

**Committee and Date****Cabinet****10 June 2026**

Item

Public

## Update on the Children’s Services Reforms

**Responsible Officer:**

David Shaw

email: david.shaw@shropshire.gov.uk

01743 251446

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):**

Andy Hall

### 1. Synopsis

- 1.1 This report provides Cabinet with an overview of the major national Children’s reforms now underway and sets out Shropshire’s proposed integrated response through a single Children’s Transformation programme and helps to support the realisation of a ‘child friendly’ Shropshire. It highlights the amended legal obligations being placed on the Council and partners (statutory and wider), the early progress to date, to support decisions required locally, and the anticipated benefits for children, families and the wider system—including earlier, more preventative “Family Help” and an education system that supports those with SEND through inclusive education and stronger multi-agency working, supported by a modernised digital offer. Overall, our approach in Shropshire is about creating a better future for children, young people and families. This means a simpler, more accessible system that works with families, helping children to thrive in their communities and reducing the need for more intensive interventions over time.

### 2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Department for Education have introduced significant reforms nationally that all Councils that provide Children’s social care services must implement, following nationally prescribed changes and timescales, that will then be evaluated through regulatory inspection by Ofsted. Nationally, these reforms are intended to improve outcomes for children, young people and families as outlined below, whilst also reducing the number of children who need to enter the care system and supporting a more financially sustainable approach to Children’s Services.

- 2.2 Shropshire is bringing together all of these changes into a single, community-based and partnership transformation programme to create a more child-friendly county, where families can access the right help, at the right time, as close to home as possible. This will mean services working successfully together providing one joined-up system across Shropshire, with Family Hubs and local multi-agency teams providing support in communities.
- 2.3 This means for children, young people and families, earlier help so problems are addressed before they escalate into crisis, support closer to home, through local Family Hubs and local multi-agency teams we will deliver joined-up services across health, education, social care and community partners. This will mean stronger support for families, helping children remain safely within their family networks wherever safe, more inclusive mainstream education for children and young people with better local support for children with SEND, improved outcomes for young people, including wellbeing, safety, local friendships, opportunities and strong qualifications that unlocks the pathway to their chosen career.
- 2.4 Shropshire currently has higher levels of demand for care and SEND support than our local context would suggest we should expect to see, with too many of our resources focused on support at the higher levels of escalation. These reforms challenge all Councils that deliver Children's social care services to rebalance their services towards prevention.
- 2.5 As Shropshire Council currently spends a very low amount on prevention services, we will use these reforms to address this position and reallocate resources within children services, whilst ensuring we improve outcomes for children, young people and families in Shropshire.
- 2.6 This includes significant investment nationally to fund up to 90% of the Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs deficit in each Council area up to the end of 2025/26, once a successful Local Area SEND Reform plan has been developed and approved by the DfE. In Shropshire the 90% High Needs Stability Grant is worth c.£41m, leaving the Council to fund the remaining 10%. This is critical to develop Shropshire Council as the financially sustainable Council we describe in our Corporate Plan.
- 2.7 Overall, our approach in Shropshire is about creating a better future for children, young people and families. This means a simpler, more accessible system that works with families, helping children to thrive in their communities and reducing the need for more intensive interventions over time.

### **3. Recommendations**

That Cabinet;

- 3.1 Notes the work completed to rebalance the Children’s Services budget for 2026/27, alongside managing the additional known pressures for this financial year.
- 3.2 Notes the successful work already undertaken to safely reduce the total number of children in care.

- 3.3 Notes the nationally prescribed children’s reforms and programmes outlined in this report and the expectations they place on Shropshire Council and its multi-agency partnership arrangements.
- 3.4 Notes the investment requirements of up to circa £8million over 4 years to deliver an anticipated £21 million savings for the local authority contained in the report and instructs the Director for Children’s Services and the Section 151 officer to make arrangements to include these estimates within the councils Medium Term Financial Plan for future consideration by Cabinet with a view to approval by Council.
- 3.5 Endorses that the Families First Partnership (FFP) requires multi-agency agreement of operating models and supporting business cases for Family Help, Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) and Family Group Decision Making (FGDM), to drive earlier intervention and that these will be progressed through the relevant safeguarding partnership governance.
- 3.6 Endorses the Council’s proposed integrated approach to deliver these reforms through a single Children’s Transformation Programme (“one plan to guide them all”), aligned to the Corporate Plan, Improvement Plan and the thematic pillars (Point 4.32) set out in the report and recommends it approval to Council.
- 3.7 Endorses the draft Best Start in Life (BSIL) Family Hubs Delivery Plan (outlined in 4.45 of this report), including the requirement to enhance the supporting digital offer (including a GDPR-compliant registration/insight system) to enable effective engagement, communication and timely access to support for families.
- 3.8 Endorses that progress, delivery risks and mitigations will be monitored through the governance structure described in the report (Section 8 of this report) with at least annual updates provided to Cabinet and the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.9 Approves the proposed locations for the three BSIL Family Hubs in Shrewsbury (at The Lantern), Oswestry and Ludlow, and the proposed additional multi-disciplinary team (MDT) bases in Highley, Market Drayton and South Shrewsbury, to provide coverage across the county’s rural geography.
- 3.10 Delegates authority to approve the final BSIL Delivery Plan for submission to the Department for Education (due 12<sup>th</sup> June 2026) to the Director for Children’s Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services.
- 3.11 Delegates authority for exploring and confirming premises options for Oswestry, Ludlow and the additional multi-disciplinary team bases to the Director for Children’s Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services. Ensuring that they are considered in conjunction with the current Community and Family Hub locations, on-going Council Asset review and the development of the NHS Neighbourhood programme to strike a balance between efficient use of public sector assets and effective delivery across the county’s rural geography.
- 3.12 Delegates authority to approve, on behalf of Shropshire Council, the Council’s participation in, and commitments arising from, the Family First Partnership business cases (including any Council owned implementation decisions and associated resourcing or locality work base implications) to the Chief Executive (as Lead Safeguarding Partner), in consultation with the Director for Children’s Services (as

Delegated Safeguarding Partner) and the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education.

- 3.13 Delegates authority to approve the Council’s position on consequential updates required to the local safeguarding framework documentation, including the Threshold Document (including any renaming), Local Protocol, Escalation Policy, and Information Sharing Agreement, as required by Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, to the Chief Executive (as Lead Safeguarding Partner), in consultation with the Director for Children’s Services (as Delegated Safeguarding Partner) and the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education.
- 3.14 Delegates authority to approve the Local Area SEND Reform Plan for submission to the Department for Education (deadline 19 June 2026) to the Director for Children’s Services and in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education, working with system partners as required, particularly the Integrated Care System (ICS) Executive Lead for SEND, noting the financial implications described in the report (including eligibility for up to 90% High Needs Stability Grant historic deficit write-off subject to Department for Education approval). The latest draft versions are included as Appendix F and G.

## Report

### 4. National Context

#### 4.1 Overview of the Changing Legal and Policy Landscape

Since the new government formed, several initiatives, programmes and reforms related to children and young people have commenced. These have been initiated on the back of significant national preparatory work, a summary of this can be found here [Executive Summary of ‘Stable Homes, Built on Love: strategy and consultation’](#) and also in response to national challenges identified within the current SEND system [Solving the SEND crisis: report calls for culture shift and funding to make mainstream education genuinely inclusive - Committees - UK Parliament](#).

- 4.2 These programmes are all focussed on how the children’s partnership in its broadest sense help to deliver better outcomes for children, young people and their families. The focus is on how we intervene and support earlier and in doing so maximise how we engage children, young people and families in decision making and utilise technology to help us meet the needs of children, young people and their families sooner.

- 4.3 The five key programmes are,

- Families First Partnership [The Families First Partnership \(FFP\) Programme Guide](#)
- Best Start in Life Family Hubs [Giving every child the best start in life Family Hubs and Start for Life programme - GOV.UK](#)
- Local Youth Transformation [The Local Youth Transformation Pilot - GOV.UK](#)
- Private Law Pathfinder [Private Law Pathfinder Delivery Update](#)
- SEND Reform White Paper: [Every child achieving and thriving - GOV.UK](#)

- 4.4 Each of these programmes seeks to transform the way we work preventatively with children and their families. Some are specific to age ranges where we see pressure in the system and others are more holistic. This is a whole system reform to rebalance the system (both activity and financially) towards more preventative Family Help and an education system with a broadened, more inclusive, role to play.

All of these programmes will result in changes to the statutory framework, guidance and inspection regimes over the coming years. The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill **Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament** has now been published and we expect other updates within 2027.

- 4.5 These reforms signal the most critical changes within Children’s Services and the partnership for decades. The ambition is to rebalance the system towards greater early intervention and prevention as opposed to later acute health, care or more specialist education. Options pertaining to what we deliver are not included in this paper as these are prescribed changes being set by the Department for Education and the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS).

#### 4.6 **Local Context**

The case for change locally is clear, Shropshire’s performance picture is mixed. We are comparatively strong on several key performance indicators our recent Ofsted judgement deemed we were outstanding, repeat demand back into social care is low. However, the number of children needing acute help and support is not what we would expect for the local demographic. This is placing a major sustainability pressure across our system that we want to address.

#### 4.7 **Key pressures**

There are two key pressures being experienced locally, the high number of children in care and the high number of children requesting support from an education, health and care plan. Both are markedly higher than we would expect for our local area based on our demographic data, which is the data used to inform the allocations of the prevention grants nationally.

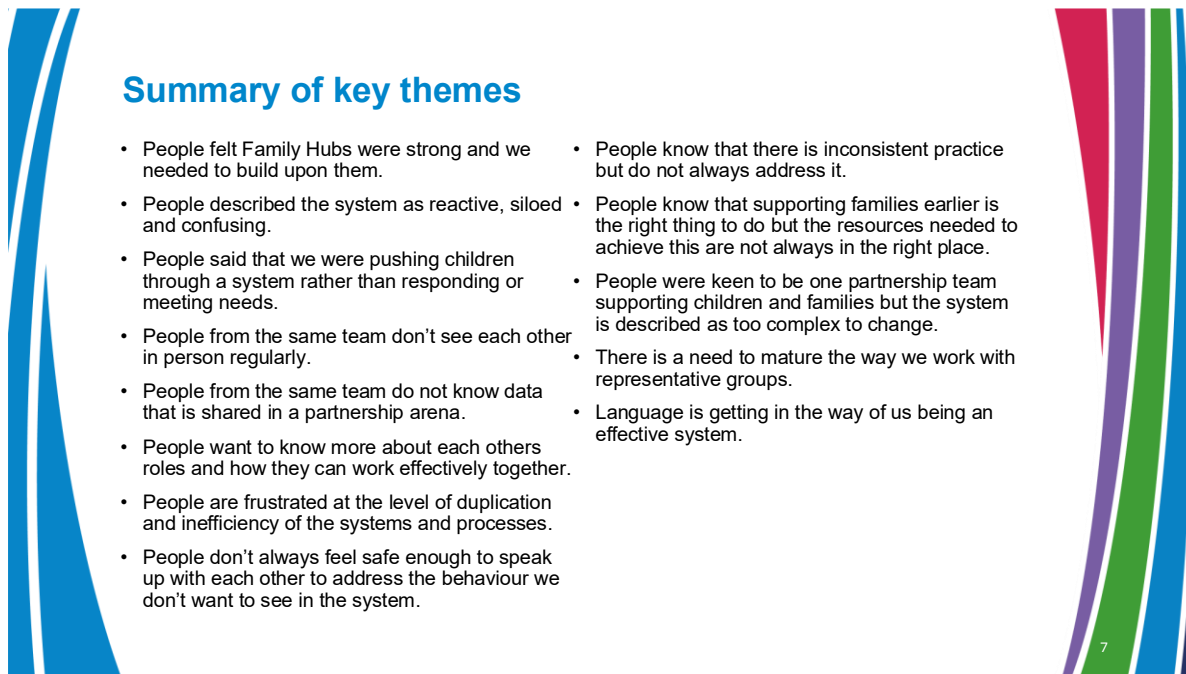
- 4.8 The Children in Care rate remains the defining sustainability issue: 111 per 10,000 (May 2026), well above the neighbour mean (61) and England <sup>[OBJ]</sup>comparator (67.1).
- 4.9 Placement mix adds to this pressure 15% of placements are in secure homes and children’s homes (2025), compared with neighbours (12.6%) and <sup>[OBJ]</sup> the <sup>[OBJ]</sup>challenge with a budget of £44million for 2026/27.
- 4.10 Following an initial assessment of needs, the majority of children known to Children’s Services will be due to the needs of their parents, hence the need for greater collaborative working with adults’ services, public health and those services commissioned by the Local Authority and its partners.
- 4.11 A needs and harms assessment has been developed which enables us to see areas across the county with the highest demand for services and support. This will drive the composition of our teams.
- 4.12 The number of children with an Education Health and Care Plan has risen substantially, since the national reforms were announced the number of families requesting an education health and care plan has increased.

- 4.13 Whilst the local authority has invested in a recovery plan there is a need to develop a more inclusive system to prevent rising and escalating needs.
- 4.14 Statutory timeliness for the delivery of our education health and care plans is below benchmark: **36.5%** of new EHCPs issued within 20 weeks (excluding exceptions) in **2024** vs neighbours (**50.2%**) and England (**46.4%**).
- 4.15 Within the SEND system there is a recognition nationally that the High Needs Block DSG deficit is at unprecedented levels and is estimated to reach £5 billion at the end of the 2025/26 financial year. Shropshire’s cumulative DSG deficit is £45.655m up to the end of the 2025/26 financial year. The Department are committed to rebalancing this system towards more inclusive systems of support building on the existing reforms.
- 4.16 These change programmes represent a chance to rebalance the system. However, it is important to recognise that the overall amount of funding spent on Children’s Services (total budget across LA education, early help and social care services) is in line with the national average. Our priority is to reallocate the resources we have, so that we reinvest into earlier help and support to prevent rising demand and reduce children looked after numbers.
- 4.17 The number of children starting school meeting their developmental milestones has reduced making it harder for children to catch up later in their education.
- 4.18 For every child who lives in Shropshire we spend £1,400 per year, this is in line with the national average level of spend for Children’s Services.
- 4.19 What is in stark contrast to the national picture is the proportion of this spend on Children’s Social Care, in Shropshire we spend circa 80% of every pound on Children’s Social Care whereas the average is 47% spent on Children’s Social Care and 53% on preventative services and support this reflects the fact that Children’s Services has a broad range of statutory duties outside of Children’s Social Care.
- 4.20 As budgets have tightened, spend on earlier intervention and prevention services have reduced to such a low level that it has been ineffective at helping to prevent children coming into care resulting in unaffordable spend on children’s care. Whilst we have recently seen some shift in this position, with fewer children entering the care system and more exiting safely than national, the net position on reducing children looked after numbers will take time to achieve a similar rate to our statistical neighbours. The transformation work proposed in this report seeks to accelerate and embed this positive change, with the two potential trajectories outlined in 12.5.
- 4.21 Work is already underway to explore and reduce the number of children and young people living in residential homes or accessing large packages of additional care provision through a combination of commissioning, process, data analysis, practice development and culture change. These changes will take time to work through to realise a financial impact over the next 5 years, but are helpful in informing future Medium Term Financial Strategy updates and developments.

#### 4.22 Initial Stakeholder Feedback

These reforms are a step change from the way we may have previously worked where each organisations could design and deliver independently. These reforms are about a shared partnership responsibility as such we have been working with partners to understand their perspective to help influence and affect change.

#### 4.23 We held stakeholder session to seek views on what was working well and what could be better. A summary is detailed below,



### Summary of key themes

- People felt Family Hubs were strong and we needed to build upon them.
- People described the system as reactive, siloed and confusing.
- People said that we were pushing children through a system rather than responding or meeting needs.
- People from the same team don't see each other in person regularly.
- People from the same team do not know data that is shared in a partnership arena.
- People want to know more about each others roles and how they can work effectively together.
- People are frustrated at the level of duplication and inefficiency of the systems and processes.
- People don't always feel safe enough to speak up with each other to address the behaviour we don't want to see in the system.
- People know that there is inconsistent practice but do not always address it.
- People know that supporting families earlier is the right thing to do but the resources needed to achieve this are not always in the right place.
- People were keen to be one partnership team supporting children and families but the system is described as too complex to change.
- There is a need to mature the way we work with representative groups.
- Language is getting in the way of us being an effective system.

#### 4.24 In addition we completed a maturity matrix for Families First Partnership and SEND (see appendix F) This was co-produced and has led to the development of our draft plan.

#### 4.25 All of these assessments and information tell us that we have being doing foundational work which will help us to achieve the desired change, we need to maintain commitment to cultivating shared ownership across our partnership. Our new Corporate Plan describes our ambition and focus for Shropshire council for the next four years. These reforms contribute to four of the ambitions, safe communities, healthy communities, thriving economy and sustainable council.

#### 4.26 Our transformation also contributes to the Improvement Plan by investing in a preventative approach that will realise financial savings for the council and transforming the way we work. Our changes will only be successful if the people plan, getting the basics right and digital are embedded and maximised.

**Corporate Alignment**



Aims	Priority programmes of action that will achieve the aims:
A Council that is financially stable and sustainable	Programme 1: Financial stability
	Programme 2: Financial sustainability strategy
	Programme 3: Strengthening financial management policy & practice
A Council that has clear priorities and purpose	Programme 4: Corporate Plan 2026-30
	Programme 5: Future council – including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Embedding principles and ways of working</li> <li>Enabling partnerships and communities</li> <li>Place shaping role</li> </ul>
	Programme 6: Review and realignment of transformation programme
A Council that supports and enables our workforce to excel	Programme 7 : People Plan – including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employee engagement and involvement</li> <li>New Ways of Working - services that support staff</li> </ul>
	Programme 8: Getting the basics right (Strengthening corporate governance and compliance)
	Programme 9: Digital programme

4.27 The transformation is dependent on ensuring that our people are working to our organisational values and embedding the principles as these underpin the work we are doing.





Figure 3: principles that guide how we operate, improve and transform

4.28 A range of work aligned to the workforce strand will support us to realise this cultural change aligned to the corporate work on our people plan. This is included as part of our transformation plan.

**4.29 Our Approach to implementing these reforms: One Plan**

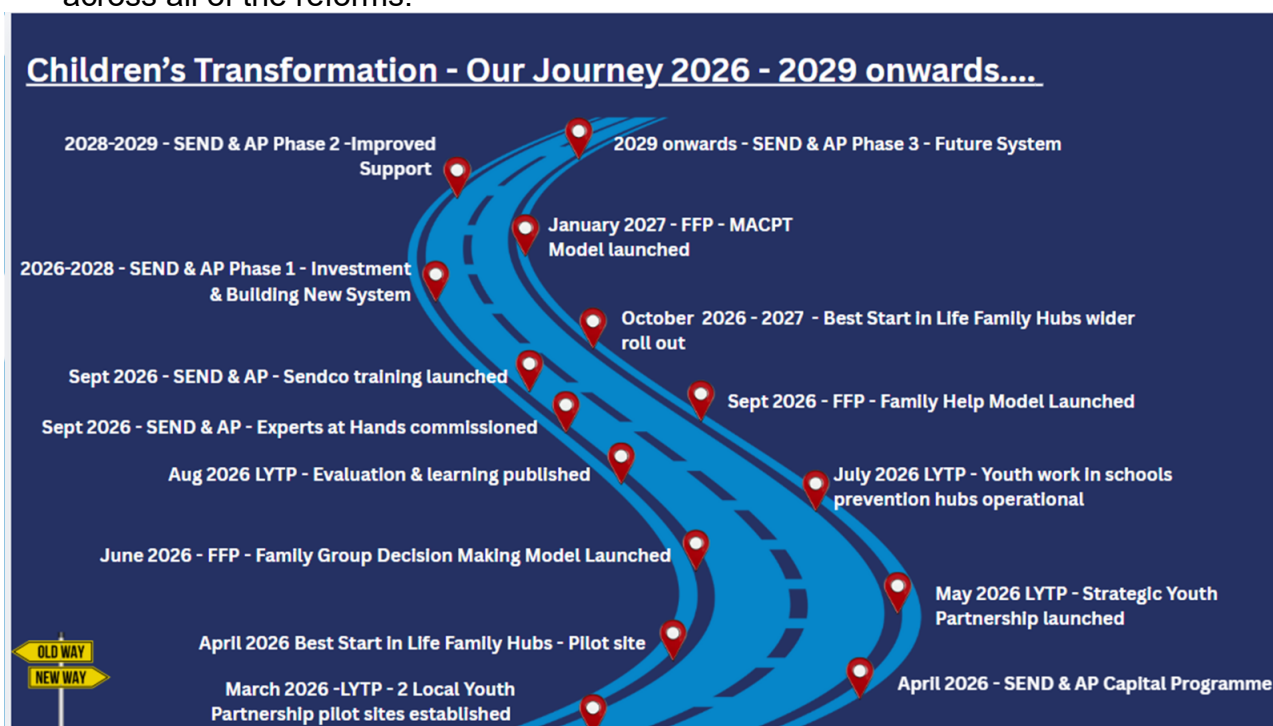
In order to deliver these ambitious changes, system leaders felt strongly that there should be one plan to guide them all. We believe that these programmes represent a change to the way we work as a whole system which means we need to see them as one integrated package of reforms. We shared this proposal with Lead Safeguarding Partners and People Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members, who endorsed this approach. We have therefore worked to deliver the change needed through a single Children’s Transformation Programme as part of the wider corporate improvement plan. A copy of the full document is included Appendix D.

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

4.31 Our plan will reiterate as key milestones are met using a test and learn approach. Regular oversight and scrutiny from Members is welcome as we move throughout the delivery of this programme, with People Overview and Scrutiny Committee having confirmed that they expect to receive further updates as the programme develops.

- 4.32 The pillars of the changes will be,
- Inclusive Practice & People - Workforce
  - Children and Family Voice
  - Data, Digital and Systems.
  - Inclusive Places and Spaces
  - Leadership, Governance and Commissioning

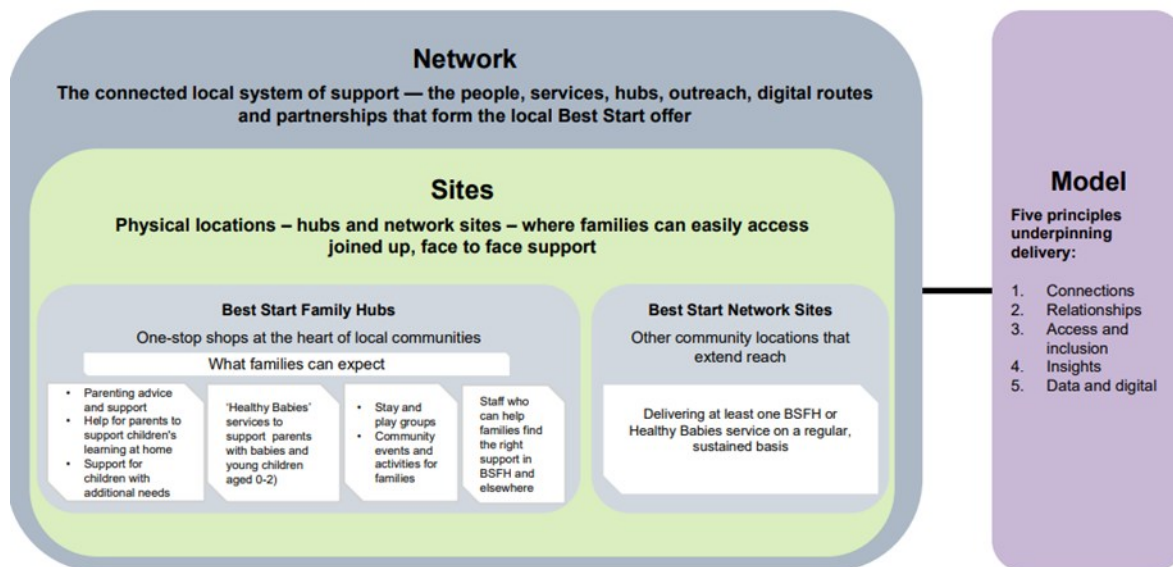
- 4.33 These are aspects of all the reforms that connect the key changes being sought corporately. We have outlined the priority work for each of these pillars (Appendix H) It is critical to acknowledge here the interdependency with the corporate improvement plan underway as these pillars are heavily reliant on corporate leadership and support from children’s services.
- 4.34 Our Plan will be underpinned by a child friendly approach where we consider systematically children and young people in our decision making so that children’s rights are embedded into our governance, policies, services and support.
- 4.35 The road map below provides a high level overview of what we will deliver and when across all of the reforms.



- 4.36 **Overview of what we are required to deliver**  
Best Start in Life Family Hubs (BSIL): The Department for Education are rolling out Best Start in Life Family Hubs. These Family Hubs are seeking to provide a local hub where families can access a range of professionals and support to help meet their needs early.
- 4.37 The government have set deliverable targets for example we are tasked with improving early childhood outcomes, measured through the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS.) By 2028 we need to ensure 77% of children are meeting the required standard. A clear focus is on reducing the impact of poverty and therefore stretch targets for families accessing Free School Meals (FSM) are also required (56%). An additional 32 children accessing FSM would need to reach the required level to meet this milestone.
- 4.38 These hubs should be a one stop shop for families to access integrated health services, delivering core activities such as parenting programmes and home learning (outreaching into households to model a home learning environment within the family home and networked sites.)

- 4.39 There is an expectation that we will deliver not just through the buildings themselves but through a range of services and support delivered by partners and voluntary and community sector organisations.
- 4.40 A key focus is about relationships with trusted adults to help improve the health, wellbeing, safety, cost of living support and family support services.

Figure 1: The Best Start Family Hubs Framework – overview



- 4.41 We are required to name our Family Hub sites. These will be required to deliver the full offer outlined in **Best start family hubs and healthy babies - guidance for local authorities**
- 4.42 Our funding is relatively low, reflecting the local demographic and therefore we are seeking to deliver the core Best Start in Life Family Hubs from three sites across the county. There is criteria that needs to be used to determine the site. This has been analysed (Appendix C) and our recommendation based on this data and to achieve a presence in North, Central and South Shropshire is that we have three sites, The Lantern in Shrewsbury would be the first to open in September 2026.
- 4.43 Sites for Oswestry and Ludlow are still being determined due to the delivery requirements it is likely that we have split site arrangements where we undertake front line delivery from one site and host the multi-disciplinary team in the other site.
- 4.44 In addition to this we will seek to work with Town and Parish Councils, the Voluntary and Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) and the Integrated Care System (NHS ICS) alongside the development of the NHS national Neighbourhood approach, to map a range of networked sites where families can access services and support throughout their life journey.
- 4.45 The Best Start in Life Family Hubs are seeking to achieve ambitious targets to achieve this outcome, we have been required to publish a Best Start in Life Family Hub Plan as part of the programme [Shropshire Best Start In Life plan | Shropshire Council](#) The plan details the partnership action that will be taken.

- 4.46 The full guidance has a strong focus on brand awareness which means that whilst we will work as part of the Community and Family Hub model the community need to be able to identify and describe the role of the Best Start in Life Family Hub **Best start family hubs and healthy babies - guidance for local authorities**
- 4.47 This will have a strong focus on early communication and language which has been identified as an area of need and to develop the family navigator and BSIL inclusion practitioner roles within the hubs to support families in navigating and accessing local services, particularly those with children who have additional needs.
- 4.48 In order for us to demonstrate the impact of this work we need to enhance the current digital offer to ensure families access support when they need it. Develop a BSIL family hub registration system that is GDPR compliant and captures key insights and contact details enabling effective communication, signposting, and sharing of information about services, activities and up to date guidance e.g. screen time advice
- 4.49 Families First Partnership, We are required to:  
Deliver a seamless system of support across **Family Help**, this is a newly defined continuum which would have previously been known as, ‘Early Help and Children in Need.’ There is a requirement of the Safeguarding Partnership to identify a broad range of partners who can deliver early help outside of the local authority. The partnership is required to deliver several key milestones (Appendix D) which will help us secure more effective earlier support for families.
- 4.50 Develop a **Multi Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT)** This is a completely new aspect of the system that the multi-agency partnership are being asked to develop. This should be a team that provides a ‘second look’ at the partnership support and provides ‘high support, high challenge’ to ensure that our practice is as effective as it can be to prevent poorer outcomes for these children.
- 4.51 Embed **Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)** throughout the system so that at the earliest point in a family's journey, opportunities to utilise and build upon the family's strengths including their widest family network are explored and built upon. The intention is that this enables children and young people to remain within their family network, rather than having to become a looked after child to the Local Authority.
- 4.52 There is a requirement for our teams and our partnership to work effectively together through co-located multi-disciplinary teams. Again using the data analysis we recommend that the locations of these multi disciplinary teams are in the three Family Hub sites and three additional sites,
- Highley,
  - South Shrewsbury and
  - Market Drayton
- 4.53 Each of these aspects has a partnership task and finish structure. Each is led by a multi-agency partner – education lead Family Help, MACPT is led by Police and FGDM is led by the Local Authority and Multi-Disciplinary Teams is led by Health. These task and finish groups have developed a shared business case that outlines

the vision, the principles and the way in which they will operate. These business cases are due to be signed off by the Lead Safeguarding Partners by the end of June, after the Cabinet meeting on the 10<sup>th</sup> June 2026.

- 4.54 The recommendations of the business cases will result in changes to the way we work as a multi-agency partnership, including the bases from which teams operate (aligned to the multi-disciplinary team bases), the structure of our teams, the practice frameworks and models we use and the partnership input into Family Help. It is envisaged that formal consultation may be needed to ensure the workforce are formally engaged.
- 4.55 This will require a change to the way we work placing much more focus on:
- Engaging Children and Families
  - Multi-Disciplinary and Joint Working, there is a need to consider fully where the partnership should be building multi agency capacity rather than single agency responses.
  - Operating systemically so that we understand the whole needs of the family and operate effectively together to meet their needs.
- 4.56 It is envisaged all of these changes will reduce the number of children in care and see more children being supported by professionals within Family Help and Child Protection.
- 4.57 All of these changes will need to be documented and will result in changes to the Safeguarding Children’s Threshold Document (likely to be renamed, framework for action), the local protocol, the escalation policy and the information sharing agreement. This should be agreed by Lead Safeguarding Partners (**Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK**)
- 4.58 National Youth Strategy (precursor was the Local Youth Transformation Fund)  
We are required to deliver:
- Trusted Adults: We are required to upskill people working with young people to identify the early signs and intervene to help children feel connected and supported to be emotionally well. This could include mentors from the private sector alongside public partners. Placing Youth Workers in localities where there is a high level of need so that targeted interventions can take place.
- 4.59 Strengthening the Workforce: Developing and growing a skilled and sustainable paid and volunteer youth sector workforce, with the highest standards to meet young people’s needs.
- 4.60 Friends and Relationships: Helping young people to develop positive social connections in schools and colleges, in their communities, and online.
- 4.61 Richer Lives: Providing enriching and meaningful activities for young people in and outside of education.
- 4.62 Good Work: Providing better education, guidance, training, and support for young people to get a great job.

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

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

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

4.66 **SEND Reforms**

The Government have committed to the reform of the SEND system; in December 2025 the Department for Education wrote to Local Authorities to ask them to start to work as a partnership to work towards a rebalanced more inclusive system of early intervention and support, to support them to achieve this they asked that local partnerships assess their maturity against seven key pillars,

- Co-Production with parents and carers and children and young people.
- Effective System’s Leadership and Governance
- Accurate understanding of needs through effective use of data
- High quality deliver at all levels
- Effective partnerships across health, education and social care
- A skilled partnership workforce
- Targeted, judicious and sustainable use of resources

4.67 The Local Authority must submit a Local Area SEND Reform Plan to DfE by 19<sup>th</sup> June 2026. If this plan is approved, we will be eligible to have up to 90% of our High Needs deficit accrued up to the end of financial year 2025/26 paid by the DfE through the High Needs Stability Grant.

4.68 We are required to:

- **Submit Local SEND Reform Plans:** Prepare and submit an initial plan by the 19<sup>th</sup> June 2026, with quarterly updates, including financial forecasting, provision planning, and monitoring and evaluation.
- **Strategic oversight:** Move from direct case involvement to a strategic and partnership role with schools, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), and other local stakeholders.
- **Implement the Experts at Hand (EAH) model:** Ensure mainstream schools and early years/further education settings have access to embedded specialist support from education and health professionals. This will include providing access to additional specialists whilst also playing a strategic role across some services such as speech and language therapy via advanced practitioners who will work with ICBs, universities and providers to ensure more support is available and more direct work is taking place.
- **Provide early intervention and inclusive support:** Strengthen capability in mainstream settings to identify and support SEND needs sooner, preventing escalation.

- **Develop and embed tiered support:** Oversee the delivery of support across Targeted, Targeted Plus, and Specialist tiers, including new Individual Support Plans (ISPs) and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) where required.
- **Enhance workforce capacity:** Recruit and support new Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT) advanced practitioners, and expand specialist education staff and aligned health professionals.
- **Ensure financial accountability:** Manage allocated funding responsibly, investing in prevention, specialist support, and transformation activities, without using it to replace statutory duties or individual EHCP provisions.
- **Data and systems management:** Implement nationally consistent digital EHCPs and ISPs, maintain shared local dashboards, and ensure joined-up data across education, health, and care services.
- **Support inclusion and local provision:** Guide mainstream schools to take increasing responsibility for SEND provision, including the creation of Inclusion Bases, and ensure support is delivered locally wherever possible.
- **Engage with families and stakeholders:** Co-produce plans with parents, carers, schools, and local partners, maintaining transparency and responsiveness to local needs.

## 5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 Shropshire Council continues to manage unprecedented financial demands, through the application and use of significant exceptional financial support. This means that whilst there has been significant management action instigated at all levels of the Council to reducing spend to ensure the Council's financial survival, there is a need to demonstrate how these reforms will contribute to enabling the Council to become a financially sustainable organisation, in line with our Corporate Plan.
- 5.2 In 2025/26, Children and Young People’s services ended the financial year with a £12.230m overspend against a budget of £90.963m. Despite an overall 7.5% reduction of the number of children looked after from 721 on 1st April 2025 to 667 on 31st March 2026, a combination of known, but unbudgeted pressures, aligned with demand led pressures within children’s placements, largely explained by a £14.908m overspend on External Residential placements within the Children’s placements budget where numbers had increased significantly in year. Growth of £19.342m has been built into the 2026/27 Children’s External Residential placements budget to address this budget pressure going forward.
- 5.3 Whilst this is significant growth in one area of the Children and Young People’s 2026/27 budget, several other budget pressures have been identified totalling £5.940m. This has been due to pressure caused by a growth in demand over and above what was expected for Education Health and Care Plans and therefore the staff capacity, agency costs and shortfalls potential shortfalls in income.
- 5.4 It is anticipated that these budget pressures can be mitigated through a combination of savings against External Residential placements through the collective work of Children’s Services, including Stepping Stones, budget growth no longer required in

the Internal Residential Children’s homes budget, the maximisation of external funding and one-off underspends anticipated from temporary vacancy management savings and other one-off efficiencies.

- 5.5 Whilst this is anticipated to deliver a balanced budget in the Children and Young People’s budget in 2026/27, investment in prevention through the Families First Programme is required to deliver cost savings over the long term.
- 5.6 Moving forward work will continue in particular to achieve a net reduction in the number of children in residential placements. Progress is expected to be in line with current trends which will continue to take the number of children in care closer towards the statutory neighbours. However, the ambition is to accelerate the pace of this change and to do so there will be a need to invest further in the service, with the ambition that these costs will be offset overtime with savings realised through earlier help and support.
- 5.7 A submission has been made to Budget Transformation and Change Review Panel with a view to advising the panel of the service ambitions the potential costs and benefits of the transformation necessary. It is estimated that investment in staff and systems will be approximately £2 million per annum with effect from 2027/28. This funding will be required in order to accelerate the reduction in the number of children in residential care and over time will be redirected to rebalance the system with the objective of increasing the resource available for early intervention.
- 5.8 Given this level of investment, it is anticipated that the number of children entering residential care will be stabilised, and hopefully reduced, and by 2029/30 the total costs to the council for residential care will start to reduce as set out in the table below. Current estimates suggest that the MTFP can project savings in the Children’s Services budget of £1.483m in 2029/30 rising to a further £3.709m in 2030/31. These estimates are on the assumptions,
  - a. Outcomes are modelled on pathfinder and comparator areas, however no comparator fully reflects Shropshire’s rurality, corporate context, starting position (high numbers of Children in Care and very low Early Help investment), placement profile, or market context.
  - b. The financial model assumes performance towards the mid-range of national outcomes; actual savings may fall anywhere within the observed range of 1.9%–13.8%.
  - c. Reductions in Children Looked After numbers does not automatically translate into a similar reduction in cost or overall spend (eg Children in Care number have reduced by 5% between September 2025 and May 2026, but we have not seen a 5% reduction in costs).
  - d. Reductions in Children in Care numbers beyond Year 2 are based on modelled projections rather than observed trend data.
  - e. The model assumes that practice change is successfully implemented and sustained across the system.
  - f. Delivery assumes sufficient workforce recruitment, sustained capacity and capability throughout the period.
  - g. The model assumes alignment and sustained contribution from key partners as often the need for our services is because the system response is not effective.

- h. Future demand is assumed to remain broadly stable, excluding unforeseen shocks.
- i. Savings and impact rely on robust data tracking and attribution.
- j. Not all reductions in demand will translate immediately into cashable savings; some benefits will be cost avoidance rather than budget reduction.
- k. Savings from placements will be consistently reinvested into prevention as modelled.
- l. The model assumes no significant deterioration in the external placement market (e.g. provider exits, price shocks, or increased use of unregulated provision).
- m. Benefits are dependent on sequencing: Early Help impact → reduced escalation → reduced placements → cashable savings.
- n. No significant changes in national policy, inspection framework, or statutory thresholds materially affecting demand.
- o. No significant changes or increase to allocations of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People placed in Shropshire by the national Government through the National Transfer Scheme.
- p. Service model effectiveness assumes that a prevention model can be delivered consistently across a large and rural geography.
- q. Savings assume growth in local fostering sufficient to offset residential demand.
- r. That corporate support is available with sufficient capacity.
- s. That the return on investment is 3 years. This is in line with the pathfinder areas however the return could be realised sooner or take longer.
- t. That the 9% remains stable in 2028/29 and 2029/30 however we anticipate this will change as we only have 2 years of data. For modelling purposes, we have assumed a 6% reduction in Children in Care in 2030/31 and 5% in 2031/32.
- u. That the rate of children in care for our statistical neighbours is broadly reflective of our demographic factors. This has been calculated at a rate of 61 per 10,000 and this could change (compared with Shropshire at a rate of 111 per 10,000 as at May 2026). This should be reviewed and adjusted annually.
- v. We will reduce escalation to high-cost placements;
- w. The ability to shift placement mix away from expensive external residential options in a volatile market, there is a shortage of foster carers, it takes time to build this market capacity.
- x. The time lag between practice changes and reductions in the care population.
- y. Inflationary and market pressures on placement costs, including the prevalence of £10k+ per week placements nationally.
- z. That there is contribution from key stakeholders this includes partners and internal services (often children become known to children’s services owing to adults.)

5.9 All these assumptions mean that the implementation of the programme needs close monitoring, review and agile adjustment by Children’s Services, the Council, political leaders and the wider partnership.

5.10 On the basis on these assumptions the payback on the investment will be achieved in 2031/32. As set out in the report this investment will have a significant impact on the outcomes for children and maintain compliance with both our statutory responsibilities and regulatory obligations.

- 5.11 Subject to the approval of this report the Director for Children’s Services and the Section 151 officer will make arrangements to incorporate these estimates in the Medium Term Financial Plan being reported to Cabinet in July 2026. As part of these arrangements options will be considered for use of the council's transformation funds to underwrite part of the commitment.
- 5.12 The range of assumptions has led us to present two potential scenarios, a best case and a more realistic case. Each of these are presented below.
- 5.13 The best case scenario is based on an equal distribution of the reductions across all care types.

	Benefits realised by Investment in Prevention (Best Case Scenario)						
	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33
Increase in Prevention Funding		2.000	0.900	0.900			
In Year Savings projected on Children's placements through a reduction in Children in Care Numbers				-	-	-	-
				5.327	3.118	2.763	2.210
Projected Increase/(Decrease) in Children and Young People Net budget		2.000	0.900	-	-	-	-
				6.227	3.118	2.763	2.210
<b>Cumulative Increase/(Decrease) in Children and Young People Net budget</b>		<b>2.000</b>	<b>2.900</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
				<b>3.327</b>	<b>6.445</b>	<b>9.208</b>	<b>11.418</b>
Cumulative Increase in Expenditure		2.000	4.900	6.900	8.900	10.900	12.900
Cumulative Forecast Savings				-	-	-	-
				5.327	8.445	19.653	33.071
<b>Cumulative Impact</b>		<b>2.000</b>	<b>4.900</b>	<b>1.573</b>	<b>0.455</b>	<b>8.753</b>	<b>20.171</b>

Table 1, Best Case Scenario

- 5.14 The realistic scenario reflects a more cautious position owing to level of change needed within our organisation, the partnership and the market to reach the more ambitious position.

	Benefits realised by Investment in Prevention (Realistic Case Scenario)						
	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33
Increase in Prevention		2.000	0.900	0.900			
In Year Savings projected on Children's placements through a reduction in CLA Numbers				-	-	-	-
				2.238	2.520	2.500	1.953
Projected Increase/(Decrease) in Children and Young People Net budget		2.000	0.900	-	-	-	-
				3.138	2.520	2.500	1.953
<b>Cumulative Increase/(Decrease) in Children and Young People Net budget</b>		<b>2.000</b>	<b>2.900</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
				<b>0.238</b>	<b>2.758</b>	<b>5.258</b>	<b>7.210</b>
Cumulative Increase in Expenditure		2.000	4.900	6.900	8.900	10.900	12.900
Cumulative Forecast Savings				-	-	-	-
				2.238	4.758	12.015	21.226
<b>Cumulative Impact</b>		<b>2.000</b>	<b>4.900</b>	<b>4.662</b>	<b>4.142</b>	<b>1.115</b>	<b>8.326</b>

Table 2, Realistic Scenario

### 5.15 **Government Intervention in the High Needs Block**

The Department for Education have written to all local authorities and pledged to cover 90% of the historic SEND deficit accrued up to the end of 2025/26 through a new High Needs Stability Grant. Receiving the grant funding (up to 90%) is dependent on the submission of a local SEND reform plan which details the action we will take to rebalance the SEND system towards a more inclusive system, focussed on earlier intervention and prevention.

- 5.16 Our SEND Reform Plan is required to be submitted to the Department for Education to ensure that we can access this funding. DRAFT SEND Reform Plan (Appendix G.)

	<b>£ m'</b>
DSG Deficit carried forward from 2024-25	17.566
DSG Deficit Outturn 2025-26	28.090
<b>DSG deficit to be carried forward into 2026-27 (without any High Needs Stability Grant applied)</b>	<b>45.655</b>
<b>DSG deficit with High Needs Stability Grant applied</b>	<b>4.565</b>

- 5.17 This means that there is a deficit of £4.565 million deficit position and no known provisions for 2026/27 onwards.

There remains uncertainty on the approach nationally to provide support for deficits that arise in 2026/27 and 2027/28 financial years, as the DfE are clear that in year deficits will likely continue to occur whilst the proposed changes to the national SEND system are implemented. However, the DfE have confirmed that they will continue to take an appropriate and proportionate approach to financial support for Local Authorities, though it will not be unlimited.

- 5.18 Given the 2025-26 outturn position for the DSG is a £28.090m in-year deficit. This demonstrates the scale of the on-going yearly risk whilst the impact of the Local Area SEND Reform plan embeds and national SEND reforms are implemented.

## 6. **Government Funding**

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

- 6.2 The Department for Education (DfE) are investing earlier as Local Authorities have been clear they cannot reduce demand without twin tracking investment. We need to reinvest savings into prevention otherwise we will not be able to realise the full anticipated benefits for children, young people and families.

Programme of Work	Funding Allocated 2025/2026	2026/27	2027/28
Families First Partnership	£1.887m	£2.872m (all but £0.375m of this increase is due to the consolidation of a number of grants)	£2.872m
Best Start in Life	£0.152m	£1.057m (see full details Appendix B)	£1.136m
SEND (Note this does not include the High Needs Stability Grant)	£0	£1.943m (indicative – see funding guidance document linked in 2.4 above)	£3.375m (predicted based on the proportion of the total fund allocated in 26/27)

- 6.3 These grants have very clear memorandums of understanding which need to be reported to the Department for Education quarterly and restrict the use of the funds to specific activities to support the specific purpose of the grant.
- 6.4 The DfE have made the case to the Treasury that investment in prevention will realise a reduction in the high costs of care, however this is a 5-year plan to reduce the overall costs at the most intensive approach to supporting children and young people who have experienced significant harm.
- 6.5 The first Pathfinders such as Wolverhampton (which started in 2023) are seeing this reduction in care numbers within 2025/26 but later Pathfinders are not seeing this reduction yet.
- 6.6 If we anticipate that Shropshire would follow a similar trajectory where investment in this approach will start to realise the benefits 3 years after (2029/30) the reforms being implemented (2026/27) within the cost of care, based on the factors outlined below.
- 6.7 The investment we have received from the DfE is based on nationally identified demographic factors for Shropshire not actual demand in Shropshire. This means that the investment is not sufficient to reform the system, whilst meeting the current service demand in the system, therefore on the current investment levels it will take Shropshire longer to realise the benefits for children, young people and families and achieve financial sustainability.
- 6.8 The estimated cost of delivering the reforms required to meet the current and future levels of need in the system has been assessed on a **whole-council basis**. Whilst some of this capacity would be needed in Children’s Services for example to support Mocking Bird Constellations so that we can ensure foster carers have adequate support the majority of the costs would support wider corporate services for example

to ensure that we had the digital capability, support from housing, the project managers to oversee a programme of a significant scale.

- 6.9 Our analysis has shown that the average decrease in Children in Care numbers across the pathfinders was 9%. This has not been split equally across care types as we recognise that there are existing market pressures. The financial impact of this investment could realise savings from 2029/30 as set out in the table below. This table shows the increase in base budget of £2.000m required in 2027/28 and £0.900m required in 2028/29, and also shows that forecast in-years savings are estimated to total £1.483m in 2029/30, increasing to £3.709m in 2030/31. 2030/31 is the financial year where we anticipate that the £2.000m initial increase in base budget will have been exceeded by savings achieved through the reduction in Children’s placements budget resulting from a 9.2% reduction in CLA numbers. Further savings can be generated in 2031/32 and beyond as long as the projected reduction in CLA numbers can be sustained.

## 7. Benefits Realisation

- 7.1 There are two key benefits, the benefits to children, young people and families and the financial benefits to support the Council to become a sustainable organisation.
- 7.2 Children, Young People and Families.  
Achieving better outcomes for children and young people in Shropshire is a priority, it contributes to four of our corporate ambitions. Council have also already agreed to implement the SEND Outcomes Framework and we will expand this to cover all children and young people, and align it to quantifiable metrics that helps the council to quantify the impact these changes have [shropshire-send-and-ap-outcomes-framework-2025-final.pdf](#)
- 7.3 We have a range of tools nationally including the Children’s Social Care Dashboard [Children’s social care dashboard - GOV.UK](#) and the Local Authority Interactive Tool [Local authority interactive tool \(LAIT\) - GOV.UK](#) which we want to bring together to provide a Children’s Services Scorecard to ensure visibility of the impact we are having (Appendix G: DRAFT Scorecard example)
- 7.4 Developing a Financially Sustainable Council  
As well as improving outcomes we know that there is a financial imperative to ensure Shropshire Council becomes a financially sustainable organisation. These changes are being embarked upon as there is a wealth of evidence that earlier intervention, not only improves outcomes, but is more affordable. The Department for Education have made the financial case to the treasury for investment and therefore there is a need to ensure that we maintain scrutiny and oversight of local performance so that we can demonstrate the benefits and see the impact.
- 7.5 The below chart illustrates that the number of children in care has already started to reduce. However, this has not yet resulted in a significant financial benefit as the reduction has not been from children and young people living in residential homes. The key reason for this is that whilst there is a desire to ensure that children are at home when possible, for most children in care there needs to be investment to wrap more support around the earliest intervention and prevention and the market conditions within more affordable care options.



- 7.12 Shropshire’s approach mirrors this: the programme will use disciplined monitoring and evaluation and will adapt the delivery model where evidence indicates that adjustments are required to achieve intended outcomes safely and efficiently, while maintaining statutory compliance and safeguarding assurance.
- 7.13 The benefits of our transformation plan will be monitored through our performance scorecard which has been appended as well as robust monitoring of our financial performance. We have evidence from the national social care dashboard that local areas investing in prevention are seeing less spent on expensive care arrangements. As a council we know that the costs associated with care are a contributory factor to the financial challenges we face.

## 8. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 8.1 The key risks related to this programme of change are detailed below. There are many risks that are documented but the most critical is the priority of these reforms, when considered amongst the broader context the Council and partners face, in particular the financial challenges, combined with significant structural change underway within the ICS and West Mercia Police. This is undoubtedly causing a tension between immediate savings and longer term preventative approaches.
- 8.2 The changes outlined in the report are due to become statutory obligations on the Council and partners, therefore our ability to remain statutorily compliant is critical. The DfE have clearly outlined in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 that it is the responsibility of the Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) to ensure that the Children’s Services reforms are owned by each statutory partner (LA, ICS and Police) and suitable resources are made available by each organisation to effectively deliver their responsibilities.
- 8.3 There is a very real challenge that the Council faces with a high number of children already in care, as for this programme to be successful there is a key interdependency with practice for Children in Care and the market to support them being vibrant enough to meet our children’s needs, particularly as most children’s needs could be met in foster care but there are insufficient homes for our children currently. We recognise that reducing the overall number of children in care will help us to achieve the overall rebalance of the system, as circa 80% of Shropshire Children’s Services spend is on Children’s Social Care currently (for most Local Authorities this is closer to 50%)., however the direct correlation between overall numbers of Children in Care and rebalancing the way funding is spent is much more complex and indirect.

### 8.4 Risk table

<i>Risk</i>	<i>Mitigation</i>	<i>Link to Strategic Risk</i>
<p><b>Overwhelming Volume of Change</b></p> <p>There is change to the way aspects of Public Sector delivery takes place e.g. change of the footprint of the Integrated Care Boards, Local Government</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure leaders across the system prioritise the delivery of the children’s services transformation programmes, noting that this may require de-prioritisation of other activity during this period.</li> <li>• Ensure good communication and alignment with the other changes to ensure that where possible these dovetail together.</li> </ul>	<p>Impact of extreme pressure of partners.</p>

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<p>Reform and removal of Police and Crime Commissioners. Whilst this change is critical it could be determined to be less important.</p> <p>All of this change alongside these service level changes can become overwhelming for people and there is a risk that we lose momentum as these changes are deemed as less important than other more strategic issues,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that communications are sympathetic to the volume of change and make sure that the methods used to communicate are clear.</li> <li>• Ensure good feedback loops from a range of people to understand how well the changes are landing and if any barriers, or if there are pulls in different directions, to ensure these are escalated to the respective governance structures</li> <li>• Ensure the impact of risk is monitored closely and keep senior leaders informed via governance mechanisms.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Financial:</b></p> <p>There is a risk that the budget is not sufficient to deliver the required change across the local authority and the broader partnership. .</p> <p>There is a risk that the short term funding is not extended beyond 2029.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grants being mapped and a clear breakdown of spend being developed.</li> <li>• Broader range of grants being drawn together to ensure that where possible the programmes align and income can be used efficiently to deliver all programme objectives.</li> <li>• Partners making necessary representation to raise this risk e.g. DfE if required.</li> <li>• Continue to monitor the spend and raise key concerns.</li> <li>• Seek exceptional arrangements for grant funding to enable swift spend against the agreed plan via BCTRP. Any deviation from plan would be subject to normal spend control processes.</li> <li>• Plan for sustainability of workforce once the transformation programme ends; commission from other providers where appropriate; seek to develop a traded model over time to offset the core, funded model of support.</li> </ul>	<p>Inability to contain overall committed expenditure within the current available resources within this financial year</p> <p>Inability to set a balanced budget for a given year within the MTFS</p>
<p><b>Scale of Culture Change:</b></p> <p>There is a risk that the scale of change needed at a time of considerable strain within the council and partner organisations is not achievable.</p> <p>There is a risk that the organisation and the partnership see this as a programme related to Children’s Services missing the critical role that they need to play in these reforms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources allocated to key partnership transformation roles (Police, health and Council)</li> <li>• Leadership buy in secured from Cabinet, Leadership Board and wider partnership.</li> <li>• Woven into the fabric of the partnership operating model (how we work around here) as part of the improvement plan, corporate plan and partnership plan.</li> <li>• Representation and deliverables from across the organisation and partnership secured.</li> <li>• Regular monitoring and progress by Leadership Board.</li> <li>• Partnership leads appointed.</li> <li>• Partnership support to develop the ‘what good looks like’ for us collectively.</li> <li>• Sequencing of the aspects of change.</li> <li>• Frequent monitoring and oversight by partnership and DfE and DCMS.</li> </ul>	<p>Critical skills shortage impacting on recruitment, retention, and succession planning.</p> <p>Health &amp; Wellbeing of the Workforce</p>
<p><b>Risk to Safety:</b></p> <p>Rebalancing a system of support to children and families brings a risk that children and families needs are not met resulting in a risk of harm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice Lead a requirement of the programme.</li> <li>• Learning from pathfinders and other local authorities.</li> <li>• Regular check and challenge from Department for Education.</li> <li>• Sequencing of change and roll out approach considered thoughtfully.</li> <li>• Working with ICB and Police footprints means we have the opportunity to test and learn on some aspects of the programme.</li> <li>• More frequent oversight of the programme and reporting to the safeguarding partnership.</li> </ul>	<p>Impact of extreme pressures upon partners (social care, health, and criminal justice)</p>
<p><b>Delivery:</b></p> <p>There is a risk that this work is not prioritised meaning that key milestones are not met for example digital priorities may not include childrens.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular reporting to Leadership Board, Cabinet, Scrutiny and Partnership Boards.</li> <li>• Children’s Leadership Team oversight monthly to maintain visibility or risks and any delay.</li> <li>• Alignment with the overarching council improvement and partnership plan.</li> <li>• Project Management support secured.</li> </ul>	<p>Health &amp; Wellbeing of the Workforce</p> <p>Critical skills shortage.</p> <p>Failure to set clear strategic direction</p>

<p>This is also pertinent to partners who are operating across up to four Local Authority Areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular reporting to DfE to maintain progress and oversight of progress.</li> <li>Investment in corporate support functions to enable the delivery.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Workforce:</b> There is a risk that the workforce are not equipped to support the changes, they are resistant to change and/or burnt out from the level of change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing a coherent narrative and approach to integrating reforms so we have a systematic way of enveloping all changes.</li> <li>Skills Audit and Population Needs Analysis.</li> <li>Engagement of workforce a critical component of the change programme.</li> <li>Regular communication.</li> <li>‘Go and See’ partnership leaders to visit practitioners to ascertain the appetite and acceptance of change to refine the delivery methods.</li> <li>Independent scrutineer utilised at critical points to check and challenge.</li> <li>Engage corporate services early to secure buy in.</li> <li>Create alignment with corporate transformation.</li> <li>Raise the profile and statutory significance of the change with corporate support services.</li> </ul>	<p>Health &amp; Wellbeing of the Workforce Critical skills shortage impacting on recruitment, retention, and succession planning</p>
<p><b>Reputation and Public Trust:</b> There is a risk that the public lose faith or see the changes in a critical light.  There is a risk that families expectations exceed what is affordable for the council.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-production and measuring families perception is a key aspect of the programme.</li> <li>Monitor feedback</li> <li>Regular communications with members, MPs and community influencers such as Parent Care Forum.</li> <li>Regular audits and reports to maintain an overview of practice.</li> <li>Examples of the change and it’s benefits shared widely.</li> <li>Communications support secured.</li> <li>Ensure the financial constraints are clearly set out so that expectations are clear.</li> </ul>	<p>Inability to set a balanced budget for a given year within the MTFS Failure of Officers and Members to adhere to Governance arrangements Health &amp; Wellbeing of the Workforce Critical skills shortage impacting on recruitment, retention, and succession planning Impact of extreme pressures upon partners (social care, health, and criminal justice) Failure to set clear strategic direction.</p>

## 9. Climate Change Appraisal

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

## 10. Our Governance

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

10.2 There is a need for us to ensure good political oversight for the delivery. This will be via Cabinet annually, or more often as necessary, supplemented by People Overview and Scrutiny Committee who will be scrutinise progress of the implementation on an annual basis but taking the opportunity throughout the year to triangulate through other papers how well the change is embedded.

10.3 There is also a partnership governance structure which has statutory and regulatory requirements in this area. We have detailed the core partnerships, boards and workstreams which will help us maintain good governance.

10.4 Our proposed governance structure for internal delivery is outlined below, whilst recognising these key areas will be regularly reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board, People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet;

Meeting	Purpose	Role	Frequency	Responsible Officer
Children’s Ambition Board	Strategic Partnership Board driving ambitious outcomes for children and families and developing ‘child friendly’ Shropshire.	Sets the vision, oversees the Children’s Transformation Programme and ensures multi-agency alignment	Every 2 months	Tanya Miles – Chief Executive
Schools Forum	Strategic oversight of all education funding covering the Dedicated Schools Grant, on behalf of Shropshire Council, as a formal committee.	Schools forums generally have a consultative role. However, there are situations in which they have decision making powers.	Every 2-3 months	David Shaw - DCS
SEND and Inclusion Partnership	Providing Strategic Oversight and Assurance of SEND and Inclusion in Shropshire.	Sets the vision and strategy for SEND and assures itself that the delivery is effective and delivering outcomes.	Every 2 months	David Shaw and Vanessa Whatley
Shropshire Safeguarding Children’s Partnership	Statutory Safeguarding board for Children.	Overseeing the FFP Implementation. Decision making board for the Families First Partnership	Monthly	David Shaw - DCS
Internal Children’s Transformation Board	<b>Internal</b> Governance ensuring delivery assurance and compliance for Children’s Services Transformation projects.	Monitors progress, manages risks and aligns internal workstreams with strategic priorities. Internal Workstreams to provide updates monthly	Monthly	David Shaw - DCS
Operational Internal Workstreams	Thematic areas of delivery; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Places and Space</li> <li>•Children &amp; Family Voice</li> <li>•Commissioning</li> <li>•Data, Digital&amp; Systems</li> <li>•Inclusive People &amp; Practice</li> </ul>	Each internal workstream lead will co-ordinate their workstream regularly to deliver the specific objectives and deliver the work identified.	Monthly	Workstream leads

## 11. Conclusions

11.1 The national reforms set out in this report represent a whole-system shift in how Shropshire must support children and families—rebalancing away from late, acute intervention toward earlier, preventative and integrated “Family Help”, strengthened multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, improved family and youth support pathways, and a modernised approach to SEND inclusion and early intervention. These developments will drive changes to statutory expectations, local protocols,

and assurance frameworks over the coming years and therefore require timely, coordinated action across the Council and its partnerships.

- 11.2 Shropshire’s local context—particularly the proportion of spend currently absorbed by children’s social care and the scale of demand pressures—means that the reforms also provide a critical opportunity to improve outcomes while creating a more sustainable system. The report outlines a clear intention to deliver the reforms through a single integrated Children’s Transformation programme with robust governance, identified workstreams, and a focus on workforce, coproduction, places, and data/digital capability.
- 11.3 Cabinet endorsement and the proposed delegated authorities are required now to maintain pace, secure alignment with national timelines (including June 2026 submissions and approvals), and enable effective implementation across the partnership—particularly for Best Start in Life Family Hubs and Families First Partnership deliverables. With these decisions in place, the programme can proceed with clearer accountability, stronger assurance, and a coherent platform to manage risk, deliver measurable improvement for families, and support the longer-term financial sustainability of Shropshire Council.

## Appendices

**Appendix A: Letter from DfE Grant**

**Appendix B: Letter from DfE Best Start in Life Family Hubs**

**Appendix C: Best Start in Life Family Hub**

**Appendix D: Transformation Plan**

**Appendix E: DRAFT Performance Scorecard**

**Appendix F: SEND Maturity Matrix**

**Appendix G: DRAFT Local Area SEND Reform Plan**

**Appendix H: Pillars of Change**

**Appendix I: Needs and Harms Analysis**