testing of area-based arrangements in two of the six areas. It would be sensible to select (after a process) two contrasting areas that offer different learning about how to do this in practice.
6	Local youth offer	To ensure that a coherent youth offer exists in Shropshire and is delivered through a mixed economy of providers
		R18. The council should consider expediting the planned development of a youth offer plan, working with young people and existing providers.
7	VCFSE engagement	How can the council ensure that it is effectively supporting the VCSEF sector?
		R19. The infrastructure support contract needs to be recommissioned, and this process affords the ideal opportunity. However, prior to the commissioning team being asked to lead a technical procurement process, a review of the current offer and good practice from elsewhere should be made. R20. As part of this review, the council should consider establishing a new, independent Young People's Foundation, utilising the national model, to provide this functionality in Shropshire. Setting up a new trust specifically for this purpose may help navigate any potential tensions in the system. The council can then work with the newly-commissioned infrastructure support body to grow a mixed

		economy of provision by developing the market, ensuring quality, and commissioning training.
8	Workforce planning	How to recruit, develop and retain a quality workforce - not only in youth work but also critical services such as education R21. The LYTP opportunity may help to resource the development of training pathways, apprenticeships, and qualifications. Could there be a specific Shropshire offer?
9	Neighbourhood geography	How can neighbourhood structures offer an organising principle for collaboration and service delivery? R22. Test out arrangements in two of the six areas and ensure that the learning is captured and utilised. Capture the learning and build this into best practice guides. R23. It is also necessary to ensure that an appropriate geography is used as a co-ordinating principle. For example, can the council and partners establish and support, however light touch, 18 area-based arrangements? This review is a perfect opportunity to test this out and determine the most appropriate way forwards for Shropshire.
10	Community infrastructure	How to identify appropriate and trusted spaces for the delivery of youth work? R24. To work with parish councils and schools, in particular, alongside young people, to identify and create safe, trusted and accessible spaces for the delivery of youth work.
		How can partners enable and ensure fair access to opportunities? R25. To engage with other relevant partners, especially schools, to consider options to reconfigure transport provision and access to services. There is an opportunity to utilise some of the funds to identify, develop and test local innovations in this regard. The local youth hubs could be provided with an innovation budget to do this, with social innovation support commissioned to curate the design process.
11	Quality of delivery	The Council needs to consider its role in ensuring quality delivery of the wider service, independent of provider, in line with the NYAs nine essential criteria. R26. The council should expedite their plans to co-ordinate the implementation of the National Youth Agency (NYA) Statutory Duty Toolkit and complete an assessment against the nine essential criteria. In doing so the council needs to be clear about the different roles within the system and how accountability for quality delivery will be identified and fulfilled.

7. Next Steps

We are excited for the opportunity that Shropshire have with the LYTP programme; the energy and commitment and passion of staff and partners was palpable. We have now reviewed and consolidated the information, evidence and ideas that support this work and that arose through our visit. We trust that in this report we hold up a helpful critical lens.

We hope that the findings presented in this report provide an accurate and balanced reflection of the discussions held with you, your staff, partners, and young people across Shropshire. Any factual errors are ours of interpretation.

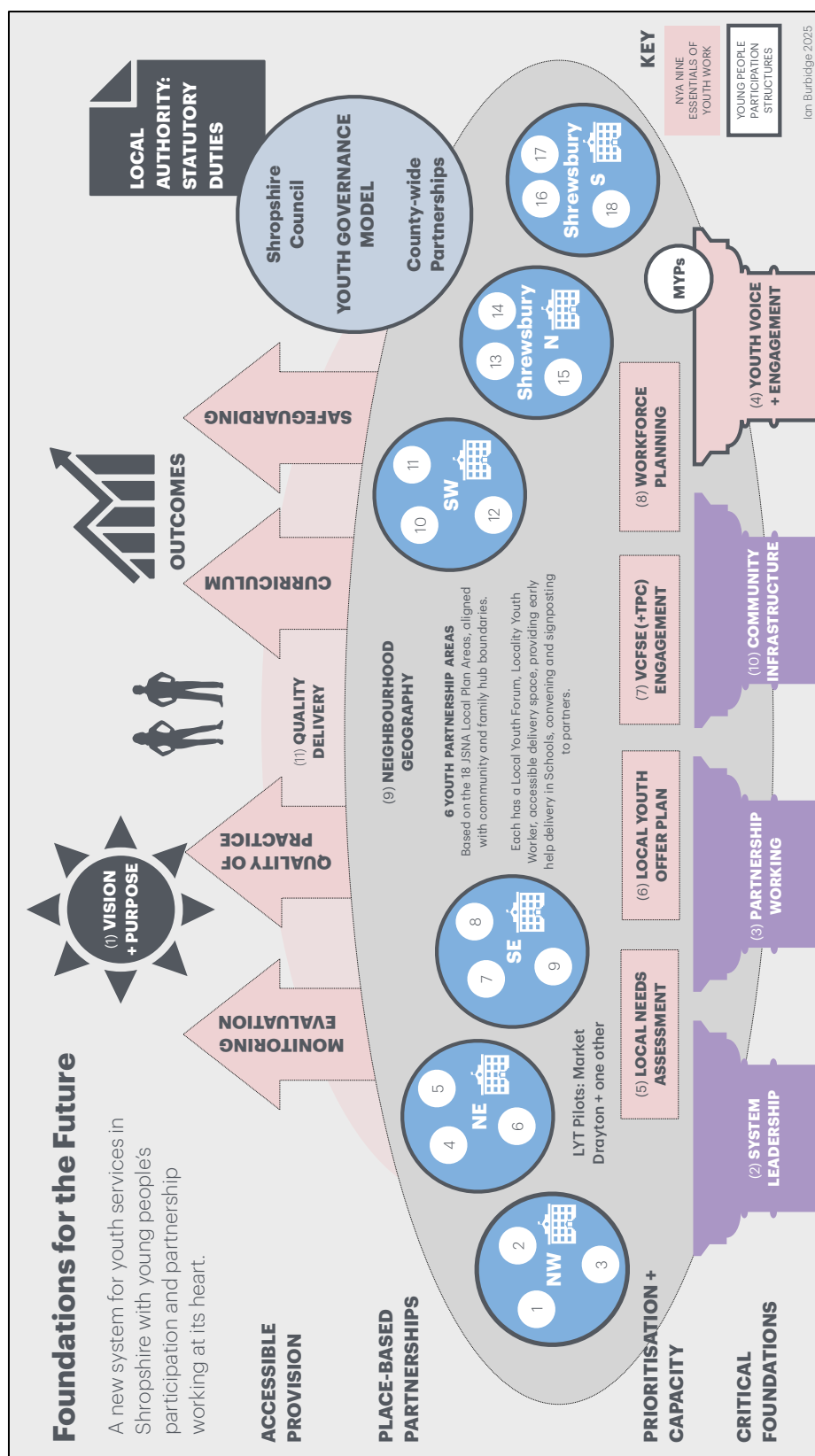
These findings now form an evidence base to inform your next step: the development of a comprehensive plan that responds directly to the review's recommendations and supports your submission for the Local Youth Transformation (LYT) grant.

The Local Authority Development Consultant (LADC), Ian Burbidge, and Case Lead, Tony Challinor, will continue to work with you to shape the development plan, ensuring it aligns with the priorities and improvement areas identified through this review.

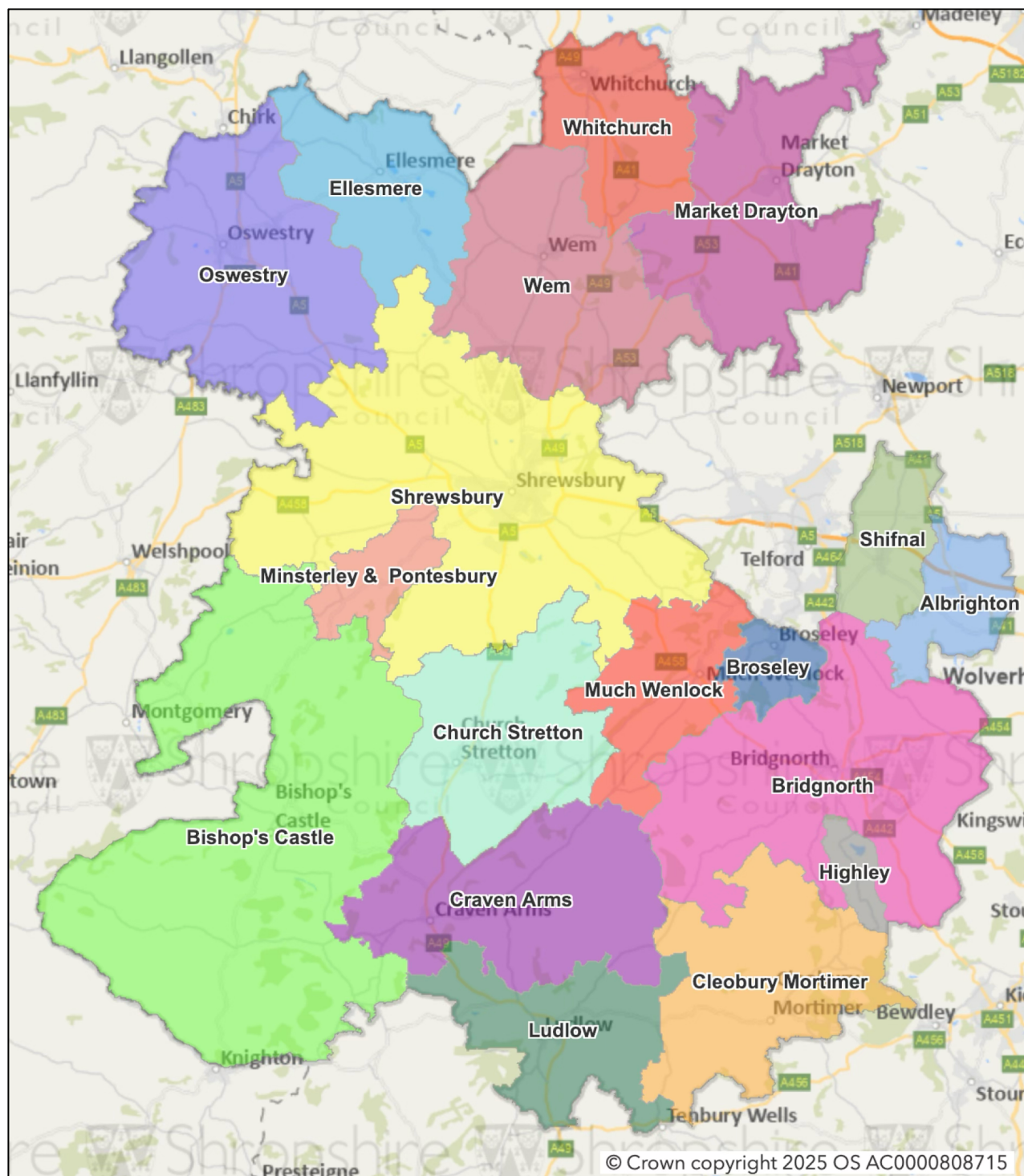
Thank you once again for your engagement throughout the review process. We would like to extend our appreciation to all those who contributed, particularly Helena Williams and Stafford Mason for their preparation, coordination, and ongoing support of the LYT Review Team.

A full list of those we engaged with is provided at appendix 4.

Appendix 1: A new youth services system

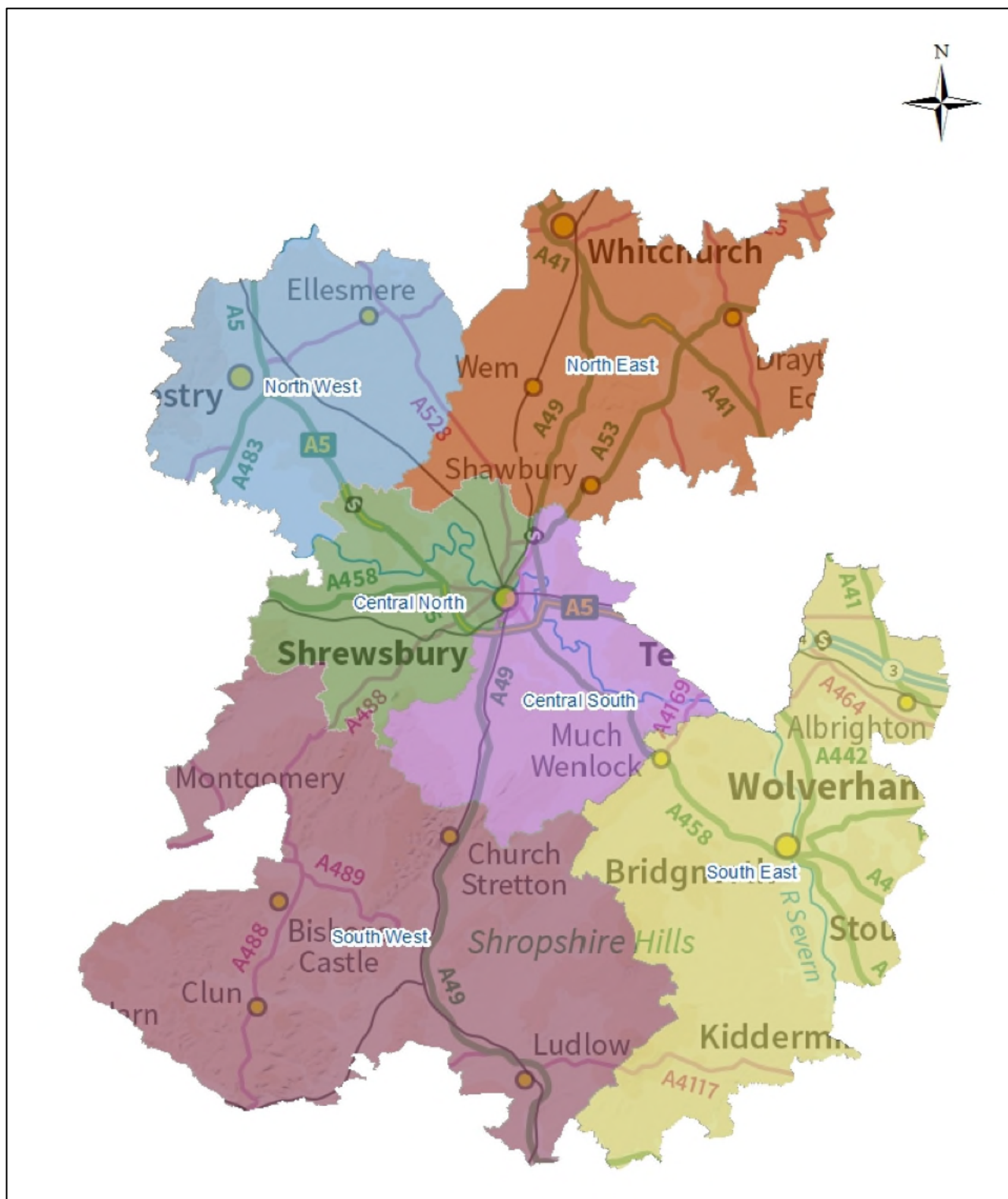


Appendix 2: Neighbourhood Geography



Source: Shropshire Council JSNA

The Local Youth Partnerships will align with Shropshire community and family hub areas:



Appendix 3: Young People Survey

See separate research report.

Appendix 4: Provider Survey

See separate research report.

Appendix 5: Interviewees

Our thanks to those who actively and generously engaged with us as part of this work, including:

Shropshire Council

Helena Williams and Stafford Mason, Shropshire Council Youth Services team

Youth Work team (Carly, Beth, Ian, Andy)

Cabinet Members and Portfolio leads: Deputy Leader and Communities (Cllr Alex Wagner), Children and Education (Cllr Andy Hall), Health (Cllr Bernie Bentick)

Director of Children's Services (David Shaw)

Early Help and Looked after Children Service Manager (Siobhan Hughes)

Early Help team: (Nina Kooner and Emily Wada)

Public Health: Paula Mawson, Customer and Communities

Community and family hubs (Mel, Charlie)

Health

Healthy Lives + Social prescribing (Naomi and Claire)

ICB (Lorna)

Community wellbeing outreach team (Kathy, Lou, Anne Marie, Amanda, Phil, Dami, Hannah)

Partners

Energize, Pete Ezard

Ludlow School: Deborah Tysall, Assistant headteacher (pastoral and safeguarding lead)

Shropshire Youth Association (Richard Parkes, Kerry Williams, Amanda Hollingshead)

Shropshire Youth Parliament members (Stephanie)

4All Foundation (George Hounsell)

Young people

Ludlow school contact session

Meole Brace community centre detached youth work session

Survey respondents

All those who completed the young people, provider or Town and Parish council surveys.

Disclaimer

Any factual errors or errors of interpretation are mine alone as lead author of this report.

Ian Burbidge, LADC, July 2025.