

Shropshire Council

Annual Service User Diversity Report 2022

Contents

A. Introduction

1. Our county and its people

- Geography and demography
- Challenges and approaches
- Deprivation and inequality
- Deprivation in rural areas

2. The legislative framework in which we continue to operate

B. Progress across our action areas

1. Local progress in 2022

- Our Council-wide equality actions
- Being open and transparent
- Using appropriate terminology
- Publishing equality and diversity information more visibly
- Collecting data more proactively
- Working jointly

2. Local proposals for 2023

Tackling racism and other forms of discrimination, harassment and victimisation

C. Concluding remarks

Appendix: tables to show Protected Characteristic groupings

A. Introduction

1. Our county and its people

Geography and demography

If you are looking for Shropshire on a map of the United Kingdom, you will need to look to the middle of England on the map, and then to the far west of Birmingham, just next to the middle of Wales. For our communities and businesses, travel to work patterns across our porous borders indicate large numbers travelling for work to the West Midlands, to the South and East, and North and North West, to Cheshire, Staffordshire and Manchester and beyond, as well as into Wales.

Shropshire is the second largest inland rural county in England, after Wiltshire, and one of the most sparsely populated. Shropshire is approximately ten times the size of all the Inner London Boroughs put together (31,929 hectares), with 1.01 persons per hectare and a population of 323,606 for a terrain covering 319,736 hectares (Source: ONS Census 2021).

Around 57.2% of Shropshire's population lives in rural areas. There are 17 market towns and key centres of varying size, including Ludlow in the south and Oswestry in the north, and Shrewsbury, the central county town. An additional dynamic is that, unlike for example Cumbria, the population is dispersed across the entire county, rather than there being any areas where no one lives at all.

Challenges and approaches

Being an inland county brings its own challenges. There is a dependency on a limited number of key arterial transport routes, for trade and supply including freight through the county to Wales and Ireland, or up to the North West, as well as for everyday transport for local communities and businesses. It is also quite literally exposed to extreme weather conditions, with roads that are liable to flooding, and a lack of viable alternatives leading to congestion and lengthy diversions.

The physical terrain poses practical challenges for digital and physical infrastructure, as well as the high service delivery costs and access issues associated with a dispersed and ageing population.

It is within this geographical context of cross border travel patterns, for residents, visitors, and businesses, that we develop and deliver services with and for our diverse communities. The exigencies of adjusting to external factors of climate change and political change, including the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and the economic and social upheaval continuing to be caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, are allied to the challenges of preserving and maximising our natural capital and seeking to address food security concerns and cost of living worries.

These external factors provide further context to our local strategic and collaborative approaches, which continue to be towards meeting rural and community needs, and in so doing achieving economic recovery and moving towards stability and growth.

Our collegiate approach is to collect and share evidence about community needs and how we are tackling them, with other local authorities, through channels such as the County Councils Network (CCN) and the Rural Services Network (RSN). We submit responses through these channels, to Parliamentary Select Committees, as well as directly to Government Departments and through such opportunities as present themselves in liaison with the elected MPs for Shropshire.

Deprivation and inequality

An emphasis on inequalities within society and within communities, including access to decent and energy efficient housing, healthcare, education and employment, whether by public or private transport or via digital means, should also include better national recognition of geographical and societal interdependencies rather than a separation out of different strands of policy.

If the pandemic has shown us anything, it is that we are more dependent upon each other and more vulnerable to a greater range of factors than could perhaps have been imagined.

A reflection on this genuinely universal truth, and a collective and cohesive approach towards the structures that we use to develop and deliver public sector services, should bring in an improvement in social mobility opportunities across the whole country, alongside environmental initiatives around green energy, longer term use of homeworking alongside reduced physical travel and greater recognition of hitherto hidden deprivation and dependencies.

Whilst Shropshire remains a relatively affluent location, albeit with pockets of deprivation, in terms of access to services, it is amongst the most deprived localities in the country. This is measured through the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2019), which was released on 26th September 2019. This updates the IMD2015.

The IMD is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas (Lower Layer Super Output Areas or LLSOAs) in England. LLSOAs are a statistical geography created by the Office for National Statistics for the Census. They are areas consisting of a minimum of 1,000 to a maximum of 3000 population. There are, in all 39 separate indicators spread across 7 distinct domains of deprivation, which are weighted and combined to calculate the overall index of deprivation (IMD).

This is an overall measure of deprivation experienced by people living in an area and is calculated for every LLSOA in England. All LLSOAs are then ranked according to their level of deprivation relative to other areas.

The higher the rank the more deprived an area is, so an area with a rank of 100 is more deprived than an area with a rank of 200. The IMD also contains two supplementary indexes Income Deprivation Affecting Children (IDACI) and Income Deprivation Affecting Older People (IDAOPI)

There is no definitive threshold of deprivation and the IMD measures deprivation on a relative not absolute scale, so a neighbourhood ranked as 100 is more deprived

than an area ranked 200, but this doesn't mean that it is twice as deprived. There are 32,844 small areas (LLSOAs) in England with an average population of 1,500, where one is the most deprived and 32,844 the least. In Shropshire there are 193 LLSOAs with an average population of 1645

A snapshot analysis of the IMD2019 has been prepared by the Performance, Intelligence and Insight Team to give an overview of the results for Shropshire. This is available on the Council website. Reports have also been prepared for the Overall IMD and each of the seven Domains.

Shropshire has become slightly more deprived since 2015 with an increase in the average score from 16.7 in 2015 to 17.2 in 2019, an increase of 0.5.

Shropshire is the 174th most deprived local authority in England out of a total of 317 lower tier authorities (rank of average score). This measure shows Shropshire has become relatively more deprived compared to other areas since 2015. Lower tier authorities include non metropolitan districts, London Boroughs, unitary authorities and metropolitan districts. Note in 2015 there were 326 lower tier local authorities whereas there are 317 in 2019.

When looking at the other two main measures of deprivation (rank of average rank and rank of proportion of LLSOAs in most deprived 10% nationally) these show Shropshire has also become slightly more deprived relative to other local authorities since 2015, however the rank is out of 317 authorities and in 2015 the rank was out of 326 authorities.

Compared to 2015, 33 LLSOAs had become more deprived in 2019, 19 had become less deprived and 141 had remained the same. This is a net change of 14 LLSOAs becoming more deprived. The largest net changes can be seen in the Income Domain where there was a net increase of 30 LLSOAs becoming more deprived also in the Barriers to Housing and Services there is a net change of 40 more LLSOAs had become more deprived and in the Income deprivation Affecting Children Sub-Domain there is a net change of 41 LLSOAs becoming more deprived.

In the Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Sub-Domain there is a net change of 13 LLSOAs becoming less deprived and in health a net change of 25 LLSOAs becoming less deprived.

Whilst all seven domains help us to consider impacts in equality terms for our communities, it is pertinent from a social inclusion angle to note that the domains include Barriers to Housing and Services, Health Deprivation and Disability, and Income.

Deprivation in rural areas

We have also said, in a submission to DCMS with regard to Dormant Assets Consultation, that with community needs becoming increasingly complex and requiring integrated approaches it may be unhelpful to focus solely on local amenities and social infrastructure.

Community wealth funds are defined in the Dormant Assets Act 2022 as funds which give long-term financial support (whether directly or indirectly) for the provision of local amenities or other social infrastructure. We were asked for our views about these, and said that:

We support the principles of the Community Wealth Fund approach such as longer-term investment, building community capacity and empowering people to design and deliver solutions within their own communities. However, the design of the delivery mechanism is critical. A place-based model with community control and a partnership approach is very important in a rural area like Shropshire.

Our concern here is one of exclusion, should this be the sole option. We need support to go into enabling and infrastructure support e.g. through faith communities and through voluntary sector organisations, rather than into community wealth funds that from our reading of it are designed to either fund provision of new assets or seek to maintain existing assets. Whilst other more urban areas may have organisations of a size that can manage assets or which already operate assets that may benefit from long term funding, we simply do not have organisations of that nature. And we have lost individuals along with their expertise, as a result of the pandemic, with some sadly deceased and with others deciding that they did not want to carry on running some of the smaller organisations that worked at grassroots levels here.

In the absence of tested Community Wealth Fund delivery models, current allocations could be managed either by national organisations with local community experts (such as the Community Fund), by local grant givers such as Community Foundations, or by Local Authorities where there is an understanding of community needs and other strategic investments, thereby facilitating the direction of funds and support in a way that complements rather than risks duplication of other programmes e.g. the UK Shared Prosperity Fund).

We accordingly requested that DCMS does not design the Community Wealth Fund delivery model without robust representation from a range of rural local authorities.

Whilst the Indices of Multiple Deprivation are widely used data sets used to classify relative deprivation of small areas in the UK, they typically poorly represent deprivation in rural areas and can lead to rural areas being overlooked when it comes to the allocation of funding and planning for rural health and social services. A focus on the 10% most deprived areas under the Index of Multiple Deprivation would not work well for Shropshire. We have very mixed communities where high-income households live alongside pockets of those who are most deprived, masking the problems that exist when whole areas are assessed.

We also have an older population, many of whom are asset rich, but still struggle to afford to heat their homes and afford the increasing cost of food. We would like the Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP) index to be considered alongside IMD with indicators for fuel poverty, food insecurity, child probers, claimant count, economic inactivity and low pay.

We will report back on the outcomes from the DCMS consultation in next year's report, along with other outcomes linked to Government funding decisions including the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Levelling Up Fund allocations.

2. The legislative framework in which we continue to operate

The **Equality Act 2010**, together with the Human Rights Act 1998 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, forms a framework of protection for equality, diversity, social inclusion and human rights.

Shropshire Council seeks to ensure that, like other public authorities, it is compliant with the **Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)**.

This **Duty**, as set out in the Equality Act 2010, may be described as the duty on a public authority, when carrying out its functions, to have what is called ***due regard*** to three equality aims.

These equality aims are listed below.

- Eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Advancing equality of opportunity;
- Fostering good relations.

As a local authority, we must comply with both a general equality duty and with specific duties, as set out in the Act.

- To demonstrate full compliance with the general duty, we are required to publish annual information about our workforce and service user diversity.
- To demonstrate full compliance with the specific duties, we are required to publish one or more equality objectives which we think we should achieve.

The frequency for these objectives to be published is a minimum of every four years.

2020 saw the preparation and publication of our **Equality Objectives Action Plan for 2020 to 2024**, approved by Cabinet on 6th July 2020. This enables positioning of the Council to assist in efforts to meet its PSED, seek to demonstrate good practice in so doing, and facilitate timely links with corporate and national policy and strategy development, not least around endeavours to address health inequalities and to tackle racism and other forms of discrimination.

The regulations also specify that a listed authority must publish its equality information and equality objectives in a manner which is accessible to the public and may publish this information within another published document. Our diversity reports are on the Council website, along with the equality objectives action plans for 2016 to 2020 and for 2020 to 2024. These are in the section on "equality, diversity and social inclusion", along with further background and complementary information about this policy area. Further information and practical guidance is available for our workforce on our staff intranet.

The Equality Act describes a number of **Protected Characteristics** groupings ie characteristics that people may share. Local authorities such as ourselves and other public sector organisations are obliged under the Public Sector Equality Duty to have due regard to the needs of people in these groupings in our decision making processes. The nine groups are, in alphabetical order:

- Age;
- Disability;
- Gender reassignment;
- Marriage and civil partnership;
- Pregnancy and maternity;
- Race;
- Religion and belief;
- Sex;
- Sexual orientation.

Whilst there are nine national Protected Characteristics with regard to individuals in groupings of people in the community, as set out under the Equality Act 2010, we add a tenth one as a Council, around social inclusion. This then brings in households as well as individuals, and reflects the circumstances in which people may find themselves.

The social inclusion category is intended to help the Council to think as carefully and completely as possible about all Shropshire groups and communities, including people in rural areas and people that may be described as vulnerable, for example due to low income or to safeguarding concerns.

The grouping explicitly encompasses members of the armed forces, whether serving or veterans, and their families; children and young people who are or were looked after by the local authority, including those who have left the care of the local authority and are making their way in the world; refugees and asylum seekers; and households who for whatever reason are finding life to be difficult.

This may be a rural household, for whom issues as diverse as fuel poverty, loneliness, lack of access to services and facilities and lack of opportunities for training and employment may be affecting their physical and emotional well-being.

We know from the evidence that we gather from across a range of sources that loneliness may as easily affect people in one of our market towns, particularly at either end of the age spectrum, despite their being seemingly close to services and social interactions. This is exacerbated by a lack of assured digital connectivity across the county, with attendant digital inequalities.

B. Progress across our action areas

Our Council-wide equality actions

The Council sets out to demonstrate equal treatment to people who are in Protected Characteristic groupings and people at risk of social exclusion, and to people who are not, through having what is termed 'due regard' to their needs and views when developing policy and strategy and when commissioning, procuring, arranging or delivering services.

The Corporate Equality Objectives Action Plan 2020 to 2024 report to Cabinet for July 2020, which demonstrated our open and transparent approach, provides a visible way in which to chart the progress that we are seeking to make to meet the national equality aims during the period 2020 to 2024.

Our Council-wide equality actions are framed across the following three areas, and we report on them in this way accordingly:

- Publish equality and diversity information more visibly;
- Collect and analyse equality and diversity data more proactively;
- Work jointly with partner organisations on equality-related issues.

1. Local progress during 2022

Being open and transparent

During this second year of the action plan, the following examples illustrate the efforts that we are making across a number of Protected Characteristics. These include our efforts to understand the ways in which people would like to be described, as individuals or as part of a Protected Characteristic grouping, as well as the efforts that we are making to deepen our knowledge and understanding about the diverse groupings in Shropshire. In so doing, we will be better placed as a Council to help to meet the three national equality aims placed upon us through the Equality Act 2010.

Considerations around social inclusion and access to services are also to the forefront of our minds as a large and sparsely populated rural county, as well as in the minds of national policymakers, not least as the initial impacts and ongoing ramifications of the pandemic have thrown inequalities into sharp relief.

Using appropriate terminology

As may be seen, there is **intersectionality** across the groupings. This term is growing in usage, to indicate that a person will perform belong to at least three groupings, ie Age and Ethnicity, and the Sex or gender to which they were assigned at birth; and that during the course of their lives they may then describe themselves as belonging at one time or another to one or more other groupings as well, eg Religion or Belief eg Marriage or Civil Partnership.

Whilst it can be tricky to keep on top of terminology and acronyms with regard to equality, equity and diversity, the recommendation would always be to ask a person with whom you are interacting, either as a member of the public or as a colleague in an organisation, how they would like to describe themselves.

We have accordingly included awareness raising work this year around this matter. Standard descriptions, such as those used in the Census 2021, are extremely helpful in providing consistency and therefore aiding comparability. However, these do not and could not pick up on differences and diversities such as the changing needs of someone with a mental health issue, or the range of ethnic origins of people living or working in Shropshire.

We have also come up with descriptions ourselves for people we may regard as being at risk of **social inclusion**. When we introduced this additional category, back in 2014, it was with the recognition that whilst it did not carry the legal weight applied to the nine Protected Characteristics, it was one that we very much wanted to introduce to complement our considerations about individuals.

This is because it reflects the circumstances in which individuals and households may find themselves, whether that is households living in rural isolation or in fuel poverty or both; veterans or serving members of the armed forces and their families; and people we define as being vulnerable. This then picks up on economic factors and environmental considerations as well, at local and national level, enabling us to for example think about the impacts of the emerging national cost of living crisis and energy crisis in our area.

When we talk about people who are **vulnerable**, the definition that we are using to describe a vulnerable person is:

“An individual who is identified as having complex needs and/or requires additional support to enable them to access services and support”

Complex needs may be described as difficult personal circumstances and/or life events that affect individuals. The following list of circumstances and events is intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive: alcohol and/or drug dependency; bereavements; adopted from care or leaving care; indebtedness; divorcing or terminating a civil partnership; experiencing redundancy, retirement or unemployment; experiencing homelessness; leaving the armed forces; leaving hospital; people who are victims of crime including domestic violence; people with one or more of the nine national Protected Characteristics.

Publishing equality and diversity information more visibly

In seeking to publish more visibly, the Council intranet was used throughout the year to share information and awareness raising pieces around a range of cultural and religious festivals and observations. This included practical advice on how to support Muslim colleagues who were observing Ramadhan; information about Chinese New Year and South Asian Heritage Month; and Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, and Jewish festivals and observations.

The information was shared with healthcare and social care colleagues across Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care System (ICS) and with West Midlands local authorities through the West Midlands Local Authority Equality Officers Network, with similar sharing from others, notably Wolverhampton City Council, and Telford and Wrekin Council.

The Council also marked the UN International Days for Women, on 8th March, and for Persons with Disabilities, on 3rd December, along with Black History Month in October, through information pieces for the workforce. This year these were through use of poetry as well as commentary.

Additionally, the Council issued press releases during the year around equality and diversity, including efforts to:

- Commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day on 27th January in liaison with the two interfaith forums and local primary schools;
- Celebrate Gypsy Roma and Traveller History Month in June;
- Praise local initiatives around Pride Month in June 2022, and fly the Rainbow Flag;
- Reflect upon the humanitarian role of the armed forces for Remembering Srebrenica Day on 11th July 2022;
- Raise awareness of national Show Racism the Red Card Day on 22nd October 2022.

Online resource packs for the external website were produced in liaison with Archives and with Libraries, for Gypsy Roma and Traveller History Month, for LGBT History Month and for Holocaust Memorial Day, which commemorates the Holocaust and other genocides.

Publishing visibly: an example from 2022:
Shropshire Council action to tackle antisemitism

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) takes place on 27th January each year and is a time to remember the millions of people murdered during the Holocaust, under Nazi Persecution and in the genocides which followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

Here in Shropshire we find a different primary school each year, in different parts of our large rural county, at which to plant a cherry tree to commemorate the Holocaust and other genocides. The aim is to help primary school children to learn about the Holocaust in a way that will be age-appropriate and memorable.

We hold a ceremony with the two interfaith forums, South Shropshire Interfaith Forum and Shrewsbury Interfaith Forum, the school itself, and the local Shropshire Council councillors, in which we think about the theme for the year, and say prayers and light candles, and in which the school make a promise to look after their tree.

Publishing visibly also includes acting swiftly where there is an incident of discrimination including racism and antisemitism, in order to show that our commitments towards equality are tangible rather than tokenistic.

One such example of this occurred in November, when an incident of antisemitic graffiti was discovered in a public place in one of our market towns, Bridgnorth. The following press release explains the action taken:

Press release November 2022:

Councils take a stance against Anti-Semitic Graffiti

Shropshire Council has worked in partnership with Bridgnorth Town Council, to act promptly in removing an incident of antisemitic graffiti in a public area in Bridgnorth.

The graffiti was found by Mr Mark Michaels and his wife when on a walk around the town. Mr Michaels is the Jewish representative on the South Shropshire Inter Faith Forum, and as such works closely with the Council on remembrance events with schools in relation to the Holocaust and other genocides.

Mr Michaels reported the matter to Bridgnorth Town Council and to officers at Shropshire Council. It was immediately prioritised for removal, as it was racist graffiti.

Cllr Cecilia Motley, Portfolio Holder for Health and Communities, said:

“I was horrified to hear about this incident of racist and antisemitic graffiti, which no one should have to witness. We will always act as a Council against racism, and we will not condone it, wherever it occurs, and in whatever form. My officers have my thanks and appreciation, as does Mr Michaels for reporting it to us and Bridgnorth Town Council for their help with this.

We know that it could have been written by anyone passing through the town, and that sadly it could occur anywhere in Shropshire. Coming as it does just before national Inter Faith Week, it is a reminder to us all to be vigilant as Mr Michaels has been, and to work in partnership through our inter faith forums and with each other to increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs.

If anyone ever sees any such incidents of graffiti, could I please urge them to report it to the Council, so that we can continue to act together against racism and other forms of discrimination.”

Cllr Kirstie Hurst-Knight, local Shropshire Council ward councillor and Portfolio Holder for Children and Education, said:

“All the Bridgnorth councillors are jointly appalled by this incident of antisemitic graffiti in our town. Whilst we know that it could have happened anywhere, it strengthens our resolve and our collaborative efforts to work particularly closely with children and young people in our area, and more widely across the county with other councillors, in order to help the children and young people of the county to understand more about what happened in the Holocaust and other genocides, and why the lessons to be learned and the lives that were lost must never be forgotten.”

Mr Michaels said:

"It just shows that where there is real commitment to combat racism and antisemitism a Council really can pull out the stops and make things happen at speed - thank you."

Racist graffiti can be reported to the Council either by telephone to Customer Services or via the "Report graffiti" button on the Council website at www.shropshire.gov.uk

National Inter Faith Week 2022 will take place from Sunday 13 - Sunday 20 November. Each year, Inter Faith Week begins on Remembrance Sunday, and runs until the following Sunday. Remembrance Sunday was chosen as a start day to encourage people to remember together the contributions of all faiths and none, and to consider how best to create a just, peaceful, and harmonious world.

It provides opportunity to highlight that there are two inter faith forums currently established in Shropshire: the South Shropshire Interfaith Forum and the Shrewsbury Inter Faith Forum. Members of both Forums support the work of the Council in commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day and Srebrenica Day through cherry tree planting activities with local primary schools.

Notes to Editors

Inter Faith Week

Inter Faith Week 2022 will take place from Sunday 13 - Sunday 20 November. Each year, Inter Faith Week begins on Remembrance Sunday, and runs until the following Sunday. It is hoped that the additional Sunday provides the opportunity for other weekend events to take place as well as those linked to Remembrance Sunday.

Remembrance Sunday was chosen as a start day to encourage people to remember together the contributions of all faiths and none, and to consider how best to create a just, peaceful, and harmonious world.

Building good relationships and working partnerships between people of different faiths and beliefs is part of the year-round work of many people and organisations across the UK.

Having a special Week provides a focal point, helping to open inter faith activity up to a wider audience so that more and more people are made aware of the importance of this vital work and are able to participate in it.

Inter Faith Week also ends on Mitzvah Day, an annual day of faith-based social action which is led by people of the Jewish faith: <https://mitzvahday.org.uk/>

Mitzvah Day

Each year, in November, over 40,000 people around the world, come together to give time, not money, to make a difference to the community.

Mitzvah Day introduces people to social action, to their neighbours and to local charities, setting up projects, which address real needs. Jewish-led, it seeks to bring together people of all ages, faiths and backgrounds, to volunteer side-by-side, building longstanding, genuine relationships.

Mitzvah Day projects offer a range of art and crafts activities such as making dog toys for animal rescue centres, eco-projects such as tree planting and litter picks, friendship projects such as visiting care homes, collection projects such as food collections for local food banks, clothing collections, stationery collections, appreciation projects such as writing letters to hospital workers, support staff, fire service workers etc. cooking projects to make food to be donated to night shelters and refuge centres, upcycling projects and care projects such as making and distributing essential supplies to rough sleepers.

[press release ends]

Follow up activity

In making our decision on location for 2023, we were guided by wishing to take further positive action in the Bridgnorth area, following the distressing incident of anti-semitic graffiti. We were very conscious that local primary school children may have come across this graffiti before it was spotted and removed, and not been fully aware that it is a hate crime, and the reasons why it is so abhorrent.

In follow up discussion with Cllr Kirstie Hurst-Knight as portfolio holder for children and education, on the importance of raising awareness amongst primary school age children about the Holocaust and other genocides, we therefore offered a cherry tree to both of the schools in the Councillor's electoral division.

This enabled us to be in a position to plant both trees in the middle of Bridgnorth, and to send out a very strong and visible message of our collective stance on this matter. Councillor Christian Lea, as the other Shropshire Council councillor for the Division, was equally keen to send a visible message of our stance.

We were heartened to see that St John's, ie the one that is actually nearest to Rope Walk Dingle, has its biblical verse as "I am the vine and you are the branches", and that at St Leonard's, the school vision is rooted in St Paul's teaching on the fruits of the Spirit: which all sits very well with the planting of a tree.

With both schools on board, details about the planned ceremonies were then uploaded to the national HMD Trust website ahead of the January 2023 events, as well as further work with Archives and Libraries around the theme "Ordinary People".

Collecting data more proactively

We said in 2021 that a main area of focus will be on the active use of the very much anticipated release of **Census 2021** data, alongside other data collected in house or available at national level for use as a potential cipher for the local position.

In relation to Protected Characteristics, the Census includes data on religion, ethnicity, national identity, country of birth, passports held, gender identity, sexual orientation (voluntary questions), disability, main language and how well this is spoken, age and migration. This data will later become available in cross tabulations, so that analysis will be possible against other variables such as occupation, car ownership, dwelling type, tenure, general health, voluntary carers, economic activity etc.

A significant development that changed things for everyone in geopolitical terms was the invasion by Russia of Ukraine, in February 2022. Following this, and decisions at national level that the UK would take in people displaced by the conflict, there was a further decision made at national level to release Census 2021 Country of Origin data sooner than usual. This was in order to help local authorities in emergency planning efforts. In Shropshire, this then built upon good practice developed with regard to resettlement of Syrian and Afghan refugee families.

Collecting data more proactively: an example from 2022
Responding to the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine

In March 2022, ONS released early, the 2021 Census results on Country of Birth due to the current situation in Ukraine. Further information on the supply of data can be found at

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/adhocs/14354ct210001> or
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/news/statementsandletters/useofcensus2021preliminarycountriesinenglandandwalestosupportandinformtheresponsetotherussianinvasionofukraine>.

Selected countries of birth based on Census 2021 responses

Area	Shropshire
Belarus	-
Estonia	-
Latvia	200
Lithuania	190
Moldova	110
Poland	1,600
Russia	100
Ukraine	70

Source: Table CT21_0001 - Census 2021 (21 March 2021), Office for National Statistics

Dataset population: All usual residents responding to the Census 2021 (threshold 20+ usual residents)

Data contained in the table are counts of census responses. They are not final census estimates and have not been adjusted for under coverage in the census.

In December 2022, the Council was then able to publish the following further details:

Press release December 2022:

Shropshire ethnic groups, national identity, language and religion:
2021 Census information

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) last month published the next phase of Census 2021 topic summaries for England and Wales looking at [ethnic group](#), [national identity](#), [language and religion](#) from national level down to small areas called census output areas.

The Census provides estimates of the characteristics of all people and households in England and Wales on Census Day – 21 March 2021. It is carried out every 10 years and gives the most accurate estimate of all the people and households in England and Wales.

This release gives information from Census 2021 about:

- which ethnic groups people identified with
- the main language people use
- how well people, who do not have English as a main language, could speak English
- how people describe their national identity
- which religious groups people identified with.

In 2021, 96.7% (312,900) of usual residents in Shropshire identified their ethnic group within the high-level “White” category. This compares to 81% in England. The next most common high-level ethnic group was “Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh” accounting for 1.3% of the overall population, compared to 9.3% for England.

In 2021, 96.4% (311,800) of usual residents in Shropshire identified with at least one UK national identity (English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British, and Cornish). This compares to 90% in England. In Shropshire, 2.1% of the resident population identified their national identity as Welsh only, compared with 0.3% for England.

The religion question is voluntary; 94.1% (304,700) of usual residents answered the question in 2021.

For the first time in a census of England, less than half of the population (46.3%, 26.2 million people) described themselves as “Christian”. However, “Christian” remained the most common response to the religion question. In Shropshire, 55.5% of the population described themselves as Christian. “No religion” was the second most common response.

There were increases in the number of people who described themselves as Muslim (1,700 people in 2021), Buddhist (900), Sikh (800), Hindu (600) and Jewish (200). In 2021, 97.4% (307,100 people) of usual residents, aged three years and over, had English as a main language. The most common main languages, other than English were: Polish (1,400), Bulgarian (1,300) and Romanian (1,000).

Cllr Cecilia Motley, Shropshire Council’s Cabinet member for adult social care, public health and communities, said:

“We welcome every opportunity to find out more about, and to celebrate, the diversity of religions and beliefs in Shropshire, and to find out more about, and work with, the wide range of ethnic communities.

“The results of Census 2021 will allow us to be better informed and therefore better able to meet any differing needs, and minimise inequalities where these occur. It is also timely to add that, as well as working to tackle racism or other forms of discrimination, we seek to foster good relations across groupings of race, religion or belief.

“This of course includes our Welsh neighbours, as it is within our geographical context of cross border travel patterns, for residents, visitors, and businesses, that we develop and deliver services with and for our diverse communities.

“Fostering good relations across groupings will always be intrinsic to our equality aims as a council, and we therefore look forward to making good use of the Census 2021 release data and sharing it with partners and communities.”

James Walton, Shropshire Council’s executive director for resources, added:

“The release of this data is very much welcomed, to help us understand the diversity of the Shropshire population and how it is changing. It is important that we can use this data to make sure our policies and services meet the differing needs of a diverse population and to tackle inequality.”

For further information, including an interactive map, and to find out more about the Census 2021 results, people can visit the [ONS website](#).

Further information and analysis for Shropshire will be added to the [Shropshire Council 2021 Census webpages](#), as further results become available. It is important that the results and analysis are widely accessible to all. The council is aiming to publish the early headlines and infographics, followed by the development of area profiles, interactive tools and topic-based analysis.

Please note all figures have been rounded.

A further source for us is **service area information**, collected by service areas as part of ongoing engagement with service users and stakeholders and also through specific public consultations on planned or projected service changes or policy developments. These may arise either as a result of changes in national legislation and guidance, or as part of efforts to realise the Council’s strategic policy intentions as set out in the Shropshire Plan.

This information is integral to the **Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessments (ESHIA)**s, carried out as screening exercises to assess the likely equality impacts of service changes or developments. The ESHIAs then form part of the committee paper documentation for elected members to consider in decision making processes: and are thus a crucial component within such considerations.

Equality impact assessments are required to be carried out as part of the obligations placed upon us by the Equality Act 2010: it is up to each local authority as to the form that these assessments may take. In Shropshire, the ESHIA serves as a standalone document, containing not only consideration of equality, social inclusion and health and well being impacts, and any plans to monitor or review these, but also likely environmental, economic and societal impacts as well.

Examples in 2022 include development of the Economic Growth Strategy for 2022 to 2027, updating the previous version. An ESHIA was carried out ahead of public consultation and then a further ESHIA was carried out after the consultation finished. This was in order to adjust where necessary in the light of feedback received, to maximise positive equality impacts and minimise any perceived negative equality impacts arising within or across Protected Characteristic groupings.

During 2022, we have also been using the process to explicitly incorporate recognition of impacts of service changes for people with neurodiverse conditions and for intersectionality across Age, Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity, and Sex.

Examples of this include those in relation to the public realm, eg Shrewsbury Town Centre redevelopment ESHIAs and joint policy work with Telford and Wrekin Council in relation to the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site (WHS). Sharing approaches with other local authorities is a key driver with regard to developing good practice around equality impact assessments and engaging with diverse communities.

As ever in the proactive collection of data and in the establishment and maintenance of a truly robust evidence base, there are a number of challenges to consider, for us as a Council and in partnership with Public Health and NHS colleagues across the Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care System (ICS).

1. Make sure everyone is using the same definitions. Otherwise you will be trying to compare apples with pears.
2. Whilst completeness is the aim, recognise there can be limitations. These can be system limitations and client willingness to permit use.
3. Develop means to identify areas of data weakness – incomplete, inaccurate etc.
4. Develop action plans to address any areas of weakness

Working jointly

Considering equality, diversity and social inclusion enables us to plan and deliver services that are responsive to the needs of our diverse communities, with a workforce that is representative of those communities and that is sensitive to the needs of those communities.

We do this in partnership not only with other public sector bodies but also with the business sector and the voluntary and community sector. Where this involves organisations arranging and delivering services on our behalf, for example where we have commissioned a service, they are expected to demonstrate that equality and diversity are similarly at the core of their own strategic thoughts and actions.

The needs of rural communities are also factored into this process and into other ways in which we develop and assess policy and strategy, such as through rural proofing and through joint work with other rural and unitary authorities, through the County Councils Network (CCN), the Rural Services Network (RSN), and the wider Local Government Association family.

This is in recognition of the fact that Shropshire is a large, predominantly rural and sparsely populated county. There are therefore practical challenges and costs for the Council and partners in delivering services, and for communities in finding out about and accessing services, particularly in terms of physical and digital connectivity.

One of the ways that we seek to raise such issues at a national level is through proactive responses to calls for evidence either from Government departments or from parliamentary committee inquiries. In editing and submitting these responses, we collate evidence from across service area specialisms, and liaise with local stakeholders such as the Shropshire Community and Voluntary Sector Assembly and town and parish councils. We also liaise with other local authorities where relevant, principally through the CCN and the RSN, and seek to make the most of academic research in relevant topic areas.

Examples in 2022 include a submission to Ofcom consultation on proposed changes to the Universal Service Obligation requirements for public callbox telephony, which is a matter of some concern to town and parish councils, and on which we were the only English authority putting in a response. Another example was a collegiate submission to DCMS with regard to dormant assets, on which we worked with the Shropshire VCSA and cited evidence from the RSN and from the CCN.

Working jointly: an example from 2022:
DCMS Dormant Assets consultation

This consultation response was made to a DCMS call for evidence in the autumn with regard to dormant assets. This consultation sought views on what the broad purposes of the Dormant Assets Scheme in England should be. This Scheme enables responsible businesses to voluntarily channel funds from dormant financial assets to good causes, while ensuring owners' rights are protected

Our response highlights three factors to consider in terms of service user diversity in Shropshire:

- the intersectionality of young people with economic circumstances, including the impact of the pandemic upon their education and employment prospects , their social mobility and the continuing challenge for them and other groupings of a lack of assured digital connectivity in Shropshire
- the importance of utilising a range of evidence about equality impacts from national partners as well as local partners, to draw up as a full picture as possible
- the lack of explicit recognition and understanding at national level about rurality as a multifaceted beast

We said the following:

“Young people are for us in Shropshire a grouping to consider in terms of intersectionality with older people and in terms of social mobility opportunities. The County Council Network (CCN) report in 2018, on social mobility, is a reference document towards which we would direct DCMS in terms of articulating the continuing particular needs of young people in rural areas. (Source: CCN)

“Flexibility is required with regard to delivery mechanisms and to the appropriateness of some of the (funding) schemes that have been mentioned. For example, a reference to an “outward bound” trip may play well for young people in an urban area: but for young people already living in a rural or coastal area, an outward bound scheme that was around inner city cultural opportunities could be more useful.

“Similarly, a finding from the pandemic was that advice aimed at encouraging people to make the most of countryside open spaces in fact exacerbated feelings of loneliness and mental ill health for those living in the countryside. This included young people in the food and farming sector, with implications for succession planning in farming, where issues such as food security were already posing challenges (Source: House of Commons EFRA Select Committee enquiry; “Rural mental health; House of Commons; 2022)

“A very recent RSN report found that rural communities are facing a triple blow in the cost-of-living crisis, as higher domestic and transport energy poverty, coupled with lower wages, pushes rural areas into a cost-of-living emergency. The research was conducted before the inflation increases recently announced. (Source: Kovia Consulting; “Rural cost of living”; RSN; September 2022).

“The report examined the key differences in cost-of-living between rural and urban locations. It found that rural residents working in rural economies earn much less than urban residents, yet still face significantly higher costs across key aspects of living including heating, transport, house prices, rent, food prices, child-care costs and council tax.

“Rural inequalities are only growing, the RSN report indicates, and that is a significant factor leading to the Levelling Up agenda in part targeting the need to reduce rural inequalities. This should therefore be included as a significant alternative cause.

We also said in our response:

“Rural local authorities like ours could contribute robust evidence from across the country to demonstrate that including rural inequality as a cause is becoming increasingly essential. We are also well placed to monitor and evaluate outcomes and impacts and to continue to share local expertise and knowledge.”

To illustrate this, we added:

“A good practice example from ourselves with regard to financial inclusion efforts is the recent formation of a Money Advice Forum comprising local providers of financial support to individuals across the county. Led by Citizens Advice Shropshire, there are 30 voluntary and public sector providers. The organisations have established a Money Advice Strategy for the county, but as small providers are excluded from bidding for many of the large regional and national contracts. Local investment to support these essential services is required, through Local Authority commissioning or other models.

“The income from Dormant Assets could allow partnership initiatives like this to be funded but the design of Community Wealth Funds must be done in a way to allow these small organisations to genuinely take control in their communities, whilst recognising the need for collaboration and partnership with more established providers, in this example Citizens Advice Shropshire, which may be able to deliver more through its training, advice and support of smaller local voluntary groups.”

“We support the principles of the Community Wealth Fund approach such as longer-term investment, building community capacity and empowering people to design and deliver solutions within their own communities. However, the design of the delivery mechanism is critical. A place-based model with community control and a partnership approach is very important in a rural area like Shropshire.”

[ends]

2. Local policy intentions for 2023

Further work is planned around tackling racism and other forms of discrimination, weaving together all three activity strands as we seek to make progress across all three national equality aims.

For the workforce, we are continuing to work with our colleagues in the NHS to progress relevant training and other actions to tackle issues such as ageism and sexism, and discrimination on grounds of religion and belief, as well as experiences of racism amongst the workforce, including from those who use our services.

For service users and the wider community, an area of focus will be the national Covid public inquiry, for which then PM Boris Johnson announced the finalised terms of reference in June 2022. Sessions will take place across the UK from early 2023 as it aims to identify lessons from the Government's handling of the pandemic.

Ethnic minorities were significantly more likely to die with Covid-19, according to official figures.

An inquiry spokesperson said the unequal impacts of the pandemic would be at the forefront of its work.

A spokesperson for the think tank Runnymede told the BBC: *"Covid-19 was not just a health crisis; it was also a social and economic crisis. Unequal health outcomes are not confined to Covid-19, and longstanding racial and economic inequality is at the heart of understanding the pandemic.*

"It is precisely because these inequalities are so systemic and interlinked that, when crisis hit, certain communities were impacted first, the hardest and in multiple ways."

The link here in Shropshire is as stated in our Corporate Equality Objectives Action Plan 2020-2024. We identified a specific action pending the direction being taken at national level over management of the pandemic, and the local learning to be gained in order that inequalities might be better understood and addressed:

- **In specific reference to BAME communities, follow up on recommendations of the Runnymede Trust to the current Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry around the unequal impacts of Covid-19 for BAME groupings, and those within the Public Health England (PHE) June 2020 report *"Beyond the data; understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups"*; with regard to data collection and to liaison with faith communities and the voluntary and community sector**
- **The Runnymede Trust has recommended action in this area, and the PHE has recommended action in this area as follows:**

"Research and data: to deepen our understanding of the wider socio-economic determinants, improve data recording of faith and ethnicity and greater use of community participatory research."

The PHE report has brought into sharp relief the additional challenges in ethnic minority communities around finding out about and accessing service, in terms of the information and support that we provide, and the ways in which we seek to provide such help. This also brings in joint efforts across our area and work with other neighbouring authorities, public sector organisations, and the voluntary and community sector across our borders.

C. Concluding Remarks

We finish where we started, with a commentary around **terminology**. The use of the acronym BAME is one that we would not now use, following our own research and research at regional and national level.

This includes a well-considered report: ***"The power of language: a consultation report on the use of collective terminology at the NHS Race and Health Observatory"***. (November 2021)

The report makes no recommendations for other organisations but encourages others in the system to have their own conversations about language. Respondents were asked about their level of awareness of and comfort with specific terms, and whether they identified with any additional terms.

The Observatory will now undertake the following five key principles:

1. Where possible, the Observatory will always be specific about the ethnic groups it is referring to – only using collective terminology where appropriate and necessary.
2. The Observatory will not use acronyms or initialisms such as ‘BME’ or ‘BAME’.
3. Where collective terminology is needed, the Observatory will always be guided by context, and not adopt a blanket term. Where there is a need to refer to more than one ethnic group at a time, the Observatory will use terms such as ‘Black and minority ethnic’, ‘ethnic minority’, ‘Black, Asian and minority ethnic’, interchangeably, to reflect the varying views of its stakeholders.
4. The Observatory will always be transparent about its approach to language.
5. The Observatory will be adaptable and remain open to changing its approach to language in the future.

Umbrella terms like ‘B.A.M.E.’ and ‘Eastern European’ should be avoided. They are at best lazy and at worst unhelpful, to us and to the diverse communities that we seek to serve. They do not help because in grouping people together by colour without sufficient thought to their heritage, or by geographical region without sufficient thought to country, we are making generalisations rather than making genuine efforts to work with all our communities, including those represented in our own workforce.

The advice is either to be specific about a particular grouping, or to use the term ‘ethnic minority’ as a preferred term if there is a need to extend this to a wider grouping, and to explain why. This enables us to be inclusive and respectful, whether we are talking about Black people of African heritage, where to be Nigerian is to not be Rwandan, or White people from Eastern European countries, where to be Polish is to not be Bulgarian.

We are a county of diverse communities, however small, and each is due respect. Sometimes, for example if talking about health inequalities, we may need to use a broader term than a single country due to commonalities across ethnic minorities; sometimes we will want to recognise dual heritage and mixed heritage; sometimes we will want to celebrate a shared heritage across a region, as with South Asian Heritage Month.

We hope that you have found this report to be interesting and useful, and we look forward to taking this and other opportunities to continue to report on progress in meeting our local equality objectives, and in so doing serving to aid achievement of the national equality aims. Please also take the time to look at the sister report on workforce diversity as well.

Table one: this is a table to show the ten groupings of people whose needs Shropshire Council thinks about in particular in its decision making processes

Main definitions source: Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

Protected Characteristic	Definition
Age	Where this is referred to, it refers to a person belonging to a particular age (e.g. 32 year olds) or range of ages (e.g. 18 - 30 year olds).
Disability	A person has a disability if s/he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
Gender reassignment	The process of transitioning from one gender to another.
Marriage and civil partnership	In England and Wales marriage is no longer restricted to a union between a man and a woman but now includes a marriage between a same-sex couple. [1]. This is also true in Scotland where relevant legislation has been brought into force. [2]. Same-sex couples can also have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must not be treated less favourably than married couples (except where permitted by the Equality Act).
Pregnancy and maternity	Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth, and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.
Race	Refers to the protected characteristic of Race. It refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.

Protected Characteristic	Definition
Religion and belief	Religion has the meaning usually given to it but belief includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (e.g. Atheism). Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.
Sex	A man or a woman
Sexual orientation	Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.
Social inclusion (additional grouping in Shropshire; not a required grouping under legislation)	Families and friends with caring responsibilities; people with health inequalities; households in poverty; refugees and asylum seekers; rural communities; people considered to be vulnerable, ie having complex needs and/or requiring additional support; veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families; young people leaving care.

[1] Section 1, Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013; [2] Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014.