

# **Shropshire Council**

## **Annual Service User Diversity Report for 2024**

### **Contents**

- 1. Our county and its people**
  - Geography and demography
  - Rural and urban classification in Shropshire
  - Challenges and approaches
  - The quest for equity
  - Deprivation and inequality
  - Life expectancy in Shropshire
  
- 2. The legislative framework in which we operate**
  - Complying with guidance and legislation
    - General equality duty
    - Specific equality duties
    - Strategic Equality Objectives Action Plan
  - Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments
  - Describing the Protected Characteristics
  - Using appropriate terminology
  
- 3. Progress across our action areas**
  - Progress made 2020 to 2024
  - Next steps for 2024 to 2028
  
- 4. Concluding remarks**

**Appendix I: tables to show Protected Characteristic groupings**

## **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 a terrain covering 319,736 hectares. 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.

Based on the mid-year population estimates published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the population of Shropshire has grown by 7.2% from 307,100 at mid-2011 to 329,300 at mid-2022. This compares with 8.6% growth for England. The ONS 2018 sub-national population projections, which pre-date the 2021 Census, estimate Shropshire's population will rise by 12.9%, reaching 371,900 by 2038.

Shropshire has a population density of 1 person per hectare (319,730 hectares), compared to 4.4 persons per hectare nationally (13,027,843 hectares). Shropshire is one of the most sparsely populated local authorities in the country with approximately 540 hamlets, villages and market towns widely dispersed across the County. The 2021 Census revealed only six settlements had a population of over 10,000 people (Whitchurch – 10,100, Shrewsbury – 76,800, Oswestry – 17,500, Ludlow – 10,000, Bridgnorth – 11,900 and Market Drayton – 12,600).

The 2021 Census showed 97.7% of Shropshire's population lived in 139,581 households and 2.3% lived in communal establishments. The number of households in Shropshire has grown by 7.6% since 2011. Household growth in Shropshire has largely been driven by a significant rise in single person households and couple households with no children, a reflection of Shropshire's ageing population. These household types make up 62.7% of all households in Shropshire.

### **Rural and Urban Classification in Shropshire**

The Rural/Urban classification was introduced in 2004 and defines the rurality of very small geographies. The classification has since been updated in 2011 and again in 2021 to account for the changes in the population identified in the 2011 and 2021 Censuses. The most recently updated classification identifies six settlement types at Census Output Area geographies with "nearer to a major town or city" and "further from a major town or city" replacing the "sparsity" classification that was used in 2011.

Most of the population in Shropshire live in rural locations, at 57.39% of the total. Of the 42.61% of the population that live in urban areas, most live in “Urban: Nearer to a major town or city”. In this context, with a population of more than 75,000, Shrewsbury is classified as a major town. Other than Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Market Drayton, Broseley, Bridgnorth and Ludlow are the main urban centres<sup>1</sup>. Ludlow and parts of Oswestry are classed as “further from a major town or city” as they are not within a 30-minute journey by road of either Shrewsbury or an alternative non-Shropshire major town or city.

More Shropshire residents live in the most rural areas (“Smaller Rural”) than in the more densely populated rural areas (“Larger Rural”), and 60% of all those living rurally are classed as living “nearer to a major town or city”.

### **Breakdown of Shropshire Population based on Rural Urban Classification**

	<b>% of Population</b>
Urban: Nearer to a major town or city	33.90%
Urban: Further from a major town or city	8.71%
<b>Total Urban</b>	<b>42.61%</b>
Larger Rural: Nearer to a major town or city	11.55%
Larger Rural: Further from a major town or city	10.69%
Smaller Rural: Nearer to a major town or city	22.94%
Smaller Rural: Further from a major town or city	12.21%
<b>Total Rural</b>	<b>57.39%</b>

Source: Rural Urban Classification 2021, ONS Mid-year population estimates 2022

Note: Major town or city defined as a built-up area with at least 75,000 usual residents

“Nearer to a major town or city” – residents of an Output Area can access within 30 minutes of travel by road

“Further from a major town or city” – residents of an Output Area cannot access within 30 minutes of travel by road

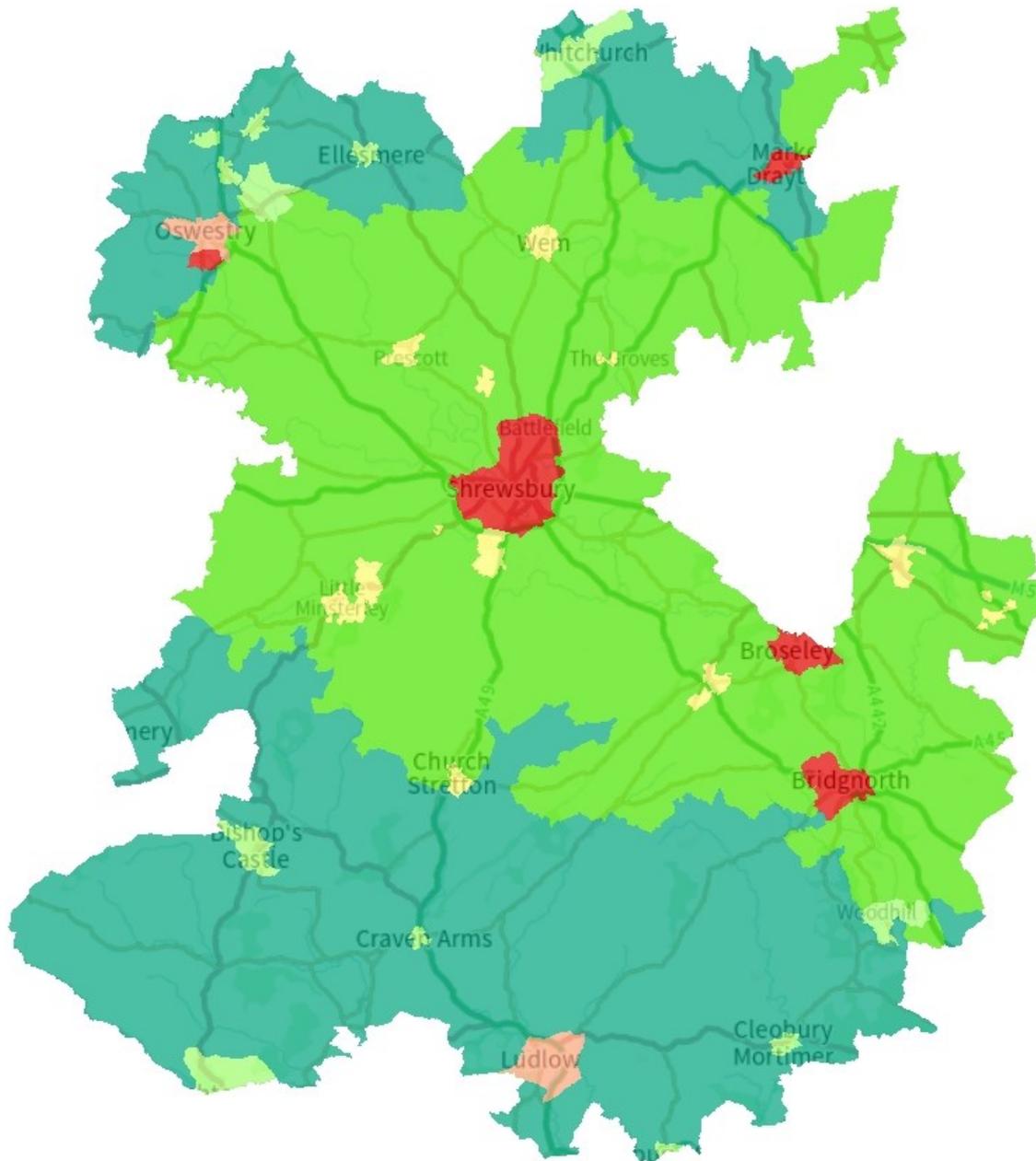
The RUC 2021 classifies local authorities according to eight classifications:

- Urban: Majority nearer to a major town or city
- Urban: Majority further from a major town or city
- Intermediate urban: Majority nearer to a major town or city
- Intermediate urban: Majority further from a major town or city
- Intermediate rural: Majority nearer to a major town or city
- Intermediate rural: Majority further from a major town or city
- Majority rural: Majority nearer to a major town or city
- Majority rural: Majority further from a major town or city

**Shropshire is classified as “Majority rural: Majority nearer to a major town or city”.**

<sup>1</sup> Defined as a built-up area with a population of at least 10,000

# Shropshire Rural Urban Classification (2021)



## Rural Urban Classification 2021

- Smaller rural: Further from a major town or city
- Smaller rural: Nearer to a major town or city
- Larger rural: Further from a major town or city
- Larger rural: Nearer to a major town or city
- Urban: Further from a major town or city
- Urban: Nearer to a major town or city

© Crown copyright and database rights. 2022 OS AC0000808715.  
 You are granted a non-exclusive, royalty free, revocable licence solely to view the Licensed Data for non-commercial purposes for the period during which Shropshire Council makes it available. You are not permitted to copy, sub-licence, distribute, sell or otherwise make available the Licensed Data to third parties in any form. Third party rights to enforce the terms of this licence shall be reserved to OS.

Source: Rural Urban Classification 2021 ONS Census Map based on Output Areas

## **Challenges and approaches**

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.

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 energy costs, 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 cost of living worries.

Looking back over the past four years, if the Covid 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, alongside reduced physical travel and greater recognition of hitherto hidden deprivation and dependencies.

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.

## **The quest for equity**

It is a fact that the Council has been significantly underfunded under successive governments when compared to urban areas. This is an equity issue. The Council joins with other rural local authorities to campaign through channels such as the Rural Services Network (RSN), the Britain's Leading Edge (BLE) grouping of rural and coastal local authorities, and the County Councils Network (CCN), for a fairer distribution of the funds which the Government decides to allocate to support local government services, so that historical imbalances do not continue.

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Rural Affairs is also a very useful additional mechanism through which to engage and communicate with national Government, and includes our local MPs.

The dominant theme in feedback from our communities, gained through public consultation exercises, is rural inequality and concerns about the impact of service changes on older people, people with disabilities and/or/limited mobility and people on low incomes. With rural issues to the fore of the minds of respondents, this indicates that the Council's ongoing efforts as a rural authority to seek equity of funding are not misplaced. Additionally, in seeking to factor social inclusion and socio-economic considerations into decision-making processes, the Council's endeavours again appear to align to community needs and aspirations as well.

Complementary to community feedback, members of the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee (now Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee) had highlighted concerns about rurality and access to health and care services through their work. This Task and Finish Group was commissioned to draw together the key points and observations that had arisen through the work of the committee during 2022/2023, to review the latest local and national evidence on rural proofing, hear from local system providers and take the opportunity to learn from other areas of the country.

The report of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee which adopted the report of the Rural Proofing in Health and Care Task and Finish Group, set out key findings, conclusions and recommendations of their work considering delivering health and care services to rural communities. The Group also heard from the Rurality and Equalities Specialist, who advised that whilst Rurality is not in itself a Protected Characteristic as set out in the Equality Act 2010, rurality is considered as part of economic assessment within the ESHIA process, in regard to the circumstances in which people find themselves as individuals or as households, including issues such as fuel poverty, lack of access to services and facilities, and lack of opportunities for training and employment

The Group recommended that rurality and the accessibility factors that are associated with it becomes a key consideration for Shropshire's health and care system (including Shropshire Council) when adapting or introducing a new service or policy and recommend the use of the Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit to achieve this. At Cabinet on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2024, Shropshire Council accepted the recommendation to adopt the Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit written by Rural England CIC, with input from the Nuffield Trust. It was a joint commission with the National Centre for Rural Health & Care. The Group also recommended that an evaluation be undertaken by Shropshire Council in their role as commissioner and Place co-ordinator to understand how the Council's intelligence and data gathering function can contribute to discussions and research on how to identify small pockets of deprivation in rural communities.

Through the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) process, Shropshire Council is committed to a more localised understanding of need and intelligence gathering, which links well into ongoing and draft equality actions around analysing data in ways that are consistent and coherent.

In addition, the Council will continue to work with research partners, including universities and other rural authorities, the Centre for Rural Studies, and regional partners, to explore opportunities to enhance research in this area

Our collegiate approach is to collect and share evidence about community needs and how we are tackling them, with other local authorities, and with NHS partners, at sub regional, regional and national level. Sometimes this will be through for example the Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care System (ICS) covering the Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin local authority areas, where partners are working jointly on health and care services. Sometimes this will be through collective responses through the RSN and CCN, eg on transport challenges and on digital connectivity and digital inclusion.

We also submit responses directly to Government Departments and through such opportunities as present themselves in liaison with the elected MPs for Shropshire.

### **Deprivation and inequality**

Shropshire is generally regarded as a relatively affluent location; however, there are pockets of deprivation and according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2019) Shropshire ranked as the 174<sup>th</sup> most deprived local authority (out of 317). Due to its rurality, in terms of access to services Shropshire is amongst the most deprived localities in the country.

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 (IDAOP)

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.

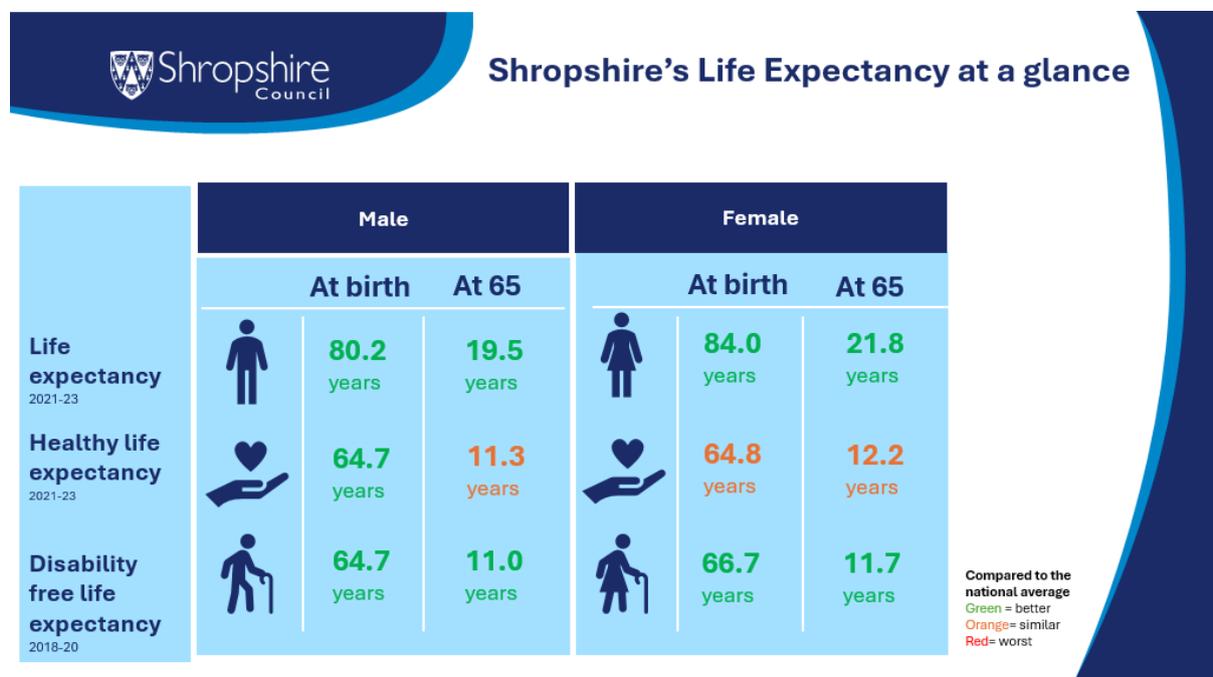
Whilst all seven domains help us to consider impacts in equality terms for our communities, it is pertinent from a social inclusion angle to note that the domains include Barriers to Housing and Services, Health Deprivation and Disability, and Income.

Although 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 have previously said, in submission to the DCMS on Dormant Assets consultation, that we would like the Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP) index to be considered alongside IMD with indicators for fuel poverty, food insecurity, child prowers, claimant count, economic inactivity and low pay.

We are anticipating that the next update of the IMD will come out later in 2025, so this will therefore be reported upon in more detail in next year’s annual service user diversity report.

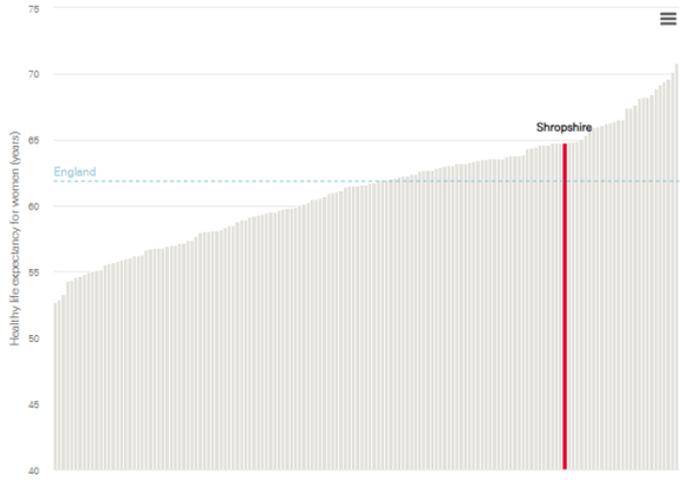
### Life expectancy in Shropshire



Women born in **Shropshire** are expected to live for **84 years**

**65 years** of which are expected to be lived in good health

**Healthy life expectancy for women by local authority, 2021–23**



**What is healthy life expectancy?**

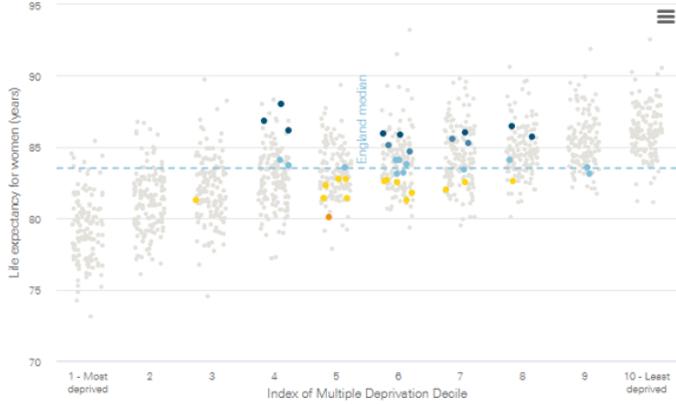
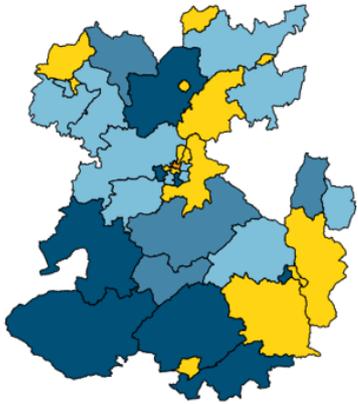
Healthy life expectancy is the average number of years a person can expect to live in good health. It is calculated using period life expectancy and a self-reported measure of health.

**71 years** Wokingham has the highest healthy life expectancy for women

**53 years** Barnsley has the lowest healthy life expectancy for women

**28<sup>th</sup>/151** Healthy life expectancy rank of Shropshire

**Life expectancy at birth for women by IMD deprivation decile: neighbourhoods (MSOAs) in Shropshire**



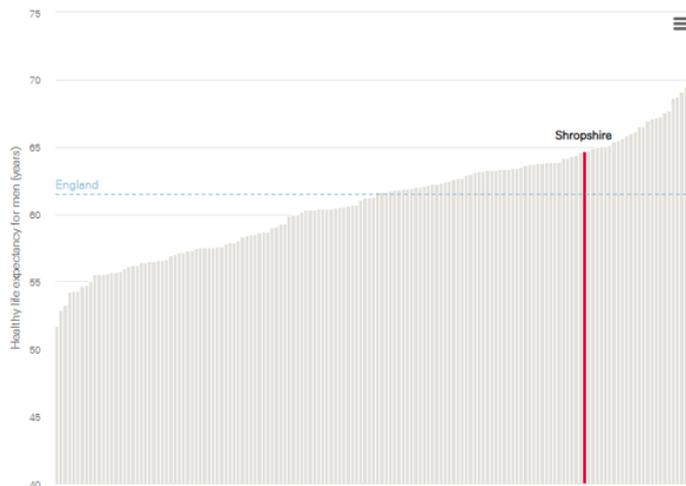
Life expectancy quintiles – England (2016–20)  
 Shortest life expectancy ■ ■ ■ ■ Longest life expectancy

Men born in Shropshire are expected to live for **80 years**

**65 years**

of which are expected to be lived in good health

### Healthy life expectancy for men by local authority, 2021–23



### What is healthy life expectancy?

Healthy life expectancy is the average number of years a person can expect to live in good health.

It is calculated using period life expectancy and a self-reported measure of health.

**70 years**

Wokingham has the highest healthy life expectancy for men

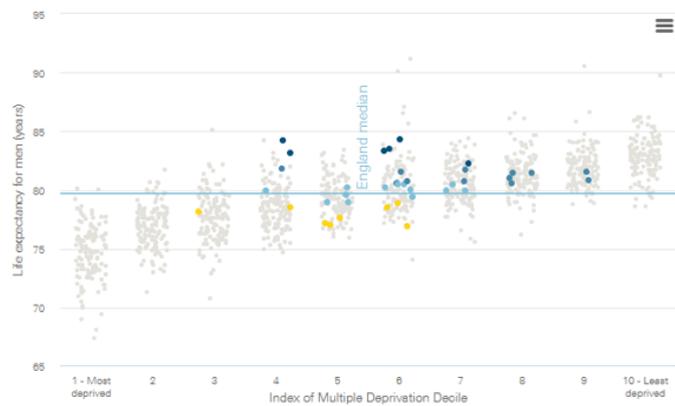
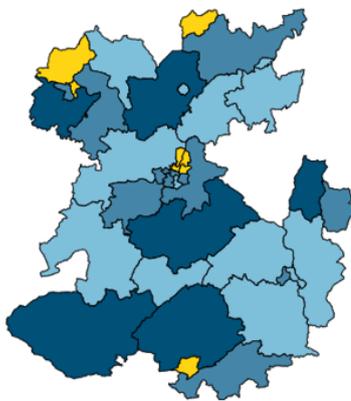
**52 years**

Blackpool has the lowest healthy life expectancy for men

**26<sup>th</sup>/151**

Healthy life expectancy rank of Shropshire

### Life expectancy at birth for men by IMD deprivation decile: neighbourhoods (MSOAs) in Shropshire



Life expectancy quintiles – England (2016–20)  
Shortest life expectancy ■ ■ ■ ■ Longest life expectancy

## 2. The legislative framework in which we operate

### Complying with guidance and legislation

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)**. Guidance on this was updated by Government in December 2023 and issued to all local authorities.

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.

#### **The general equality duty**

To demonstrate full compliance with the **general duty**, we are required to publish annual information about our workforce and service user diversity.

In terms of meeting the **general duty**, our annual diversity reports are published on the Council website, with reports from previous years retained as well as the most current ones. These are published on the website every year, enabling progress to be charted against the three national aims and our own local objectives.

The legislation specifies 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. To not meet our legal obligations would be to risk intervention by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

#### **Specific duties**

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.

In terms of meeting our **specific duties**, we have previously published the equality objectives action plans for 2016 to 2020 and for 2020 to 2024. As with the annual diversity reports, these documents are on the [www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk) website, in the section on “equality, diversity and social inclusion”, along with further background and complementary information about this policy area. Please see below for more information about the current plan.

## **The Strategic Equality Objectives Action Plan 2024 to 2028**

The Strategic Equality Objectives Action Plan for 2024 to 2028 was presented to Cabinet in November 2024 by the Leader of the Council, at which time it was approved with support across parties.

Publication of the Strategic Equality Objectives Action Plan is a legal requirement under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) set out in the Equality Act 2010. Its production enables the Council to not only frame our proposed actions for the next four years but also record and reflect upon progress made in the last four years. This is being achieved despite financial constraints, with a focus upon joint working and best use of resources within the Council and across organisational boundaries.

The Action Plan serves to continue to demonstrate our commitment to tackling racism and other forms of discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to fostering good relations across communities, and to advancing equality of opportunity, through our actions as a Council and in partnership with others. This includes support to our workforce as well as to communities, with examples given in the annual service user diversity reports and workforce diversity reports that are also published as per the PSED requirements.

Further information and practical guidance is also available for our workforce on our staff intranet, including an EDI Workforce Policy, which was produced with HR colleagues during 2024.

Publication of an approved Equality Objectives Action Plan 2024 to 2028 thus enables up to date positioning of the Council to assist in efforts to meet its PSED. It will also facilitate timely links with other local and national policy and strategy developments in the arena of equality, diversity, and social inclusion.

If the Council did not publish this action plan for 2024-2028, it would not be in a position to readily demonstrate compliance with the PSED. This would represent a major risk, not least in reputational terms, as it would involve breach of legal obligation, affect more than one group of stakeholders, attract the medium-term attention of legislative or regulatory bodies and potentially attract significant adverse media interest.

Another risk, were the Equality Objectives Action Plan to not receive endorsement, is that the Council could be seen as ignoring the needs of the vulnerable and those at risk of social exclusion, including rural communities and those on low incomes. These individuals form wider groupings of people who need to be identified and who may need support either as individuals or as groupings

In terms of alignment with the Shropshire Plan, approval of the Strategic Equality Objectives Plan 2024-2028 will enable the following key aspirations to continue to be progressed, alongside further embedding of the three national equality aims within Council policy and practice:

- A. Healthy economy: *We'll develop Shropshire as a vibrant destination that attracts people to live in, work in, learn in and visit.*
- B. Healthy environment: *We'll enable safer, sustainable, diverse and inclusive communities that pull together by reducing anti-social behaviour and risk of harm;*
- C. Healthy organisation: *We'll enable a skilled, happy, healthy, diverse, inclusive, empowered, and proud workforce that influences and leads change, addressing any inequalities.*
- D. Healthy people: *We'll work with partners to develop, commission and deliver the right services and support that meet the needs of children, young people, adults and families in the right place, at the right time.*

This is because approval of the Strategic Equality Objectives Action Plan 2024-2028 could be considered to have potential positive environmental, economic and societal impacts for the wider community across Shropshire, as well as equality and health and wellbeing impacts for people within and across the Protected Characteristic groupings as currently defined in the Equality Act 2010.

### **Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments**

It is a legal requirement, laid upon us as a public sector body through the Equality Act 2010, for local authorities to assess the equality and human rights impact of changes proposed or made to services.

Carrying out impact assessments helps us as a public authority to ensure that, as far as possible, we are taking actions to meet the general equality duty placed on us by the Equality Act 2010, and to thus demonstrate that the three national equality aims are integral to our decision making processes.

As reinforced in Government guidance updated in November 2023, it is up to us as an authority to decide what form our equality impact assessment may take. By way of illustration, some local authorities focus more overtly upon human rights; some include safeguarding. It is about what is considered to be needed in a local authority's area, in line with local factors such as demography and strategic objectives as well as with the national legislative imperatives.

We need to be in a position to be able to demonstrate to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) that we have made every effort to carry out our equality impact screenings, and that we have done so at every stage where it would be appropriate to do so.

In Shropshire, the tool that we use to do this work is referred to as an **Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA)**

This is a single screening template, usually presented as an appendix to a committee report, either to Cabinet or to the Strategic Licensing Committee. ESHIAs thus form part of the committee paper documentation for elected members to consider in decision making processes: and are a crucial component within such considerations as well as demonstrating our open and transparent approach.

Our ESHIA screening sets out to ensure that “due regard” is being given to equality, equity, social inclusion and health and wellbeing.

For us, this is about maximising the opportunity of a legal requirement in relation to considering impacts for the nine Protected Characteristic groupings to augment it with our own extra efforts as a council.

As well as considering impacts for the nine Protected Characteristic groupings, our ESHIA screenings therefore set out to ensure that “due regard” is being given to equality, equity, social inclusion and health and wellbeing, in line with our local aspirations as set out in the **Shropshire Plan** as well as our national legal obligations.

### **Describing the Protected Characteristics**

The Equality Act describes nine **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.

There is intersectionality across the Protected Characteristic groupings as well as for the additional groupings we consider in Shropshire. This term is growing in usage, to indicate that a person will inevitably belong to at least three groupings, ie Age and Race, and the Sex 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.

Within the Disability grouping, conscious efforts are being made for ESHIAs in regard to service change proposals to consider the likely impacts for people with sensory disabilities, people with neurodiverse conditions, and those with hidden physical disabilities including Crohn's disease.

We also consider the projected neutral, negative or positive impact for those individuals and households that we may consider to be vulnerable by virtue of their circumstances. Whilst these are not defined as Protected Characteristics within equality legislation, it has been a matter of good practice in Shropshire for us to consider their needs as well, within a tenth grouping termed Social Inclusion. This includes low income households, households in rural areas, and young people leaving care.

When we introduced the tenth 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, wherever they may live in our rural and sparsely populated county.

Social inclusion reflects the circumstances in which individuals and households may find themselves, whether that is households living in rural isolation or in market towns; those living in fuel poverty or on low incomes; 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 in our local area of the national cost of living crisis.

The category of young people leaving care is now considered as a local protected characteristic grouping by the Council, as is the case in Telford and Wrekin. Also as with Telford and Wrekin, the Council now separates out the grouping veterans and serving members of the armed force and their families, in order to visibly demonstrate that 'due regard' is being given to people in this grouping, as per the requirements of the Armed Forces Act 2021

Government guidance states the following:

*"Someone has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment if they are proposing to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone a process or part of a process to reassign their sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex. Authorities should take care to undertake their assessment by reference to the protected characteristics set out in the act. They should not use concepts such as gender or gender identity, which are not encoded in the act and can be understood in different ways.*

*"Marriage and civil partnership is a protected characteristic but not a 'relevant' one. This means you have to consider it only in relation to the first aim of the duty. Discrimination because of marriage and civil partnership is only prohibited in relation to the work provisions of the act. This is because the parts of the act covering services and public functions, premises and education do not apply to that protected characteristic. See sections 28(1)(a), 32(1)(b), 84(1)(b), and 90 of the act.*

**“Having due regard”** means properly considering the 3 aims identified in the act, and how they relate to the function you are exercising, and then deciding what weight to give them. It is not a duty to achieve a particular outcome. The level of “due regard” considered sufficient in any particular context depends on the facts. A proportionate approach should be taken to the resources spent on duty compliance, depending on the circumstances of the case and the seriousness of the potential equality impacts on those with protected characteristics.

“When assessing the equality impacts of a decision, organisations should consider the positive and negative impacts, not just the negative. For example, policies designed to support integration and community cohesion may have a positive impact across a population, even if not targeted at any one group in particular.

**“Eliminating unlawful conduct prohibited by the act”** means eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation, failure to make reasonable adjustments and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the act.

**“Advancing equality of opportunity”** means having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their relevant protected characteristics
- take steps to meet the different needs of people who share a relevant protected characteristic
- encourage participation in public life or any other activity by underrepresented groups
- take steps to meet the different needs of disabled persons

“Considering people’s different needs and taking steps to meet those needs can be relevant to avoiding indirect discrimination. There are specific provisions in the act about making reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities.

“It is important to note here that the duty to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity is not a duty to put in place positive action measures. Positive action means measures permitted under the act that aim to alleviate disadvantage or under-representation, or to meet the particular needs of those who share a protected characteristic. It may be appropriate to consider positive action as part of the second aim of the duty, where adverse impacts have been identified. However, the duty is not a positive action programme and the use of positive action is voluntary. Positive action must balance the seriousness of the disadvantage suffered, or the extent to which people with a protected characteristic are under-represented, against the impact that the proposed action may have on other people.

**“Fostering good relations”** means having regard to the need to deal with prejudice and support understanding. For example, some decisions have the power to bring divided groups together and to support their mutual understanding. Other decisions may inadvertently cause people with one protected characteristic to blame people with another for a social problem.

*“Unless there is a clear correlation with a protected characteristic, considering demographics that are not protected characteristics will not help you to comply with the duty. In fact, it could obscure compliance in your supporting records. Examples of demographics that are not protected characteristics include:*

- *class*
- *gender*
- *gender identity*
- *caring responsibilities*
- *single parenthood*

*Depending on context, some of them may be linked to race, sex, or gender reassignment.”*

### **Using appropriate terminology**

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.

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.

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 we give 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 advice, issued here in 2022 after publication of national research, has recently been strengthened through the issuing of Government guidance in this regard. (<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity/>)

[extract below]

### ***BAME and BME***

*We do not use the terms BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) and BME (Black and minority ethnic) because they emphasise certain ethnic minority groups (Asian and Black) and exclude others (Mixed, Other and White ethnic minority groups). The terms can also mask disparities between different ethnic groups and create misleading interpretations of data. In March 2021, the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities [recommended that the government stop using the term BAME](#). One of the recommendations in the [final report on COVID-19 disparities](#), published in December 2021, was to refer to ethnic minority groups individually, rather than as a single group. This was supported by research commissioned by the Race Disparity Unit (RDU), which found that people from ethnic minorities were 3 times more likely to agree than disagree that the term 'BAME' was unhelpful.*

[extract ends]

Our approach 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.

With a workforce drawn from the communities that we seek to serve, our efforts include helping them to be seen and celebrated, and helping to demonstrate that if a commemoration or observation is important to them and their communities, it is important to Shropshire Council as well.

### **Progress made 2020-2024**

We have been carrying out actions aligned to three main strategic action areas:

- Publish more visibly
- Collect data more proactively
- Work together more jointly

Progress has been reported upon each year within the annual diversity reports.

As may be seen from the update table available online at [www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk), progress has been made in each action area.

Highlights include:

#### A. Publish more visibly

Action: increased publication of press releases and digital materials to mark celebrations and commemorations, and to raise awareness and understanding amongst the community and amongst the workforce of what these events and dates mean to different groupings.

This has included material to mark religious festivals and dates, such as around Bodhi Day for Buddhists, Chinese New Year, Christmas, Diwali, Easter, Hanukkah, Ramadhan and Vaisakhi. The Council has also publicised the efforts of Community Pride volunteers during Pride Month, commemorated Stephen Lawrence Day, promoted UN International Women's Day and UN International Day for People with Disabilities, and used payslips to promote Show Racism the Red Card Day and the White Ribbon campaign against domestic violence.

#### B. Collect data more proactively

Action: embedding health and well being impacts into ESHIAs

The proactive gathering of intelligence from local and national sources is now linked into the priorities within the Shropshire Plan and to the use to be gained through input to and findings from public consultation exercises. As such, data and analyses now form a more in-depth resource for service areas and for reports to Members as well as for publication on our website. Data and findings form an integral part of ESHIAs in terms of helping to assess the likely impact of proposed service changes upon people in different groupings

In December 2021, we added in an impacts table on health and well being, which affected not only the content but also the title for the impact assessment template, to now refer to it as the Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment, or ESHIA. In June 2023, we updated it further, in order to amplify not only the health and well being element but also the duty that now applies in law to have due regard to the needs of veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families. This brings us to April 2024, with changes to now show armed forces as a distinct grouping, and care leavers as a distinct local grouping. The current templates are available on the website and on the Council intranet, together with examples and latest Government guidance.

Our additional efforts to consider impacts of decisions through the screenings that we undertake thus involve considerations around social inclusion, around health and well being, linked to health impact considerations; around environmental impacts, linked to climate change considerations; and around economic impacts.

None of these are currently legal requirements under the Equality Act 2010. Together, they add value or at least ensure that the Council is visibly seeking to take an holistic view of impacts: and as importantly for our service areas is taking a proportionate and time efficient way in which to do so through use of a single template.

### C. Work together more jointly

Action: growing a cherry tree orchard of remembrance to mark the Holocaust and other genocides, partnership with inter faith forums, local primary schools, and local elected members as community leaders.

There are now 20 trees in the orchard, being grown in different locations across our rural county, with a new tree planted each year. This includes the planting of a Remembering Srebrenica tree in 2021 by the Armed Forces memorial outside Shirehall, to remember the humanitarian role of the local armed forces in the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and in genocides since that time.

The Council's efforts on Holocaust and genocide commemoration work with children have been recognised by the national HMD Trust with a feature in their 2023 annual publication. These efforts are not only around ensuring that the Holocaust and other genocides are never forgotten but also around providing opportunity for children to work with representatives of a range of faith communities and grow their own understanding of world faiths.

Action: evaluate increased understanding amongst officers and elected Members about the challenges faced by people with Protected Characteristics and people at risk of social exclusion.

This action has changed in scope towards awareness raising efforts allied to specific campaigns or place-based activity. Awareness raising efforts have included the following:

- terminology changes such as no longer using BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) as a generic acronym, recognising the diversity of our many small ethnic minorities including from Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Poland, Syria, and Ukraine;
- being an ally, particularly for the Protected Characteristic groupings of Race, Religion or Belief, and Sexual Orientation;
- visible 'due regard' being taken of the needs of neurodiverse individuals within ESHIAs; and
- use made of poetry and narratives as a way to help people to think about commemorations and celebrations including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, Race Equality Week, and South Asian Heritage Month.

## **Next steps for 2024-2028**

The three broad action areas have served us well over the last eight years, but now warrant changing whilst retaining intent. This is partly as we have made progress and partly as efficiencies may be gained through scoping things more toward use of what we have already and use to be made of online resources, as well as maximising potential for more partnership working.

The action areas have now been recast to the following:

- Publish information in ways that are visible and accessible
- Analyse and utilise data in ways that are consistent and coherent
- Work together in ways that are collaborative and cost efficient

Highlights will include:

### **A. Publish information in ways that are visible and accessible**

Action: Maintain online resource materials on equalities, diversity and social inclusion in one location on the external website at [www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk)

Utilising one main location has enabled information to be presented as logically and visibly as possible, with links to further external material that may be helpful, including the website of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). Use of these pages has facilitated ready links to be made to press releases and resources elsewhere on the website, including committee papers, and to other related websites including Shropshire Archives.

The annual service user and workforce diversity reports required to be published as part of our PSED are added to the website each year. These provide extra depth and layers of information about not only the needs of people across and within groupings but also the heritage and cultures of diverse communities in Shropshire, including amongst our workforce.

The focus remains on the website, for internal and external audiences alike, whilst efforts continue to recognise the need to provide additional support and advice via email enquiries and telephone

### **B. Analyse and utilise data in ways that are consistent and coherent**

Action: Analyse and present contextual equality and health and well being information in a range of ways and through local and national opportunities that arise, in order to strengthen collective understanding about issues and needs, and optimise use to be made in partnership, Council and service area policy and strategy development of all opportunities to aid understanding of equality, diversity and social inclusion issues.

This is an ongoing action involving use of a wider range of in depth analyses published on the website, including Census 2021 analyses and public health data. There is also a greater awareness of the complexities of health inequalities for different groupings, including those which emerged during the pandemic; and those which remain for people we may describe as vulnerable. This includes people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families; and young people leaving care. Future plans include further assessment of inequalities (both health and otherwise) through the embedding of select aspects of the Health Equity Assessment Tool within the ESHIA process.

### C. Work together in ways that are collaborative and cost efficient

Actions: to work with local NHS organisations and Telford and Wrekin Council through the Integrated Care System, on the following areas:

For the workforce: equip managers with the confidence and competencies to recognise and tackle racism and other forms of discrimination, including sexism and misogyny, through targeted training and briefing, and equip all employees to act as allies.

For service users and the community: implement communication campaigns to address misinformation and raise awareness of how to recognise and report hate crime in all its forms, allied to communications about standards of respectful behaviour and language towards the workforce.

## **4. Concluding Remarks**

Equality legislation necessitates compliance but also provides opportunity for reflection on local progress and recalibration towards where we want to go in addressing inequalities and achieving equity of opportunity for all our communities, whether they live in rural areas or in our market towns.

The new Strategic Equality Objectives Action Plan for 2024-2028 online at [www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk) sets out to make the most of the feedback we gain from communities, allied to local and national digital resources, and emerging intelligence and data on inequalities, and to utilise events, celebrations and commemorations through which to raise awareness of the rich diversity of our communities.

Along with our partners, and through our workforce, we are in a position to frame our proposed actions for the next four years in ways that will utilise the data and evidence that we already hold about groupings and their needs, continue to collect and analyse and share this and use this in our decision making processes, and do all that is possible to engage with and support our communities to live their best lives, wherever they live, study and work in our large rural county.

In so doing, we may make more local progress over the next four years, with regard to the three national equality aims, as well as improving the health and well being of the communities that we all serve. The Strategic Equality Objectives Action Plan for 2024-2028, including review of the actions undertaken in the last four years, serves as a record of our commitment to our diverse communities and to our workforce.

The workforce of the Council is a key target group in the Council’s equality endeavours, as are the elected Members of the Council as community leaders. The assistance of all staff across all service areas, in taking account of equality considerations in their everyday actions and in applying such considerations to planned changes to services, will help the Council to proactively meet its PSED as well as mitigate against any risks of non-compliance.

We will continue to publish information in ways that are visible and accessible, seek to take due regard of needs, in particular recognising intersectionality between groupings, and target efforts at finding out where there may be barriers to accessing particular services, and how this might be addressed in ways that will promote health and well being. This will continue to be reported upon in the annual Service User and Workforce Diversity Reports published online.

We hope that you have found this annual service user diversity report, which draws upon the Action Plan, to be interesting and useful. 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.

**Appendix I**

**Table one: this is a table to show the nine groupings of people as defined in the equality Act 2010**

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

<b>Protected Characteristic</b>	<b>Definition</b>
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.
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.

---

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