

Sufficiency Strategy for Children in our Care 2025-2027



We want children to live in safe and loving homes, for most children we hope that this will be with their family or wider network of support. We will prioritise support as early as possible for all children as we know this needs to improve.

We want to ensure that we work as a local authority to either deliver or commission high quality local homes for children when these are needed.

Our internal provision has gone from strength to strength but we cannot rely on this alone, the external market is a critical part and we hope this sufficiency strategy provides an overview of our position and the areas of growth we want to make with you.

We recognise there is significant work underway to reform Children's Services and therefore this next 2 years will be critical to understanding the impact. We will continue to update this document to ensure it reflects how these changes are impacting us locally.

David Shaw
Director of Children's Services

Children in our Care

Shropshire Council are committed to providing the right provision for children and young people and their families to achieve the outcomes that matter to them. We want to see them living healthy, happy, more independent and fulfilling lives.

Shropshire County Council’s Sufficiency Strategy for Children in our Care 2025-27 aims to address the ‘Sufficiency Duty’ of the Local Authority – determined by Section 22G of the Childrens Act 1989 - which requires each local area to ensure sufficient accommodation for children in care.

Looked After Children

Since 2020 there has been a sharp increase in the number of children becoming looked after in Shropshire. Where previously the rate of children in care per 10k population was lower than both National and West Midlands Local Authority rates, this has now risen to be significantly higher, **(table A1)**, adding pressure to Shropshire’s sufficiency needs. **Children looked after per 10,000 population increased by 78% between 31st March 2020 - 31st March 2024, placing Shropshire 2nd highest regionally.**

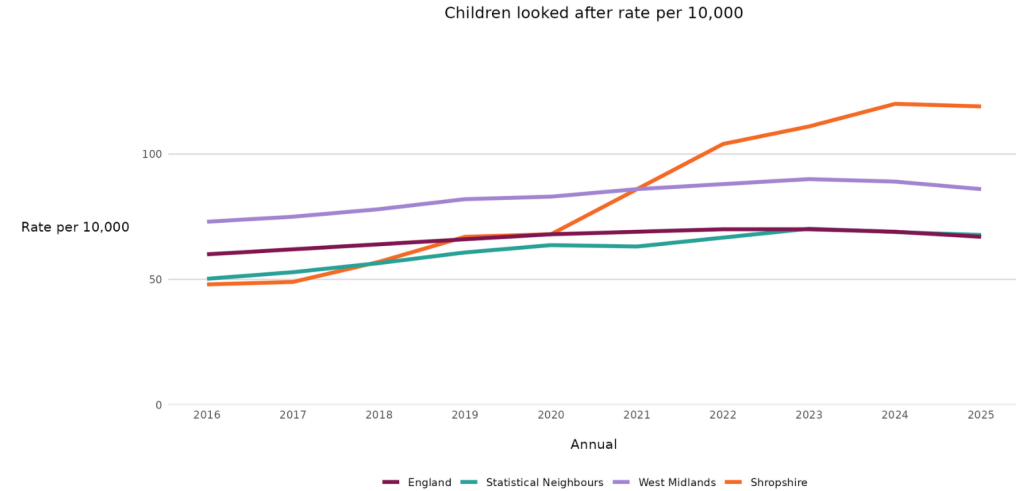
As of 31st March 2025 Shropshire has significantly higher the number of looked after children when compared to statistical neighbour LAs such as North Yorkshire, Somerset and East Riding of Yorkshire.

In response, Shropshire Council has developed their Early Help offer and implemented the Stepping Stones therapeutic service. This additional edge of care support to families and children, enables children to remain at home where it is in the child’s best interest and safe to do so, a key outcome in the government paper “Keeping Children safe and helping families Thrive”, November 2024.

At 31st March 2025, the number of children looked after was 721 **(table B1)**, an increase of 0.1% from 31st March 2024, the first signs that the number of Looked after children has stabilised after significant rise from 2020. Stepping Stones have contributed to this change with 84 families supported to prevent children entering care in 2024/25, **(table H2)**.

In particular there was a significant reduction in the proportion of Children Look After between the ages of 0-4. As of the 31st March 2025 the percentage of children in the 0-4 age group was 20%, a reduction of 7.7% from 31st March 2022, whilst proportionally ages of 10-15 has risen 6% over the same period, **(table A2)**. The Ofsted annual report 24/25 notes children aged 10 to 15 make up the largest group in children’s homes nationally.

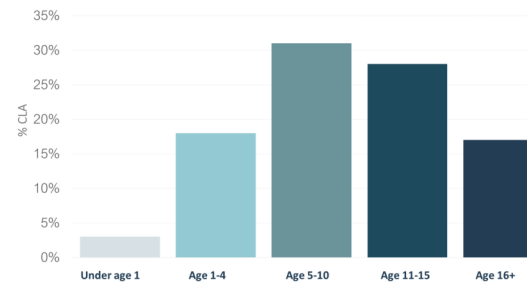
Children Looked after at 31st March each year per 10k pop.



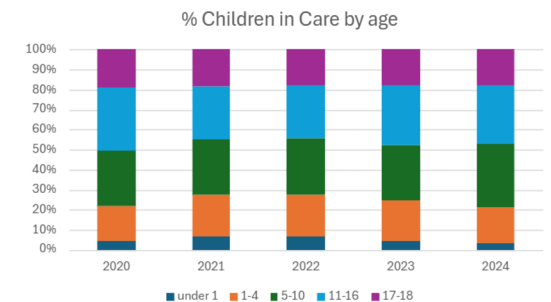
Number of children looked after at 31st March 2021 - 2025.

31/03/2021	31/03/2022	31/03/2023	31/03/2024	31/03/2025
504	609	654	714	721

Children Looked after by age group at 31st March 2024



Children Looked after by age group at 31st March 2020-2024



The stabilising of the number of looked after children in FY2024/25 has led to a 0.8% decrease in the rate of Shropshire looked after children per 10k population, however this decrease is less than saw nationally with a 2% decrease, within the West Midlands with a 3% decrease and with Statistical neighbours with a 1.2% decrease. The gap between Shropshire Council and statistical neighbours is growing wider. **(table A3)**

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Shropshire	68	86	104	111	120	119
West Midlands	83	86	88	90	89	86
Statistical Neighbours	63.7	63.1	66.7	70.2	68.9	67.7
National	68	69	70	70	69	67

Modelling off current trends and considerations of ONS population projections **(table A5)**, had predicted Shropshire rates of looked after children per 10k population would meet national rates by 2033. However this modelling was based on a continued increase of the national rates which is not occurring. The modelling also does not consider the national impact of the Families First Partnership which will be implemented by all local authorities in 2026. **(table A4)**

Public Health’s Joint Strategic Needs Assessment has estimated a 9.6% population growth in Shropshire, from 2021-2031. This growth would mainly be seen in the over 60 age group with a population regression in the 0-29 age bands.

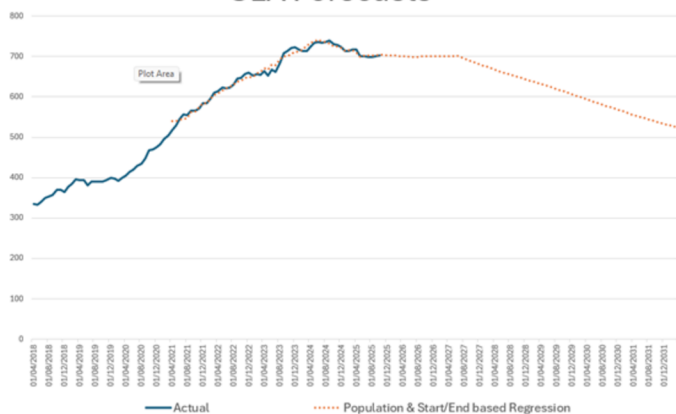
Based on these population projections for Shropshire to demonstrate a CLA rate per 10k population of 86, similar to the current West Midlands rate, the number of looked after children in Shropshire would need to reduce to 554. This would require a reduction of 21 CLA each year over the next 8 years.

As of November 2025 Shropshire had 704 children looked after, a reduction of 17 from the 31st March 2025. A rate of 86 CLA per 10k population could be achieved if this decrease was to continue until 2033.

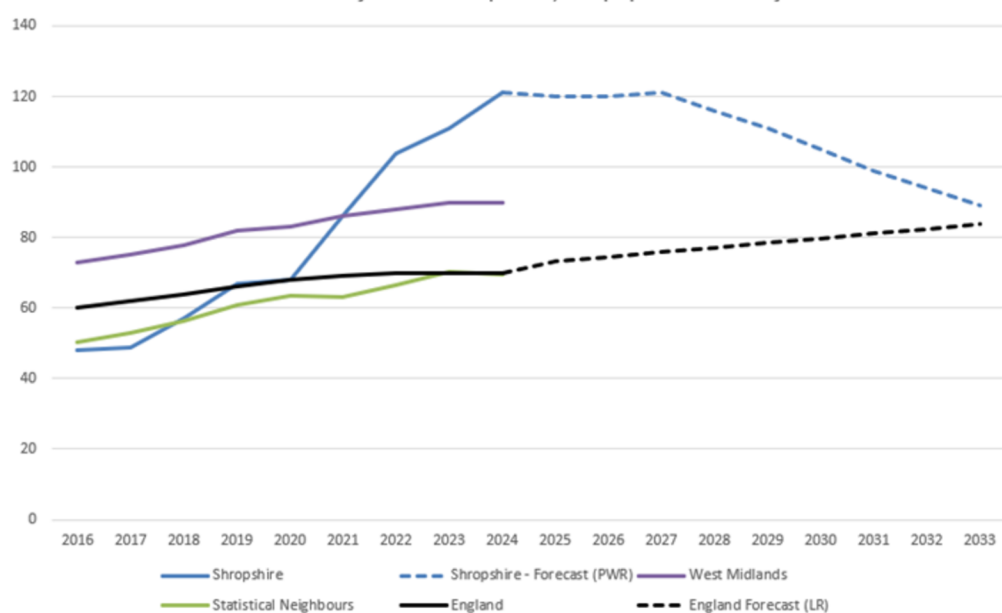
To reach the national rate of 67 would require a much sharper decrease of 35 CLA per year over the next 8 years. More understanding of whether this can be achieved will be realised with the implementation of the Family First Partnership. Monitoring of the FFP impact, as well as assessment of the Stepping Stones and Early Help programmes will determine if the current initiatives are on course to meet these ambitions.

Considering population growth (table A5), and the impact of the Shropshire initiatives, as well as the implementation of the national Families First Programme (FFP), it is predicted the numbers of looked after children will start to fall over the next 3 years, (table A4). Initial reductions are in foster placements and children placed with parents, whilst children in Residential homes remains high. Ambitions for Shropshire Council children recognise a need for more diversity in provision and specifically an increase in foster homes for children who have moved into a children home due to lack of fostering sufficiency.

CLA Forecasts



CLA Actual & Projected Rates per 10,000 population & Projected



Families First Partnership

The Families First Partnership (FFP) is a UK government program aimed at reducing the number of children in care by shifting the child social care system toward early intervention and family support. It integrates services for families with complex needs to prevent crises and ensure children can safely remain at home.

The FFP is backed by a significant investment of over £500 million for 2025–26 and draws on insights from the Families First for Children Pathfinder program, which tested new ways of working with families.

It is expected that FFP will have a significant impact in the reduction of children entering care over the next few years.

The purpose of increasing early help will:

- Reduce the number of children entering care
- Provide robust assessments which identify the right care required at the right time.
- Provide family help, supporting early and meeting their needs.
- Where it is in the best interest and safe for a child to return home we ensure wrap around support is available to facilitate this.

A review of CIN/CLA per 10k pop. as of 31st March 24 vs 31st March 25 against West Midlands Pathfinder authorities noted the following.

- **Shropshire - 1% increase in CIN vs less than 1% decrease in CLA**
- **SN authorities - 3% increase in CIN per vs 1% decrease in CLA**
- **Walsall (FFP pathfinder) - 16% increase in CIN vs 14% decrease in CLA**
- **Wolverhampton (FFP pathfinder) - 26% increase in CIN vs 6.4% decrease in CLA**

West Midlands FFP pathfinder authorities had significant increase in CIN and large decreases in CLA for FY 24/25

Early Help

After an independent review of Shropshire Early help services in 2023 an Early help transformation programme took place from May 2023 to June 2024, shaping the Early help “How Can I help?” strategy.

A revised front door for children’s services was introduced in September 2023, which resulted in a 297% increase in Early help contact. Further development of the Early help strategy has provided improvements such as reduced re-referrals to targeted early help and a reduction in escalation to children’s social care from 11% to 1% in FY 23/24.

Teams and areas of impact within the Early help offer include:

Family Community hubs - Increasing access and promotion of Shropshire early help services. Eight family hubs can be found across Shropshire.

Child in Need (CIN) pilot programme - Management of CIN cases by Early Services.

Local Youth Transformation project (LYTP) - An initiative which will run from September 2025 to March 2026. The development of partnerships, tools and hubs through this initiative will improve current Shropshire youth work which engages vulnerable young people in high need areas, advised by young people.

Parenting Team - Training and individualised support, providing trauma-informed, evidence based approaches.

By putting families at the centre of support, Shropshire Council aims to reduce children who then progress to children’s social care and reduce the number of children who become looked after.

Robust assessment, planning and case reviews ensure that only those children for whom being in care is the only way of ensuring their safety, protection and development become looked after..

Should a child become looked after Shropshire Council will continue to work with those with parental responsibility to help a child or young person in care return home safely, wherever this is possible.

Current Activity - Stepping Stones

In 2019 Shropshire Council set out a vision for a project which would provide individualised, intensive, wrap around support to children and families. The primary aim being that by providing an intensive trauma informed approach with children and parents/carers, the programme would address the impact of adverse early experience, and break cycles of abuse in families.

The Stepping Stones programme was launched in April 2021, based on the North Yorkshire “No wrong door” model. Since initial launch, capacity within the team has tripled, allowing the programme to both support the reduction of children who need to become looked after and reducing the number of children in care by supporting reunifications. In addition, Stepping Stones will identify and support children to transition from residential homes to foster homes or supported accommodation.

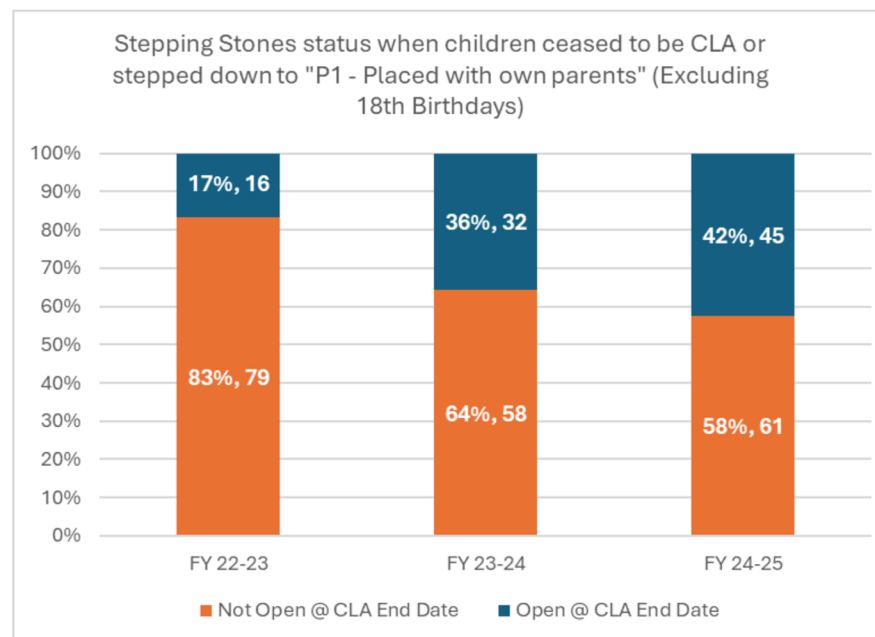
In FY 23/24 and FY 24/25 the number of children receiving assessment and intervention from the Stepping Stones was consistent between at 469 and 495 (**table H1**). The planned outcome “Edge of Care” was the most frequent requested intervention status at the initial consultation for both years 23/24 and 24/25. An increase in “Reunification Home” was seen from 16% in 23/24 to 28% in 24/25. (**table H3**)

In FY 22-23 17% of children (16 out of 95) who ceased being CLA or moved to a P1 placement, “placed with parents”, were working with Stepping Stones at the time. In FY 24-25, this has increased to 42% (45 children of 106). A 35% increase in Stepping Stones support with a 11% increase in children who ceased to be looked after or moved to P1 placement. (**table H4**)

	FY23/24	FY24/25
Avoidance of becoming Looked After	75	84

Placement Vacated (Step Downs)	FY23/24	FY24/25
External Fostering	4	14
External Residential	14	20
Internal Residential	3	0
Internal Fostering	18	18
Supported Accom.	0	1

Initial Consultations Planned Outcomes	2023/24	2024/25
Edge of Care	339 (65.32%)	307 (60.08%)
Reunification Home	83 (15.99%)	146 (28.57%)
Avoid Step up to Residential	53 (10.21%)	35 (6.85%)
Step Down to Foster Care	32 (6.17%)	13 (2.54%)
Transition to Independence / Supported Lodging	12 (2.31%)	10 (1.96%)



75 children were reported as avoiding becoming looked after in FY 23/24 and 85 in FY 24/25, due to the support of the Stepping Stones programme. This reduction is not replicated in actual numbers of children entering care when compared to previous years, however, had the number of children reported by Stepping Stones become looked after then there would have been an additional 10% rise in the number of looked after children for both 2023/24 and 2024/25.

The number of step downs from children’s homes supported by Stepping Stones was 14 for FY23/24 and 20 for FY 24/25. In both years there was an increase in placements within children's homes, 12.5% in FY23/24, more than the CLA increase of 10% and 12% in FY24/25 much higher than the 0.1% CLA increase. Had these step downs not occurred then the rise in residential placements would have been ~20% higher.

The costs avoidance and savings impact from the work of Stepping Stones was £4.32m in 23/24 and £10.30m in 24/25.

Stepping Stones and Internal homes

Two of Shropshire’s six internal residential homes, Pebble House and Chelmaren, work closely with the stepping Stones programme to step children down from residential care.

Educational Psychologist base themselves at each of the homes for 1 day per fortnight and work with the Registered Managers, providing group supervision, training to the team and undertaking child lead sessions with the children and young people in the home.

An internal weekly tracking meeting between the respective Service Manager’s, the Residential Quality and Development Lead and Stepping Stones’s Team Manager; to monitor the intervention of both services and trajectory when children will move on to minimise the length of bed vacancies.

Furthermore, this support can be provided to the other Shropshire internal children’s homes where a change of care plan is identified for a child within that home and Stepping Stones involvement will benefit the transition.

	31st Mar 2022	31st Mar 2023	31st Mar 2024	31st Mar 2025
CLA children homes	65	79	89	110
FY increase	2%	22%	13%	12%
Total CLA	609	654	714	721
FY increase	20%	7%	9%	0.1%
CLA Starts	240	209	205	207
CLA Ends (no UASC)	129	128	122	163
Stepping Stones avoidance			75	84
Residential Step Downs			14	20

Stepping Stones development

Stepping Stones will continue its support for edge of care crisis and step down. In addition, the service is developing a pilot with the Early Help service, to reduce the escalation for statutory intervention by combining service expertise, providing earlier intervention of Stepping Stones therapeutic approach and Early Help targeted practical support. The outcome of this work will be reviewed next year.

A review of Residential step downs from Jan 25 - Sept 25 noted a similar rate as FY24-45.

- Move on to Supported Accommodation/Lodgings - 5
- Move on to Fostering - 2
- Move on to Parents - 4
- Ceased to be CLA due to reunification - 2

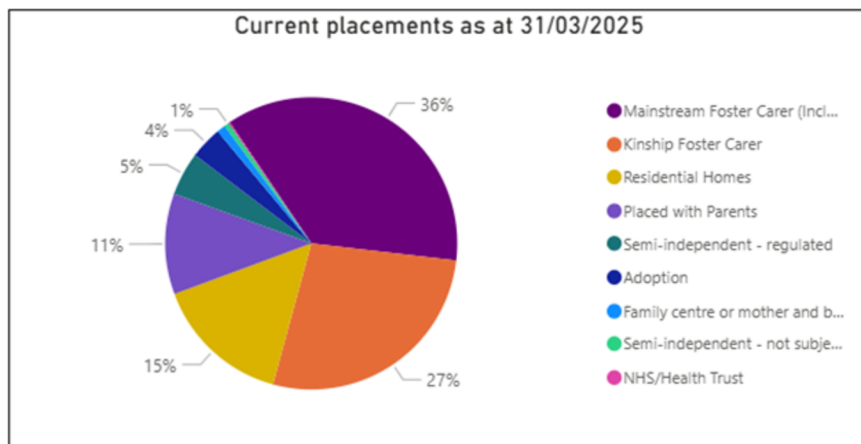
Home finding Team

Capacity within the home finding team has remained the same throughout Shropshire's increase in the numbers of children looked after. This is a highly experienced team however the lack of capacity does restrict activity and puts more reliance on the West Midlands placement portal.

A transformation project is exploring how additional staffing can provide benefits in finding the right home for Shropshire children. This may include:

- **Brokerage** - ensuring the package of care meets need at the right cost.
- **Fostering home initiatives** - Working with IFAs to increase secondary placements and carers for residential step downs.
- **Block bed utilisation** - supporting planned moves.
- **Individualised commissioner** - working with providers to create individualised care packages

Looked at Children's homes as of 31st March 2025



Location of Homes

It is important we keep our children looked after close to home, especially where they need high levels of support. However, we recognize there will still be instances where local provision is not in the best interests of the child and then an Out of Authority placement will be sourced.

As the number of looked after children has increased this has impacted the percentage of children placed outside of Shropshire, **(table C3)**. As of 31st March 2025, 58% of looked after children were placed within Shropshire boundaries and 42% placed outside of the county. 7% of those children were homed in the neighbouring Telford & Wrekin Authority and 3% in the neighbouring Staffordshire Authority, **(table C1)**, whilst other were further afield, **(table D2)**.

Provision Need

To ensure sufficiency and versatility Shropshire Council requires a variety of homes and contracting models. Currently these include internal provision for both fostering and residential homes, West Midlands framework agreements for fostering, residential and supported accommodation placements and a Shropshire block bed children's residential contract.

Fostering homes are the largest provision at 64%, **(table C2)**, although there has been a slight reduction in this percentage over recent years, **(table B2)**. The numbers of looked after children in foster care fell from 474 to 469 from 31st March 2024 to 31st March 2025, **(table B3)**. This reduction was in external foster carers whilst the internal numbers remained steady.

The Fostering in England 2023 - 2024 report noted a reduction in approved fostering households of -5% IFA and -6% LA, adding sufficiency pressure to finding fostering placements. The number of fostering households nationally has been consistently decreasing, with a fall of 7% over the last 5 years. Ofsted reported children in fostering homes was 66% in 2025, falling from 71% in 2020.

Whilst the numbers of looked after children remained similar from 31st March 2024 to 31st March 2025, children in Residential Homes/Residential schools increased from 89 to 110 over the same period, **(table B3)**. Increasing from 12% to 15% of looked after children placements.

Also, the numbers of looked after children within the Disabled Children's Team reduced from 54 at 31st March 2024 to 40 at 31st March 2025, **(table E1)**. However, the number of those children in a Residential setting increased by 1 and the number in fostering reduced by 3, reflecting the difficulty in finding fostering provision for children with complex needs.

At 31st March 2025 numbers of looked after children was 721

Fostering placements 64% & Residential placements 15%

Placements within Shropshire boundaries is 58%



Our approach

Right Support at the right time

As Corporate Parents we preface all our thinking, planning, actions, and decisions with: “would this be good enough for my child.”

Know our children, their needs, talents, and aspirations and promote their interests.

Hold high aspirations for their future and expect the best for and from them.

Listen to their views and ensure they influence practice, service developments and policy.

Support their health and emotional well-being and resilience.

Support transition to adult life and promote their economic prospects and prepare them to become responsible citizens.

Ensure our children attend their education regularly.

Many children looked after are at greater risk of social exclusion than their non-looked after peers, both because of their experiences prior to becoming looked after, and because they are often separated from their birth parents, and from their extended birth families and the community they grew up in.

It is essential, therefore, that Shropshire Council, as a Corporate Parent, ensures that their experience of being looked after is a positive and supportive one and maximizes their full potential. The needs of children are explored through consultation at various forums to ensure we provide the best support

- **Corporate Parenting Steering Board**
- **Placement Forum**
- **Stable homes forum**
- **PATHS (Providing Access to Help and Support)**
- **Resource Panel**
- **Permanence Forum that considers the permanence options for all looked after children.**
- **Complex Care forum attended by EHCP team, virtual school and (ICB) Continuing Care Team.**

To meet the needs of our children in a foster care or a residential setting requires a provision that delivers quality outcomes for the child and has staff that are resilient, well trained and supported to manage children and young people’s multi-faceted behaviours stemming from for example: emotional trauma, neglect, poor parenting, and no clear consistent boundaries.

Shropshire Council have teams and staff members who can support external providers in ensuring our children’s needs can be met; **Commissioning Officer, Placements Team, Quality Assurance Officers & Residential Quality & Development Lead.**

What we need from the external market

There has been a decrease in the number of Shropshire children entering care each year since 2021. Between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025, 207 children became looked after. This is a reduction of 15.5% when compared to the same period between 2021/22.

Looked after children entering a fostering home has been between 104-155 over the last 4 years. However, it should be noted the number of placements with an external provider has been very stable, between 30-32 each year.

The number of children entering a Children’s Home has been between 20-26 each year, with a steady increase in the number being placed with a Shropshire Council internal home.

There has been a drop in the number of children being placed within Supported Accommodation when entering care. It is noted that the majority of these children will be UASC referrals through the National transfer scheme.

In addition, to the provision required when a child enters care there will be additional need to support a placement break down. It has been noticed that the pressures on fostering sufficiency is resulting in children entering a residential placement after a fostering placement breakdown, increasing residential need by ten placements per year.

External Provider annual sufficiency requirements

- **Fostering 30-35 placements per year**
- **Residential 25-30 placements per year**
- **Supported Accommodation - 25-40 placements per year**

Internal versus External Fostering comparison

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Int. Fostering	123	74	92	80
Ext. Fostering	32	30	31	31

Internal versus External Residential comparison

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Int. Residential	1	2	3	7
Ext. Residential	19	24	13	16

Children entering care by provision 1st April - 31st March

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Fostering	155	104	123	111
Residential	20	26	16	23
Semi-Ind.	40	63	47	27
Other.	30	36	29	46

We see a number of children enter residential homes after fostering home breakdowns. **In 2024/25, 19 children moved from a fostering placement to a residential placement.** This would increase sufficiency requirements, although this was somewhat balanced with the reductions of **20 children who stepped down from residential through Shropshire’s Stepping Stones programme in 2024/25** and **4 children left a residential home at 18 years old.**

External market needs:

- Increased short break/ provision for disabled children.
- Increased foster homes both internal and with external partners, including specialist care for disabled children.
- Residential children’s homes for complex care placements.
- Move on/Step down accommodation with independence support.

Placements for children’s needs:

For services to manage children with high complex/high risks we need highly trained staff who can support children and young people with the following needs/behaviours: *Missing from Care, Sexualised behaviour (male/female victim/perpetuator), Violent/aggressive behaviour, Self-Harming, Learning disability/Autism, Managing multi-faceted behaviours (e.g., substance misuse, criminality) that stem from underlying needs, Social, emotional, and mental health behaviours, At risk of CCE, At risk of CSE*

Outcomes for children

Provision should be able to prepare and deliver plans to meet the outcomes for each child within timeframes. These outcomes may develop over time, involvement with Shropshire’s Stepping Stones Team will inform the Outcomes.

Residential

Number of CLA in Residential homes at 31st March

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Residential	64	64	65	79	89	108

Shropshire council has seen a rise in the number of children in children’s home rise by 69% between 31st March 2020 and 31st March 2025, **(Table I1)**. This is slightly lower than the 82% increase in looked after children over the same period. However, it significantly higher the the 10% rise in children’s home placements reported by the National Audit Officer between 2020-2024.

At 31st March 2025, the percentage of Shropshire looked after children in a children’s home was 15%, **(table I2)**. Data from the Local Authority Interactive Tool shows the percentage of Shropshire looked after children in a children’s home has been above National, West Midlands and Statistical Neighbours percentages for many years. Although this reduced to 11% at 31st March 2022 it has since increased and returned to the 2020 rate of 17% in November 2025. **From this data an expected percentage of children in a children’s home would be between 10%-12% which Shropshire is exceeding at significant financial cost.**

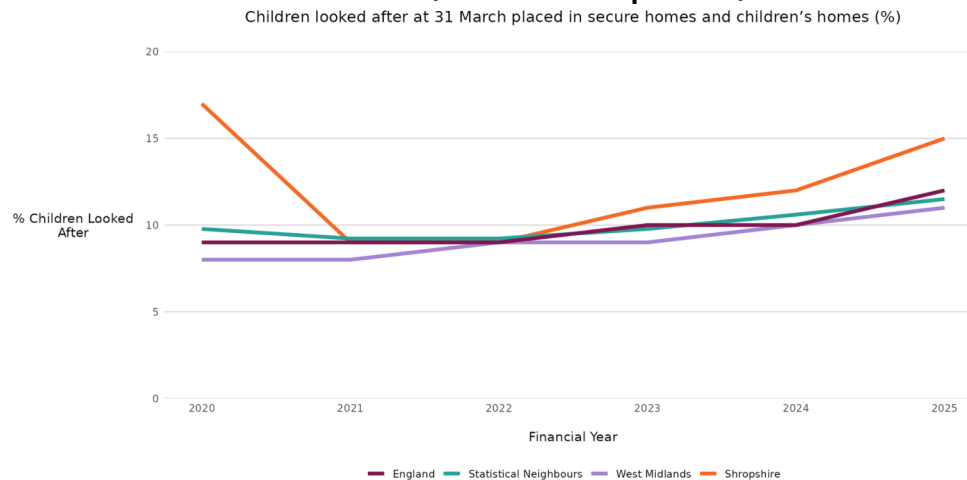
47% of our children placed within a residential setting were within Shropshire boundaries, as of February 2025, with 10 of these children placed within our bed block contract and 13 within our internal homes. As of 31st March 2025, 62% of all residential setting placements made within Shropshire boundaries were with two external providers.

The November 2025 Ofsted social provider list reported 81 Children's homes/Residential schools offering 307 placements, located within Shropshire boundaries, 247% of the number of Shropshire’s looked after children placed in a residential setting at that time, **(table D1)**. Most of these homes are located in the North and North West of the county, **(table D3)**.

Although the number of registered placements within Shropshire exceeds Shropshire Council’s sufficiency requirements, there is a lack of homes that can support Shropshire children with complex needs. Reasons for use of Shropshire homes by other LAs are:

- Higher fees paid by other local authorities.
- Shropshire rurality support CCE risks
- Provider risk plan limits the number of placements per authority

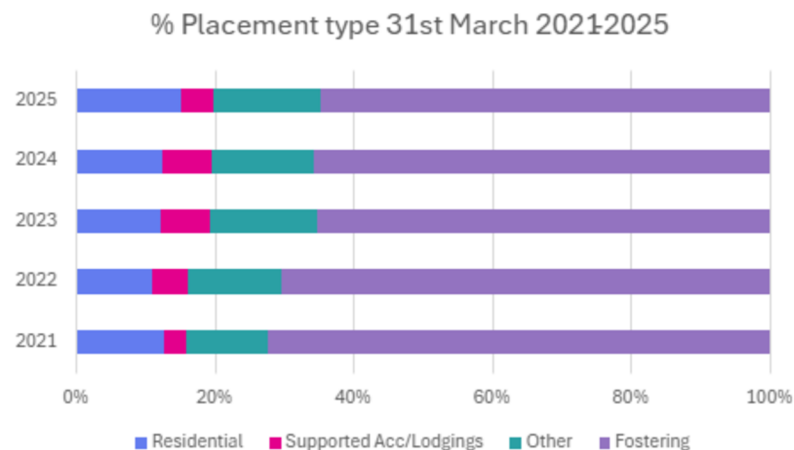
% CLA in Residential homes (other LA comparison)



A gradual rise in the proportion of children within a residential setting has been present within the other local authorities since 2020, however in Shropshire this rate has always remained higher than statistical neighbours, as well as Regional and National .

Reported reductions in a national foster placement sufficiency is likely to be having an impact. **If 1% of Shropshire looked after children are placed in a Children’s Home due to lack of fostering Sufficiency the cost for Shropshire Council in 2025 is £1.8m per annum.**

% CLA - type of homes



Children's home comparisons (2025)

Regional Framework

- Access to vetted providers
- Compliance with procurement standards
- Competitive pricing through aggregated demand
- Limited flexibility for bespoke needs
- Framework capacity can be constrained. Costs vary but generally lower than spot purchasing; indexed rates

49%

Block Contract Placements (Secure a fixed number of beds with providers for a set period).

- Guaranteed capacity
- Cost predictability - lowest unit fee when fully utilised
- Reduces reliance on spot purchasing
- Risk of under-utilisation
- Less flexibility for specialist needs to spot purchasing

9%

Spot Purchasing (External Market) Buy placements individually as needed.

- Immediate access for urgent/specialist cases
- No long-term commitment
- High cost (often £5,500–£8,000/week)
- Limited leverage on quality
- Placement instability cost pressure; unpredictable spend

32%

Internal Provision, including specialist models.

- Full control over quality
- Reduces external dependency
- Better outcomes for children
- High capital and staffing costs

10%

Internal Residential

The internal residential service has grown considerably within the last 6 years, from two children's homes to six. This growth was based on business cases which aimed to deliver best quality care at a reduced cost to the local authority. The homes are consistently rated Outstanding or Good by Ofsted, offering positive outcomes for our children which enables them to flourish.

As of 31st March 2025, 12% of all looked after children in residential settings are placed internally.

Shropshire Internal Children's homes

Chelmaren: accommodating 4 children

Ifton: accommodating 1 child – currently closed.

Devonia: accommodating 2 children

Berwyn Cottage - accommodating 2 children

Pebble House - accommodation – 3 children

Caer Bryn: semi-independent provision for up to 3/4 children

Havenbrook: offering short breaks up to a maximum of 5 children at any one time including one for crisis provision.

The transformation of Shropshire's internal children's homes has specialised the homes to meet identified needs.

Chelmaren: 6-9 month placements which supports the transitioning of the children back home to parents.

Devonia & Berwyn: Therapeutic care homes for children with complex needs, avoiding more expensive external placements

Pebble House: Specialising in children under 12 to support transition into a family environment.

Caer Bryn: Homes for children aged 16-17 in student dorm style accommodation, supporting the child progression towards independence.

The average local authority residential children's homes cost is £5,708, Chelmaren having the lowest unit cost of £4151 per week and Berwyn the highest at £8006 .

In comparison external costs average at £6,246 per week (November 2025), the highest reaching over £19k per week. However, some of the external children's homes do offer additional staffing and some homes are part of a block bed contract at a reduced weekly fee of £4059. Removing children's placements with staffing at 2:1 or above, and removing all blocked bed placements, lowers the average external weekly fee to £5646 (November 25), similar to the average internal costs.

The provision of Internal homes provides a cost effective solution to meet specific needs of Shropshire children. Development of this service is hampered by recruitment difficulties and solutions are being explored .



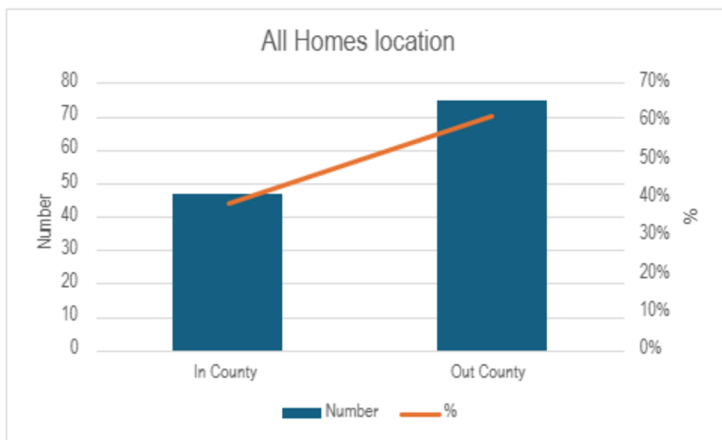
External Residential

To ensure sufficiency and versatility of residential services Shropshire Council utilises a variety of contracting methods. Sufficiency is further supported by Shropshire Council's membership of the West Midlands Children's Commissioning Hub which aims to support the management of fees and Quality Assurance of the West Midlands market.

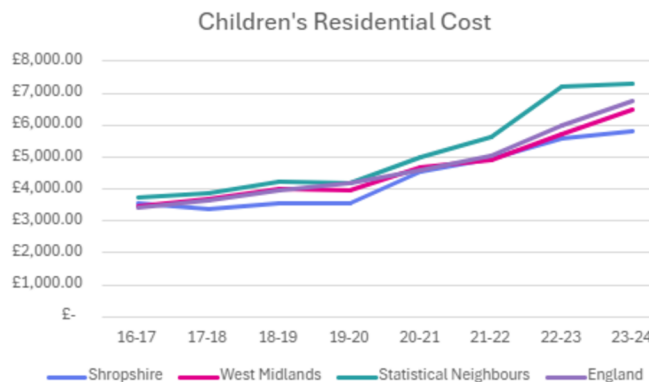
Block Contract - a number of beds for exclusive use of Shropshire Council within the Shropshire boundaries. Monthly meetings held to support planned moves and enhance stability of placements.

WM Residential Framework - providers on the framework agree to set fees, fee review processes, additional contact management from the lead authority and best practise forums.

National Spot Contract - used only when internal, block and framework providers do not meet the needs of the child.



As of November 2025, 39% of Shropshire children, homed in a Residential Home, were in a home within Shropshire Boundaries. This percentage is reduced to 26% when not including internal homes or those on the local block bed contract. Although Shropshire has a large amount of homes within county the local authority is often required to look outside of county to find a home which meets our children's needs.



Annually searching for between 20-30 residential placements

Shropshire's unit cost for Residential placements has increased at a similar rate to other local authorities but has historically remained lower than the West Midlands and Statistical neighbours' costs.

The block bed contract is our most cost effective provision. Recent figures show beds remain empty for a short period and utilisation between 1st August 2024 - 31st July 2025 was 95%.

November 2025 - average unit weekly costs (plus additions) for an external residential placement was £6246.

Number of external providers with homes in Shropshire	25	Number of registered places within Shropshire Homes	307
Shropshire Children's Homes/Residential Schools registered placements Sufficiency vs current need		247%	

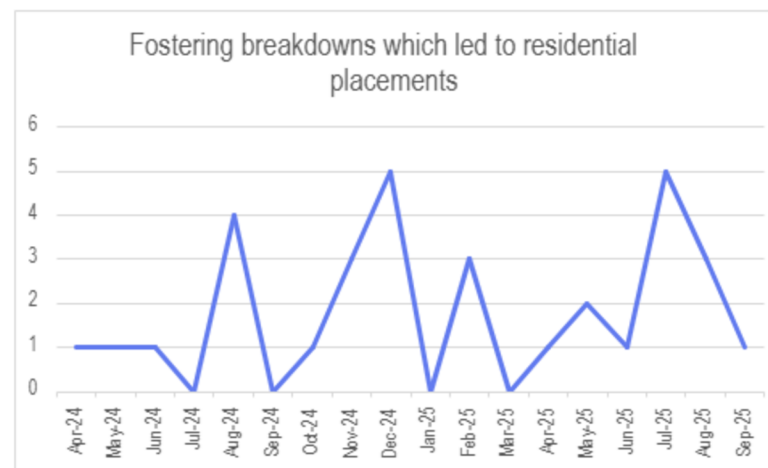
1	2	3	4+
3	15	24	39

Although the number of registered children's homes places in Shropshire has increased we have seen a reduction in solo provision from 12 to 3 from 2020, (table D4).

EBD	Mental Disorders	Sensory Impairment	Alcohol	Drugs	Learning Disability	Physical Disability
275	22	28	12	12	117	18

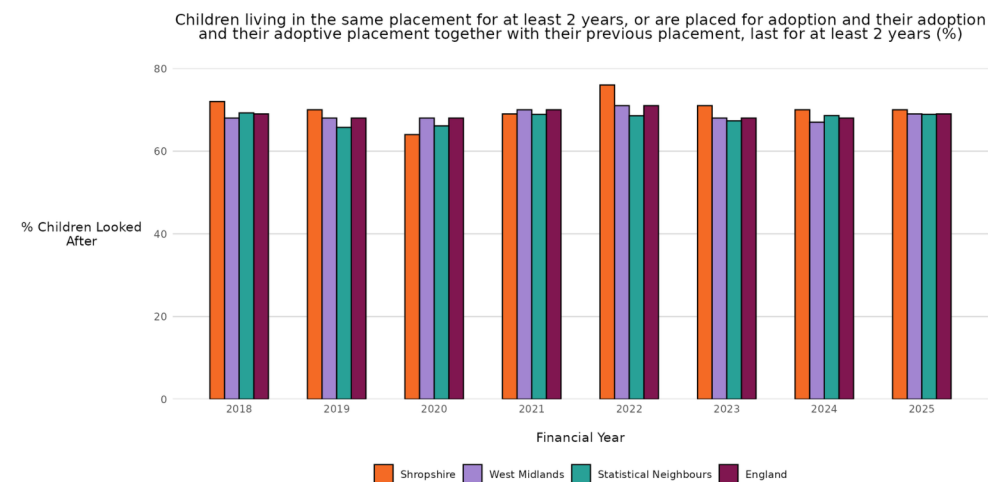
Current and future challenges

- Feedback from the market and the internal team is that recruitment is an issue for opening and sustaining new children's homes. Shropshire Council's employability programme Enable has offered recruitment workshops to aid providers to help meet this need.
- The national audit office reported that between 2019-20 and 2023-24, the local authority costs of supporting looked-after children in residential care increased by 96% .
- In 2022 the CMA (Competition and markets authority) identified higher provider profits than expected, and a risk that children's care could be disrupted by provider failure. It estimated that from 2016 to 2020, the 15 largest private providers had average profit rates of 22.6% for children's homes.
- Although Shropshire Council rarely uses unregulated provision there is a reported increase nationally across local authorities due to lack of sufficiency.
- A shortage of places in foster care has increased pressure on residential care.
- Changes across public services, including a shift to community mental health support, have reduced the use of wider settings such as secure custody or inpatient mental health care.
- Although it can be seen as positive that the number of children with 3 placement or more was half that of statistical neighbours, it should be considered if this stability meets the ambitions of our children. Particularly for children who are homed in a children's home due to lack of fostering sufficiency and remain in that placement for the longer term. For the last 4 years the % of Shropshire children in the same placement for more than 2 years has been higher than national, West Midlands and Statistical Neighbour authority rates.
- Increase in the number of foster home breakdowns which lead to additional need for a children's home place.



In FY 24/25 there were 19 foster home placement breakdowns which led a residential placement. After six months of FY 25/26 there had been 12 foster home breakdowns which have led to residential placements, putting this year on course to have a slight increase on the previous year.

Foster Care breakdown are reducing sufficiency within Shropshire's foster care service and increasing need for children homes places. In addition, children who leave a foster home and enter a children's home are remaining in the residential placement for the longer term. More data is required to understand how many children are moved to a children's home due to need and how many of the placements are the result of lack of foster care homes.



To reduce the percentage of children in a residential placement to national rates of 10%-12% will require a combination of activity.

- Shorter residential placements for children who have moved from a foster care home could relieve pressure on residential sufficiency. This would require more fostering sufficiency, residential homes who can meet outcomes to support children's transitions and developed pathways models with external foster agencies for carers who can support children stepping down from residential homes.
- Shorter residential placements for younger children and increased searches for foster homes.
- As of November 2025, sixteen children aged between 16-17 were in an external children's home. Identifying and moving more children from a children's homes to Supported Accommodation when this is the best interest of the child.
- An increase in the resource for the children's home finding team to support the facilitation of increased and expanded searches to support moves when required.

Furthermore, to increase provision for children with low need and/or identified for step down/across, Shropshire could consider an increase to the children's block bed contract.

A review of purpose for the block bed contract and the internal homes could potentially identify where gaps in service, particularly meeting the needs of our most complex children, could be met by the internal homes if the block bed contract fulfilled the current role of our internal homes.

Market Engagement and endorsement for Shropshire homes should focus on children's homes with lower registered places, that support matching and meet the needs of Shropshire children with complex needs.

Outcomes set with providers should be clear, including achievements in personal development and future preparations.

Residential - What we need

- We want to place children in smaller style family homes, with a need for two bed and solo provision for children with complex needs. This will enable the matching of children and increase the likelihood of stability and permanence for the young person.
- Clinical/therapeutic practice within homes that meet the increasing complexity of needs of the children.
- Work with residential providers that share Shropshire Council's ambitions in preparing young people for step down arrangements where this is identified as part of the care plan. This could be reunification with their family, step down to foster care or transition to 16+accommodation and support.
- Shorter placements which transition children into foster homes or supported accommodation.

Residential - How we will meet need

- Develop our internal Children's Homes which will provide more direct control over the quality and outcomes for our children.
- Increase our local block bed contract which will have a focus on step across to fostering and step down to reunification, supported by Shropshire's Stepping Stones programme.
- Engage with the West Midlands Residential Framework which will increase of sufficiency and provide additional quality and cost support.
- Provide market engagement events which focus on supporting the market with best practise, regional initiatives (such as recruitment workshops), inform the market and gain market feedback.



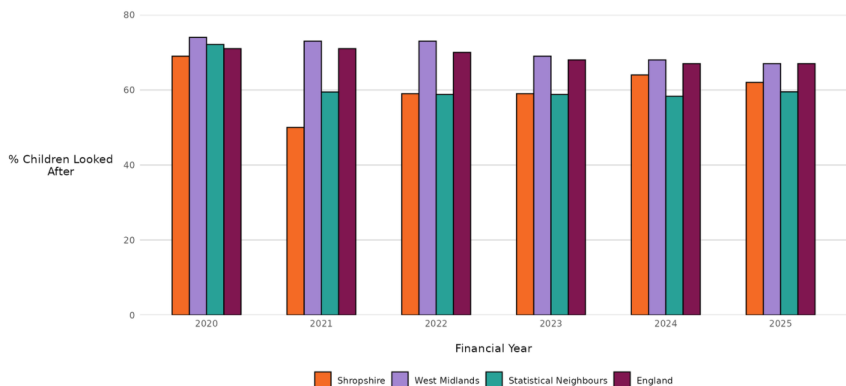
Current Fostering

Number of CLA in Foster homes at 31st March

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Foster Care	272	365	427	434	474	469
Family & Friend %	43%	39%	45%	41%	42%	44%

% CLA in Fostering homes (other LA comparison)

Children looked after at 31 March placed in foster care (%)

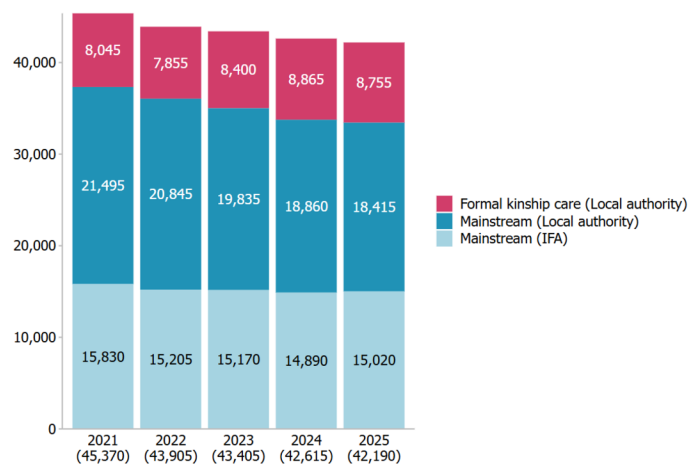


Foster care homes provide 65% of all CLA accommodation as of 31st March 2025, (table B2). This has dropped from 71% in 2021. Comparing to our statistical neighbours and national rates this decrease is similar, however Shropshire’s proportion of children in foster care has regularly been 4% or higher, less than the West Midlands region average, (table I3).

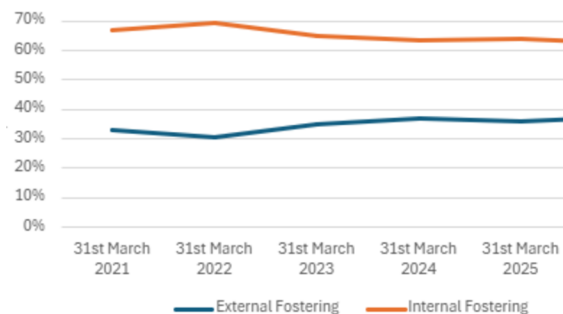
Internal foster carers provide most of our foster care homes, 62% as of 31st March 2025, a reduction from the recent high of 70% as of 31st March 2022, (I4) and lower than the national average of 67%. Independent providers are required to increase Shropshire’s sufficiency and versatility.

National Fostering household development

Figure 1: Number of fostering households by type and sector as at 31 March, over the last 5 years



View the [data for Figure 1 in an accessible table format](#).



% of Fostering Internal vs External fostering placements

Since 2022 the percentage split between internal foster carers and external foster carers had been narrowing, however for FY 25/26 there are signs this is changing. **As of November 2025 there were 432 children in foster homes (66% internal carers and 34% external carers).**

At March 2025 Shropshire Council had 71 mainstream fostering families and 108 connected person foster homes, providing 179 foster families. Additionally, 16 Connected Person households under Reg 24 had temporary approval.

Kinship foster carers increased 38% from 31st March 2022 to 31st March 2025, at a similar rate to the increase in looked after children, and proportional family and friend foster carers has remained similar.

Shropshire Council’s fostering sufficiency plans will remain aware of ongoing national initiatives such as fostering recruitment support hub which aims to have a single point of contact, working as a central front door, to support a foster carers journey from initial enquiry for multiple authorities.

Internal Fostering

In 2024 Shropshire council received over 300 fostering enquiries, (**table G2**). 4% of enquiries led to application and 100% of applications led to new fostering families. (**table G3**). In FY 24/25 Shropshire Council registered 14 mainstream an increase of 100% from the previous year. The recruitment was higher than the resignation of internal mainstream foster carers, demonstrating positive movement in the number of foster care homes. This increase is in contrast to negative movement reported nationally.

Shropshire Council’s current internal fostering transition plan aims to increase the number of foster carers by improving the marketing, foster care offer and support for foster care families based on the “more rewarding than ever” approach. Initiatives include:

- Having 2-3 marketing campaigns running at all times, including specialist campaigns
- Fortnightly webinars
- Celebration events
- Carer Connect portal - one stop shop for foster carer
- Recruitment Officer

Development of the Shropshire fostering offer has had encouraging results over the last few years. The recruitment of a Marketing and Events Manager is supporting the significant increase in fostering enquiries.

- FY 2023/24 - ~29 enquiries per month - 352 total
- FY 2024/25 - ~42 enquiries per month - 508 total
- FY 2025/26 - ~57 enquiries per month - 309 as of November 25, with an expectation to reach 684 enquiries by the end of the year.

Once enquiries are received, developed practises now ensure that communications with a pipeline of interested potential carers continue, maintaining interest until the time is right for progression.

In addition to the increased enquiries, activity is ongoing to support the conversion of applicants to become foster carers and to retain foster carers once approved.

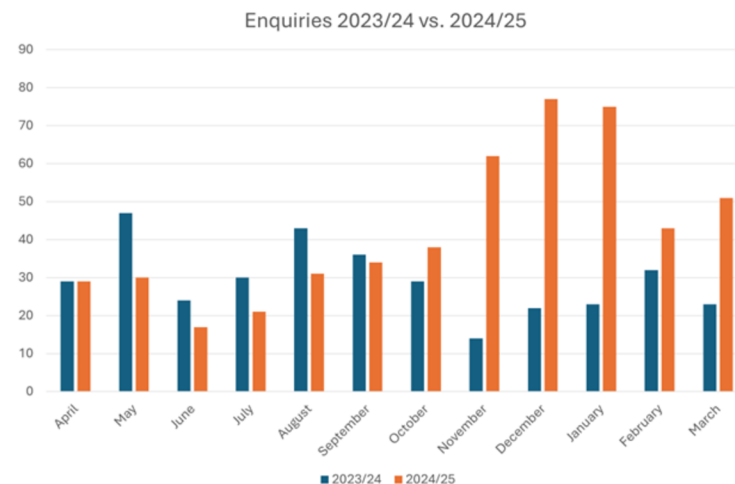
In November 2025 Shropshire Council advertised a new post for a Fostering Recruitment Officer. This role will be dedicated to completing home visits and providing a more effective and efficient assessment process.

A Foster carer celebration event occurred in July 25, which was well attended by 45 carers. This build on activity such as manager coffee mornings and walk and talk events, providing support for carer families. The addition of the Foster Carer portal will further advance Shropshire Council’s approach to involving fosters carers as part of the Shropshire Council team.

In addition, Shropshire Council introduced the Mockingbird Model - building a constellation of support among a group of foster carers. Feedback has been positive and Shropshire Council are exploring a potential expansion of this model with a second constellation.

Should Shropshire Council meet there set target to increase conversion of mainstream enquiries to approved carer to 10%, considering the increase in enquiries, could see a significant rise registered mainstream carers each year.

At the 6 month stage of FY 25/26, 7 mainstream foster carers had been approved with



From 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, Shropshire had 45 foster carer resignations: 38 from Kinship Fostering Households and 7 from Mainstream Foster Carer Households and 1 Mainstream Foster Carer transferred to Supported Lodgings.

External Fostering

As of 31st March 2025 Shropshire Council utilise the West Midlands Fostering Framework for 76% of all external fostering homes with spot provision used where specialist requirements are not available through internal or framework provision.

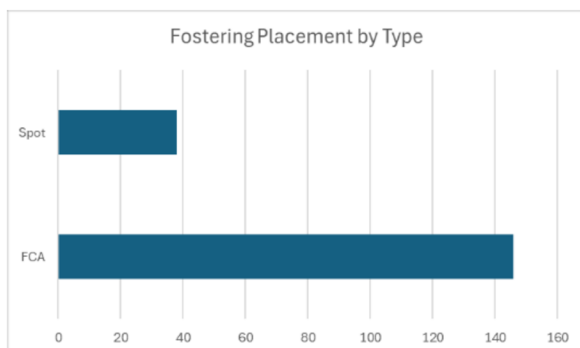
The weekly unit price for fostering has historically remained lower than that of comparative local authorities, however like other local authorities this is increasing.

The West Midlands Fostering framework applies an annual uplift based on 50% CPIH (Consumer price index and housing) and 50% NLW (National Living Wage). This has led to a cost increase of 4.9% in 25/26 and a predicted increase of 4.1% for 26/27.

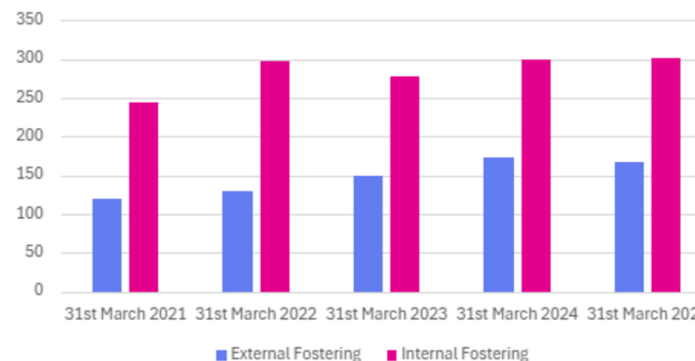
To strengthen local fostering sufficiency with external fostering agencies, regular meetings are held to explore closer working relationships. Discussion have taken place to consider secondary placements where appropriate, planning for the end of Staying Put agreements, encouraging tender responses for fostering short breaks and promoting work with the Stepping Stones team to identify carers specifically for children stepping down from residential homes.

Through his activity we have seen an increase of 22% in placements with the largest local Shropshire external fostering provider in 2025.

Framework vs Non-Framework External fostering placement as % of all CLS placements as of 31st January 2025



Number of Fostering Internal vs External



Annually searching for 30-40 fostering homes

31st March 2025 - average unit weekly costs (plus additions) for an external fostering placement was £928.69.

Fostering Placement ends which led to Residential placements 2024/25

Carer ended - non behavioural	Carer ended - behavioural	Temporary placement	Change of care plan
5	5	6	3

Between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025 19 children left their fostering home and entered a residential home. Of the 19, ten placement ends were requested by the carer, and in 5 for reasons other than the child's behaviour.

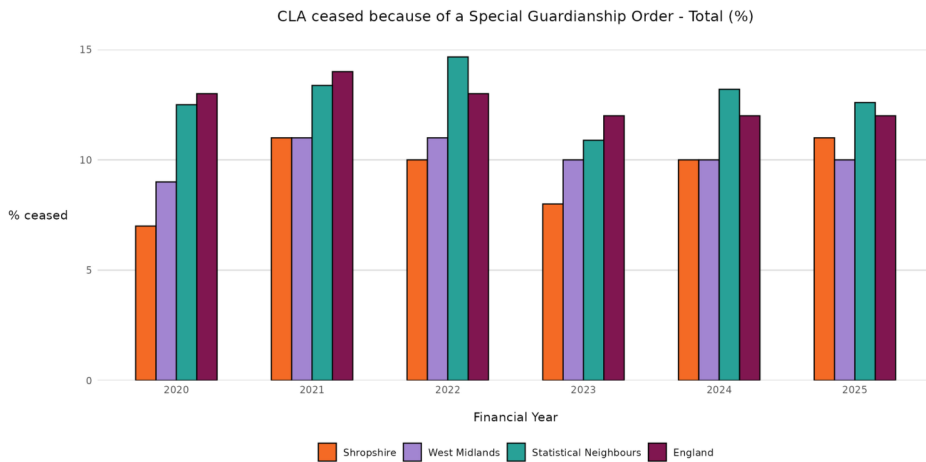
More understanding is required on whether a children's home the most suitable provision or whether this was forced due to lack of fostering sufficiency.

Shropshire Council have implemented a stability forum to help reduce placement breakdowns.

Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is a way of providing permanence for children and young people. It gives legal security for children who can't remain in the care of their birth parents, and is an alternative to adoption, long-term fostering or a child arrangement order.

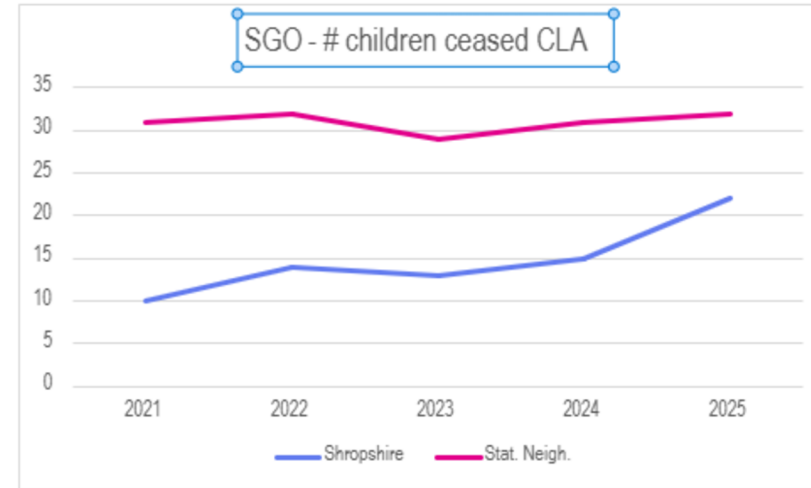
% CLA ceased due to SGO



Increases in SGO's has seen Shropshire percentage of children ceasing to be CLA due to SGOs increase above the West Midlands % from 2021 to 2025. Rates remains below National and statistical neighbour LAs percentages, however the difference has reduced by over 50%.

A dedicated team within Shropshire support those considering becoming a SGO or those who are special guardians. Reviews of support plans, advice and guidance on wraparound support and access to training are available to Shropshire SGOs through his team.

% CLA ceased due to SGO 2021 2025



Adoption

CLA ceased due to adoption

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Shropshire	11	9	10	26	26	18
Statistical Neighbours	27	25	21	31	28	30

Adoption in Shropshire is facilitated through the regional adoption agency, Together4children. This is a partnership of four local authorities including Shropshire, Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Telford and Wrekin Council

There was a significant increase in adoptions of over 150% between 2022 and 2023 and a similar adoption rate in 2024, before reducing in 2025.

Current and future challenges

- Between 2019 and 2023, the number of vacant fostering places decreased by 25% across LAs and IFAs. (Ofsted (2023), Fostering in England 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. Shropshire Council is committed to developing relationships with Independent Fostering Associations to complement our in-house provision, and specifically for children with more complex needs.
- The numbers of Kinship carers has remained proportionally similar to the number of looked after children. However, this may see a reduction through the implementation of FFP, and earlier family help .
- The internal fostering transformation project is demonstrating an increase in enquiries and should the target of a 10% conversion be achieved, there will be an increase in internal foster care families over the next few years.
- The West Midlands Fostering framework launched in October 2024 has not delivered the results in Shropshire that we had expected. External fostering placements have seen a reduction throughout 2025. A similar experience has been reported by neighbouring Telford & Wrekin.
- A strengthening of relations with a Shropshire Fostering organisation has led to a 22% increase in placements with the provider in 2025. Developing projects to look at secondary placements and foster carers for children stepping down from residential care.
- Development of a step down process with a fostering provider has stalled and results have not been achieved as expected.

Foster Care - What we need

- We want foster carers who are able to offer a family and home to a child/young person and provide a stable environment to live in which is comfortable, safe and secure.
- We want families who can support a young person stepping down from residential provision.
- We want foster carers that can care for siblings so they can stay together .
- We want respite for children with additional needs .
- We want foster carers who can preventing residential placements for children where the child wishes to live with a family. Particularly for children with specialist needs; all ages and includes children with disabilities, ASD/ADHD, risks of offending/sexual harmful behaviour/exploitation.

Foster Care - How will we meet need

- Develop our fostering offer to retain existing foster carers and increase the number of fostering families.
- Offer a payment to staff and foster care families whose referral leads to a successful application.
- Develop a fostering short break offer.
- Continue to support the region in the development of the West Midlands framework.
- Keep informed of the national development such as fostering hubs.

Supported Accommodation & Supported Lodgings

Number of CLA in Supported Accommodation at 31st March

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Supported Accommodation	14	17	30	46	56	38

Annually searching for between 25-40 Supported Acc. homes

Supported Accommodation is an important provision in supporting our children towards independence. As of April 2023 all Supported Accommodation providers were required to register with Ofsted as part of regulation changes. This has had an effect on the market with some providers deciding to stop providing under 18 support and new providers entering the market are experiencing long registration processes while they wait for visits.

As of November 2025, Ofsted reported 5 Supported Accommodation settings in Shropshire, all of which were for solo occupancy. In comparison, neighbouring authority Telford and Wrekin were reported as having 19 private services and 20 local authority services. Due to lack of sufficiency Supported Accommodation sufficiency within Shropshire almost all placements in FY24/25 were outside of county.

As of 31st March 2025 5% of all looked after children were in a semi independent home. This is a reduction of 2% from 31st March 2024 which was 7%. The percentage of Shropshire children in independent or semi independent living remains under national rates of 9%. Supported Lodgings contributes a small addition to the number of looked after children under 18 in Supported Accommodation.

To support Supported Accommodation sufficiency Shropshire Council utilises the West Midlands Supported Accommodation Framework. Discussion are underway regarding the extension of this framework which is due to end in February 2026.

As of 31st March 2025 44% of all Shropshire Supported Accommodation placements were with WMSA framework providers, however this is increasing and likely to exceed non-framework provider in FY 25/26.

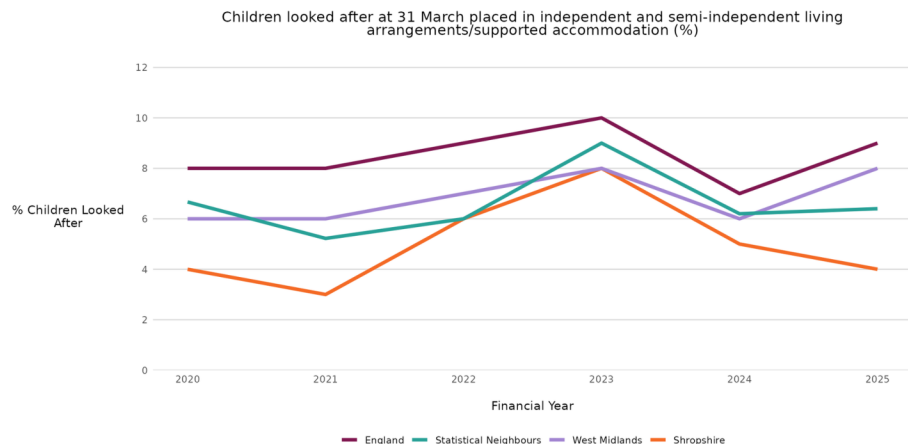
Average weekly fees for Supported Accommodation, as of October 2025 were £1094 per week. (£894 p/w framework provider & £1493 non framework provider). There could be a significant increase when the WMSA framework ends.

Over 80% of all looked after children within a Supported Accommodation provision are unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).

Semi Independent - What we need

- Review and development of Shropshire Councils internal Shared Board and Lodging & Supported Accommodation Offer, in line with regulation changes.
- We need providers who Supported Accommodation homes with a registered Ofsted provider, located in or close to Shropshire borders.
- We need appropriately well trained and well supported staff that can engage with children and young people and support them to prepare for adulthood.
- We need providers who understand and are able to support the needs of unaccompanied asylum seekers (UASC).

%CLA in Semi-independent/Supported Accommodation



Internal Supported Lodgings

Supported Lodgings serves as a transitional step towards independence and is utilised when it aligns with the child's best interests. For certain children, such as those who prefer not to reside with a foster family or in a residential home, this can be an appropriate choice. Additionally, it may be suitable for some unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, though not universally applicable.

Figures as of December 2025

- **36 providers**
- **45 places**
- **34 CYP in supported lodgings**

17 providers are mainstream (including 1 respite) and 19 connected carers.

9 Unaccompanied Asylum seeking children are with an SL family, with 3 under 18.

Supported Lodgings Social workers in the Leaving Care Team complete SL assessments, which are then presented to the Leaving Care Team Manager prior to the fostering panel. This includes new applicants and also foster carers who are wanting to care for the child post 18 but not continue to offer additional fostering placements.

Supported Lodgings provides Shropshire Council with a cost effective services that provides the necessary support for children to transition towards independence.

Utilisation of the service had been reducing over recent years and a review of the service is required to identify changes necessary to provide effective delivery as in line with the recent Ofsted regulations.

As of October 2025, the SBL weekly fee was £195 to £295 per week, which could vary depending on the needs of the CYP. The average Supported Accommodation fee October 2025 was £1094 per week. A Supported lodging placement could provide a financial saving of £809 per week or more.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers

Shropshire Council are part of the National Transfer Scheme and are assigned a number of UAS children through this scheme. The numbers vary at each intake and Shropshire aim to take above allocation when they can.

Shropshire utilise a range of accommodation across the West Midlands to place UAS children where their ethnic, cultural and community availability needs can be met. Birmingham and Wolverhampton often meet sufficiency and cultural needs for these children.

There is considerations on increasing Shropshire's internal supported accommodation for UAS children but it is felt the rural nature and lack of cultural diversity in county does not meet need.

However, homing UAS children in neighbouring counties creates difficulties when the child reaches 18 and gain access to funds such as housing benefit. It can be difficult to gain support from other authority housing teams which means Shropshire children can remain in expensive support accommodation for many more years beyond reaching 18 years old.

Care Leavers

When our young people are ready to leave care, we strive to ensure that Care Leavers receive the right move on placement for them and continue to receive the right services at the right time to promote independence. Care Leavers are allocated a Personal Advisor to provide support and promote our young people to achieve independent life skills. Shropshire care leaver offer has been developed to individual needs the needs of Care Leavers.

- Engage the market to develop accommodation in Shropshire which supports pathways for Care Leavers 16 to 24 to enable them to live well independently.
- Develop our Supported Lodgings offer, providing accommodation in a family environment for young people who need extra support with independence skills.
- Work with the Housing team to identify priority housing. A Homelessness Prevention Officer situated within the Care Leavers Service to support care leavers navigate the housing process.
- Support development of the West Midlands Supported Accommodation framework.
- Work with Supported Accommodation to providers to develop a pathway for looked after children to move to suitable accommodation when they reach 18.



Efficiencies of practise

Many local authorities are managing unprecedented financial positions which require significant management action. Many decision are being made on the identification of non-essential spend which can be reduced. The significant budget pressure from spot purchase residential placements and Independent Fostering Agency Placements requires a close working relationship with independent providers to support where efficiencies of practise can lower costs in providing the right support for our children. We will work with independent providers who agree to aid in frequent review of care plans and targeted support for children to be supported to move to foster care or back home when it is safe and in the child's best interests to do so.

Shropshire Council also works closely with all other 13 local authorities in the West Midlands through the West Midlands Children's hub. This cooperative led captures data across all local authorities to support efficiencies of practise and build stronger relationships with independent providers through joint working. The West Midlands Commissioning Hub, support and facilitate with regional arrangements, including but not limited to

- Strategic Commissioning Network (SCN)
- Operational Commissioning and Contract Group (OCCG) workplans
- Annual data collections across LA's, used to inform future commissioning intentions.
- Annual fee reviews

Right Support at the right time

Shropshire will continue to develop it's services to ensure Shropshire families are receiving the right support and care at the right time.

- Early Help
- Families First Partnership
- Stepping Stones
- In Home care
- Short breaks

Working Together with external market

Placement costs are rising due to inflation, cost of living and difficulty recruiting/retaining staff. Shropshire Council are committed to working with the independent market to find efficiencies which help manage these costs.

From the summer of 2025 Shropshire Council market engagements events will focus on working together with provider on joint solutions. The first initiative to begin recruitment workshops for care workers through Shropshire Council's Enable employability programme.

National annual costs by placement type each year

A children's home place costs five times as much as supported accommodation/other residential settings and eight times as much as fostering, more than in 2019-20



Caffs

Children and family framework supports families to remain safely together, supports children to step out of care; returning home, step down to fostering, independence, and provide after adoption support.

Lot 1 - Therapy	Lot 11 - Independent person service for looked after children in secure accommodation
Lot 2 - Psychological Assessment	Lot 12 - Form F - Prospective Foster Carer Report
Lot 3 - Parent & Child Community Parenting Assessments	Lot 13 - Form C – Connected Person Assessment
Lot 4 - Parent & Child Residential Parenting Assessments	Lot 14 - Special Guardianship Order (SGO)
Lot 5 - Supervised Contact	Lot 15 - SEND Mediation
Lot 6 - Family Group Conference	Lot 16 - Return Home Interviews
Lot 7 - Mediation	Lot 17 - Positive Behaviour Support
Lot 8 - Secure Transport	Lot 18 - Parental Advocacy
Lot 9 - Occupational Therapy (OT)	Lot 19 - Mentoring
Lot 10 - Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)	Lot 20 - Positive Activities

The Children and Family Framework is an approved Provider List of non-accommodation services which is used across the 14 West Midlands local authorities.

118 approved providers, with more to be added in July 2025.

Most requested services:

- **Lots 18 -Parental Advocacy**
- **Lot 5 – Supervised Contact**
- **Lot 1 – Therapy**

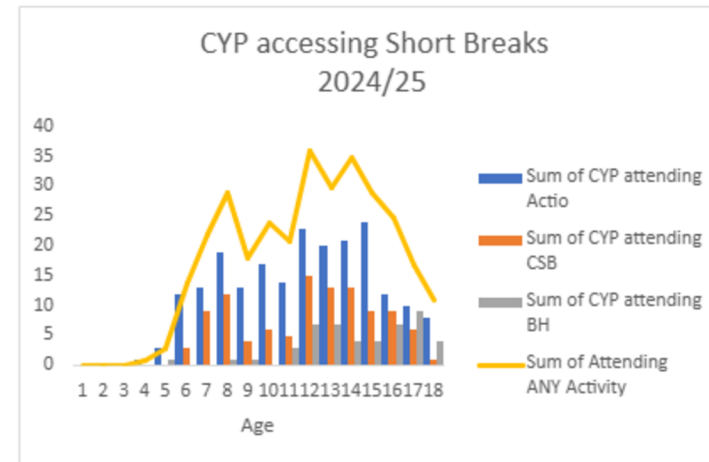
2096 Individual Service Agreements accepted through the framework in 2023

Short Breaks

Parent and carers of children and young people with special educational needs and / or disabilities tell us that they often need a short break from their caring role. Short Breaks offer essential time for children and young people with disabilities to socialise and engage in fun activities, providing them and their families with a break and the confidence that their child is well-supported.

Through our close working with families, children with disabilities and parent carer forums we understand that a range of options are needed from useful information, advice, and guidance to easy access to local community support services to overnight short breaks.

Short break services were recommissioned in 2025 with the aim to enhance efficiencies and expand capacity. In addition to the existing services a short break Fostering offer has been developed with national provider.



At Home Care

Shropshire commissions packages of support that enable children to be cared for in the family home. Currently the Commissioning Team is exploring how this offer can be further developed through utilising Shropshire’s existing adult care flexible framework.

In 2025, families purchasing PAs for their children and providers were given access to Shropshire’s adult digital board to enhance the options available to parents.



“you’ve all made your way to be a second family, you all loved me when i didn’t love myself and you showed me so many things and taught me so many things, life lessons that you didn’t have to show me but you showed me out of the kindness of your hearts”.

It is important young people have a voice in decisions about their care. Shropshire Council commission and provide a number of services to support and facilitate children make themselves heard and advocate for them when required.

Shropshire Children in Care Council

The Children in Care Council is a small group of young people currently being supported by Social Services and Virtual School. The aim of the group is to help make sure services and support for looked-after children work for children and young people. It overall provides a chance for children and young people to tell our Corporate Parenting Panel how Shropshire's service can be improved.

Advocacy and Independent Visitor

In November 2025 Shropshire Council recommissioned it’s Children advocacy contract. This contract ensure we can reach a minimum of 7.5% of all children with children in need plans, child protection plan or looked after children.



“For anyone working with these kids to understand it takes loads for us to talk to you and tell you stuff – that is almost scarier than what we are living through. If you don’t get that then don’t work with us”.

Participation Strategy

Shropshire Council is developing it’s participation strategy which uses the Lundy model to inform practise. This model will give the child space, a voice and an audience to ensure their voice influences decision that affect them.

Mind of My Own

Shropshire Council have commissioned Mind of my Own app to enable children and young people to have an independent means to express their views. Mind of My Own is available in a range of languages and is accessible to children who may have communication difficulties or additional needs. The can be used to capture the voice of the child in various scenarios, such as:

- Young people keeping a diary
- Early help visits
- Assessments and investigations
- Social work visits to help capture the child’s lived experience
- Key worker sessions
- IRO pre-review meetings
- Personal adviser visits
- Court / panel proceedings

Our Commitment

The actions on the following pages outline how we intend to meet our obligations under the Sufficiency Duty determined by Section 22G of the Children's Act 1989, which requires each Local Authority “...to take steps that secure, so far as is reasonably practicable...” sufficient accommodation within its area to meet the needs of children that they are looking after. Whilst the sufficiency duty applies in respect of all looked after children, it recognizes the importance of earlier, preventative action to support children and families so that few children become looked after – those who are on the edge of care.

To inform future priorities in the Shropshire Sufficiency strategy we will engage with Mutual Ventures who are supporting national pathfinder initiatives such Families First for Children, Family Network Pilot and Regional Care Cooperatives.

This document will be published to provide the market about our placement needs.

We welcome approaches from the independent market to support our strategy and will continue to commission contracts and individual placements that meet the needs of our children.

All our opportunities for tendering for specific needs will be managed via our e-tendering portal DELTA and published on our website and/or contracts finder. <https://shropshire.gov.uk/doing-business-with-us/current-opportunities-for-tendering/view-and-apply-for-current-tenders/>

Objectives	Priorities	Goals	Current/Future Activity
<p>Reduce the number of children who are looked after. 5% reduction in both FY25/26 & FY 26/27</p>	<p>Continue to develop the early help offer</p>	<p>Strengthening families through the provision of preventive and early help services</p>	<p><u>Early help transformation project</u></p>
<p>Reduce the number of children who are looked after. 5% reduction in both FY25/26 & FY 26/27</p>	<p>Continue to implement and further develop where necessary the Stepping stones project</p>	<p>Supporting the avoidance of children at the edge of care and step down of children in care</p>	<p><u>Stepping Stones annual report 24-25</u></p>
<p>Reduce the number of children who are looked after. 5% reduction in both FY25/26 & FY 26/27</p>	<p>Implementation of the Family First Programme</p>	<p>Providing support to families earlier to reduce the number of children who become looked after.</p>	<p><u>Families First Programme</u></p>
<p>Ensure that Shropshire is resource 'sufficient'. Reduce Residential reliance to 12% by end of FY26/27</p>	<p>Add capacity with commissioning and the home finding team - March 2026</p>	<p>Strengthen relationships with external providers to provide options for creative solutions for children outside standard pathways.</p>	<p>Recruit Individualised Commissioner and two brokerage officers. Currently with Workforce board. March 2026</p>

Objectives	Priorities	Goals	Current/Future Activity
<p>Ensure that Shropshire is resource 'sufficient'. Reduce Residential reliance to 12% by end of FY26/27</p>	<p>Develop the residential block contract to avoid escalation of expenditure and to ensure local placements within Shropshire. - March 2026</p>	<p>Commission fifteen beds to continue the current provision, with options to increase where required.</p>	<p>Business Plan awaiting approval Dec 25</p>
<p>Ensure that Shropshire is resource 'sufficient'. Reduce Residential reliance to 12% by end of FY26/27</p>	<p>Participate in West Midlands Regional Commissioning arrangements and regional Frameworks.</p>	<p>Provide Shropshire input into the development of the WM hub and frameworks. Increasing sufficiency and versatility of homes.</p>	<p>Participate in West Midlands Residential, Fostering and Supported Accommodation Frameworks</p>
<p>Ensure that Shropshire is resource 'sufficient'. Reduce Residential reliance to 12% by end of FY26/27</p>	<p>Review of the internal residential provision with analysis on scope to increase the number of homes.</p>	<p>Completion of the internal residential transformation plan.</p>	<p><u>Residential growth project</u></p>
<p>Ensure that Shropshire is resource 'sufficient'. Reduce Residential reliance to 12% by end of FY26/27</p>	<p>Increase recruitment and retention of internal foster carers.</p>	<p>Develop Marketing, assessment, recruitment journey, support and foster carer offer and insights</p>	<p><u>Fostering transformation project</u></p>

Objectives	Priorities	Goals	Current/Future Activity
<p>Ensure that Shropshire is resource 'sufficient' Reduce Residential reliance to 12% by end of FY26/27</p>	<p>Increase Supported Accommodation and Supported Lodgings provision through internal/external provision.</p>	<p>Provide independence routeways for children in care at 16 years old</p>	<p>Business Plan in review, completion March 2026.</p>
<p>Good quality Care for those who need to be looked after children</p>	<p>Create collaborate and efficient practises between independent providers and the local authority.</p>	<p>Develop regular forums and provider meetings, aligning with QA activity.</p>	<p>QA visits and forums increase in 2025.</p>
<p>Good quality care for those who need to be looked after children</p>	<p>Reduce the number of children who are placed out of the authority area</p>	<p>Increase market engagement and inform local developments to meet need.</p>	<p>Children's Commissioning team development March 2026.</p>
<p>Forecasting needs to inform commissioning activity</p>	<p>Improve data sources to analyse and understand local needs. Create</p>	<p>Data gained the through FFP - needs and harms assessment & improved WMPP portal</p>	<p>In 2026 use new sources of data to better understand and measure children's needs and gaps. Performance Management system June 2026.</p>

table A2. Children Looked after by age group at 31st March each year

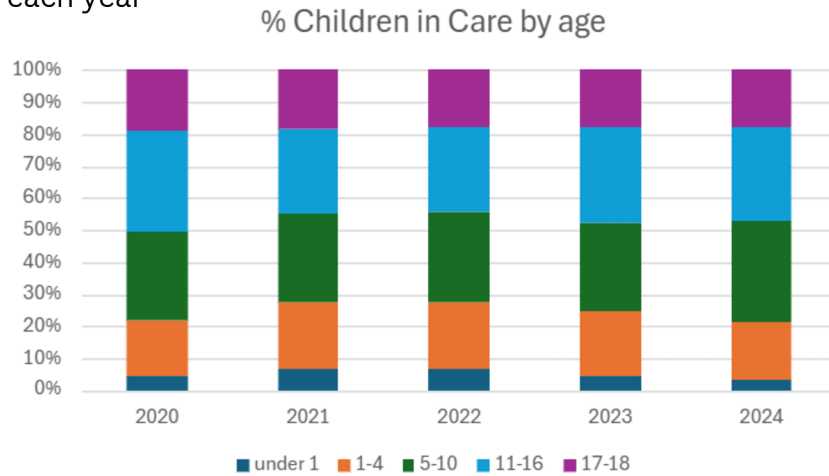


table A3. 2025 Children Looked after at 31st March each year per 10k pop.

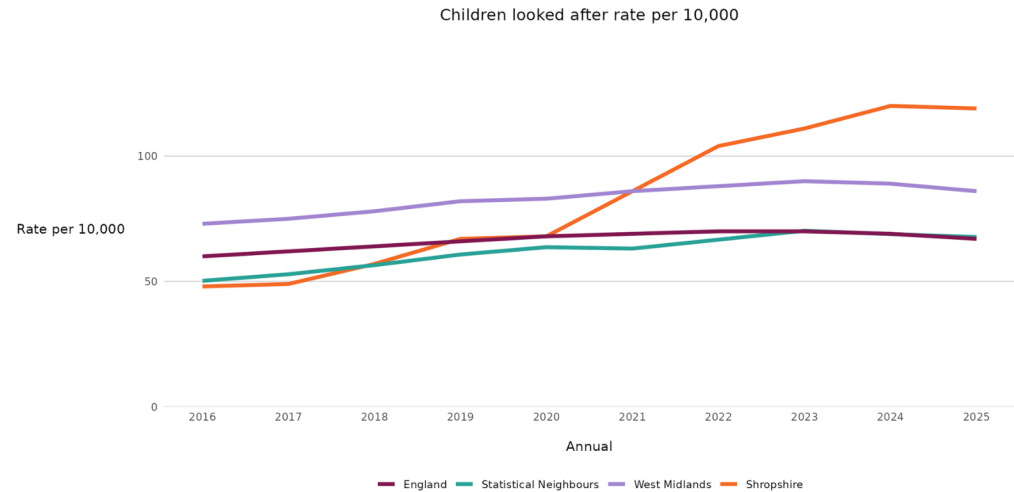


table A1. 2024 - Children Looked after at 31st March each year per 10k pop.

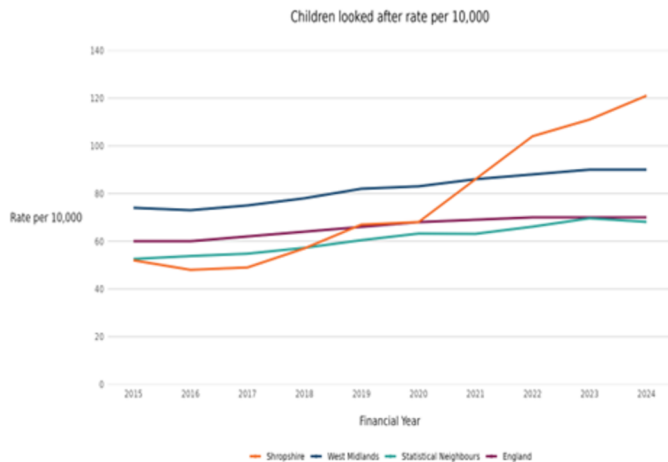


table A4. Shropshire CLA Forecasts

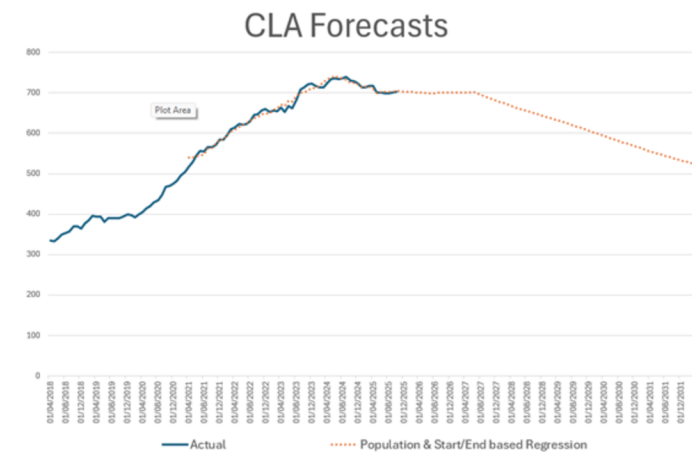


table A5. Shropshire JSNA population trends

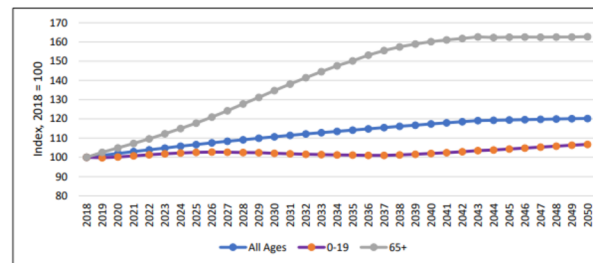


table B4. Gender of Children Looked after at 31st March each year

Gender	31st Mar 2020	31st Mar 2021	31st Mar 2022	31st Mar 2023	31st Mar 2024	31st Mar 2025
Female	196	241	289	301	319	331
Male	203	264	319	355	403	394
Grand Total	399	505	608	656	722	725

table B1. Numbers of Children Looked after at 31st March each year

31st Mar 2017	31st Mar 2018	31st Mar 2019	31st Mar 2020	31st Mar 2021	31st Mar 2022	31st Mar 2023	31st Mar 2024	31st Mar 2025
294	338	395	399	505	608	656	722	725
Change	15%	17%	1%	27%	20%	8%	10%	1%

table B3. Placement type at 31st March each year

	31st Mar 2020	31st Mar 2021	31st Mar 2022	31st Mar 2023	31st Mar 2024	31st Mar 2025
Residential	64	64	65	79	89	110
Fostering	272	365	427	434	474	469
Semi Independent	14	17	30	46	56	38
Other	49	59	86	97	103	115

table B2. % Placement type at 31st March each year

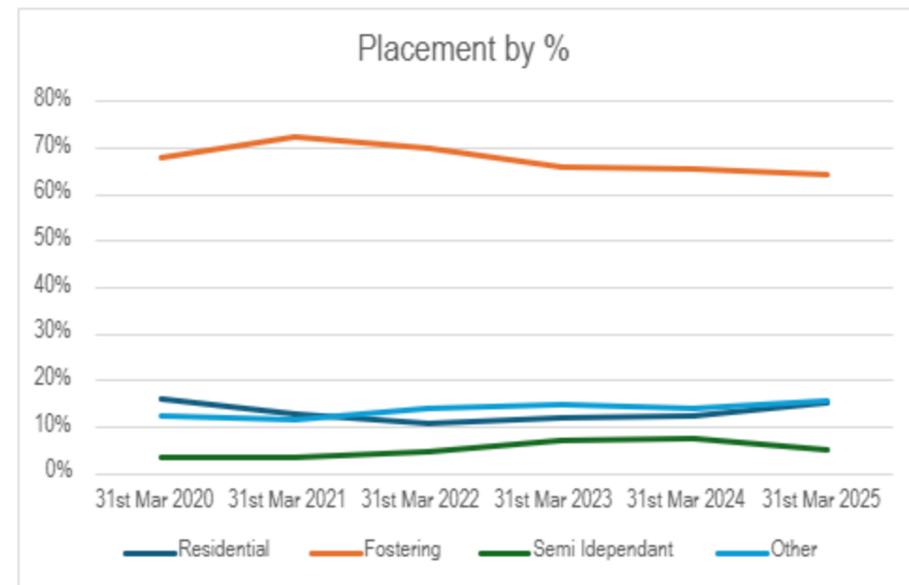


table C1. Out of Shropshire as of 31st March 2024

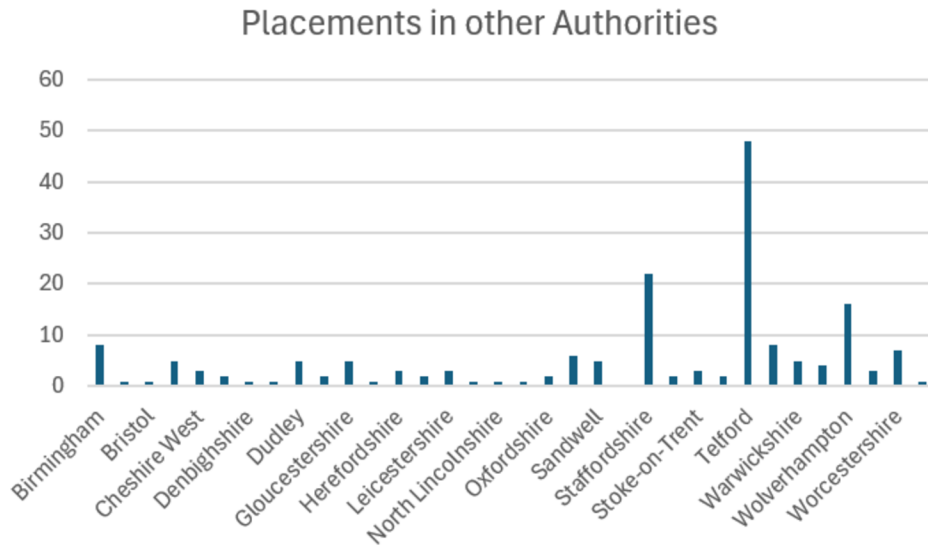


table C2. Types of homes as of 31st March each year

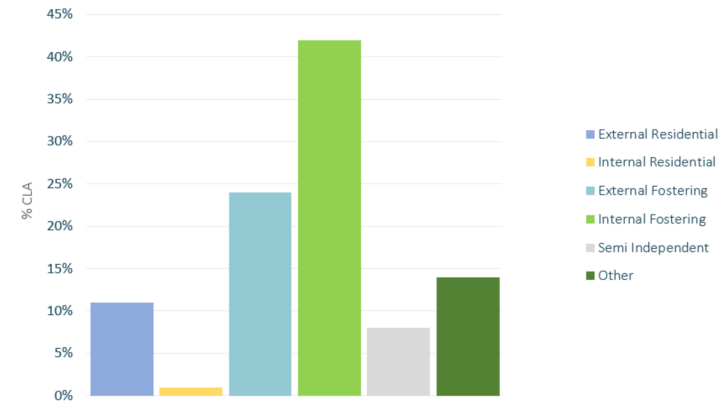


table C4. Chart of type as of 31st March 2024

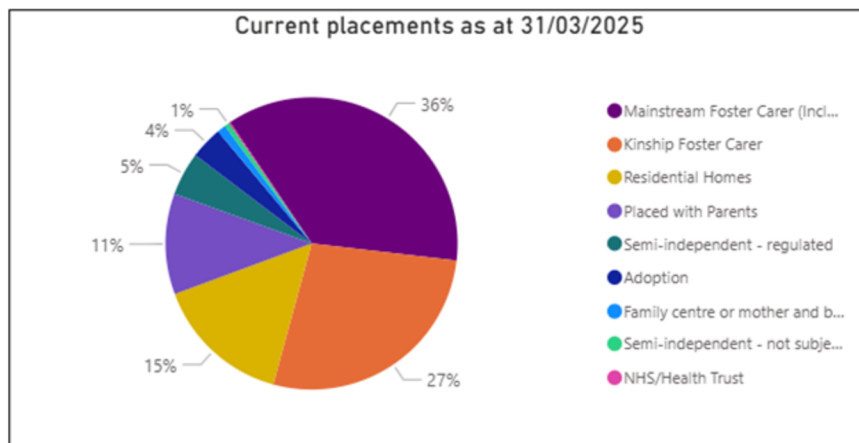
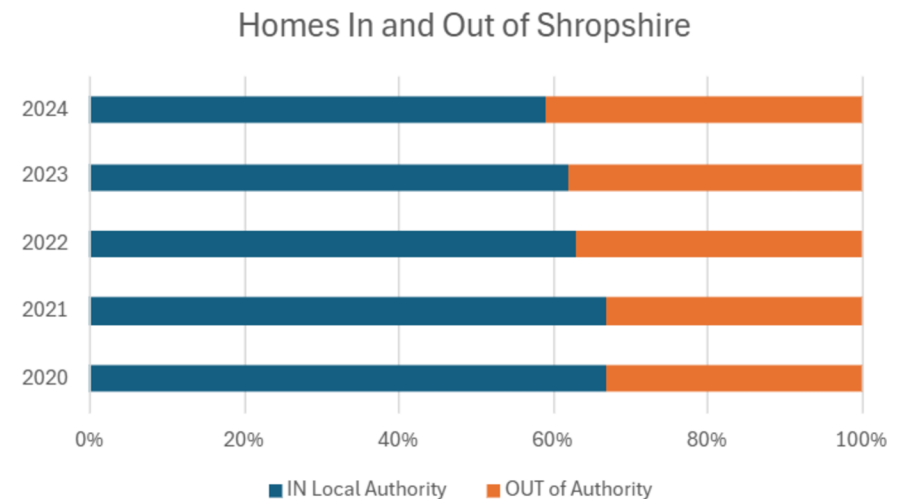


table C3. Homes in and out of Shropshire as of 31st March each year



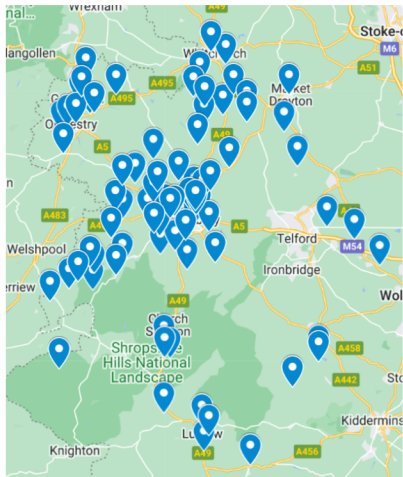


table D3. Children’s Homes in Shropshire as of 1st November 2024

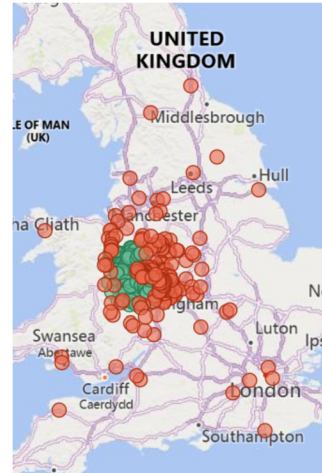


table D2. Location of placements as of 1st January 2025

table D1. Ofsted reports of children’s residential at 13st March 2025

Total number of beds	Private	Voluntary	Local Authority	Health Authority	TOTAL
2020	284	4	13	0	301
2021	263	11	15	0	289
2022	235	11	15	0	261
2023	279	11	14	0	304
2024	296	11	17	0	324
2025	292	11	20	0	323
Change	▲ 8	▲ 7	▲ 7	■ 0	▲ 22

table D4. Number of registered places per home

Number of beds - grouped	1 to 1	2 to 4	5 to 9	10+	TOTAL
2020	12	42	16	4	74
2021	10	47	15	3	75
2022	6	48	14	2	70
2023	3	47	20	3	73
2024	4	52	21	3	80
2025	3	58	21	2	84
Change	▼ -9	▲ 16	▲ 5	▼ -2	▲ 10

table E1. Numbers of DCT Children Looked after at 31st March each year

	As at 31st March 2020		As at 31st March 2021		As at 31st March 2022		As at 31st March 2023		As at 31st March 2024		As at 31st March 2025	
	#	% of overall DCT	#	% of overall DCT	#	% of overall DCT	#	% of overall DCT	#	% of overall DCT	#	% of overall DCT
Number of DCT children overall	245		338		373		366		383		392	
Number of DCT children who are CLA	22	8.98%	28	8.28%	28	7.51%	33	9.02%	54	14.09%	40	10.20%
Number of DCT children in External Residential Placements/Providers	15	6.12%	14	4.14%	12	3.22%	16	4.37%	16	4.18%	17	4.34%
Number of DCT children in Internal Fostering placements	4	1.63%	7	2.07%	8	2.14%	11	3.01%	17	4.43%	14	3.57%
Number of DCT children in External Fostering Placements/Providers	1	0.41%	2	0.59%	4	1.07%	2	0.55%	4	1.04%	4	1.02%
Number of CLA children overall	399		504		609		656		722		725	
% of DCT LAC to overall CLA	5.51%		5.55%		4.60%		5.03%		7.47%		5.52%	

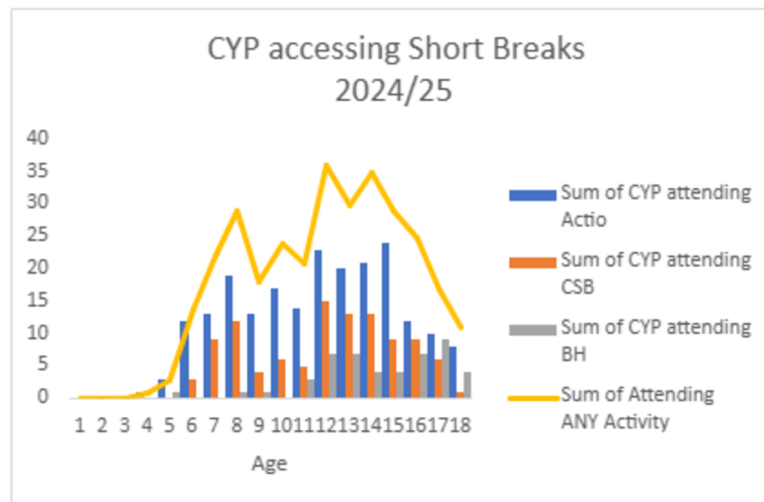


table E2. CYP accessing short breaks 2024/25

table F1. Category of Need of looked after children at January 2025

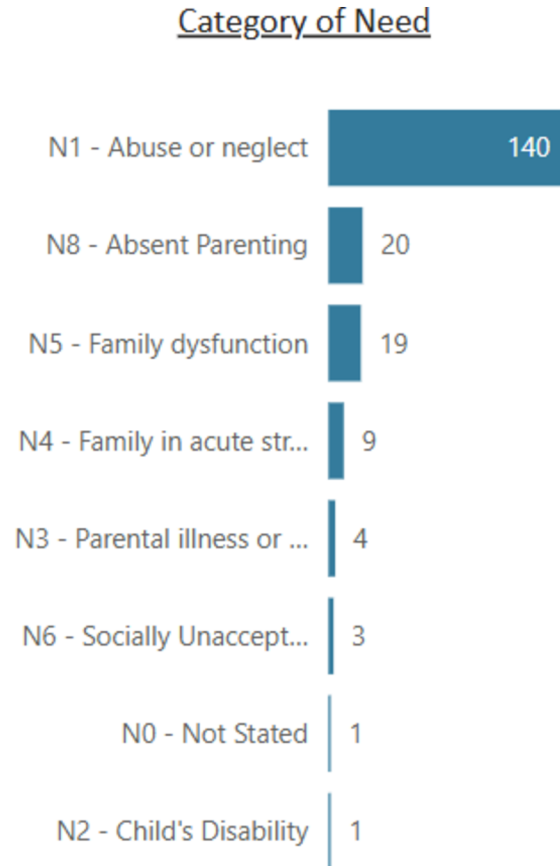


table F2. Placement provider at January 2025

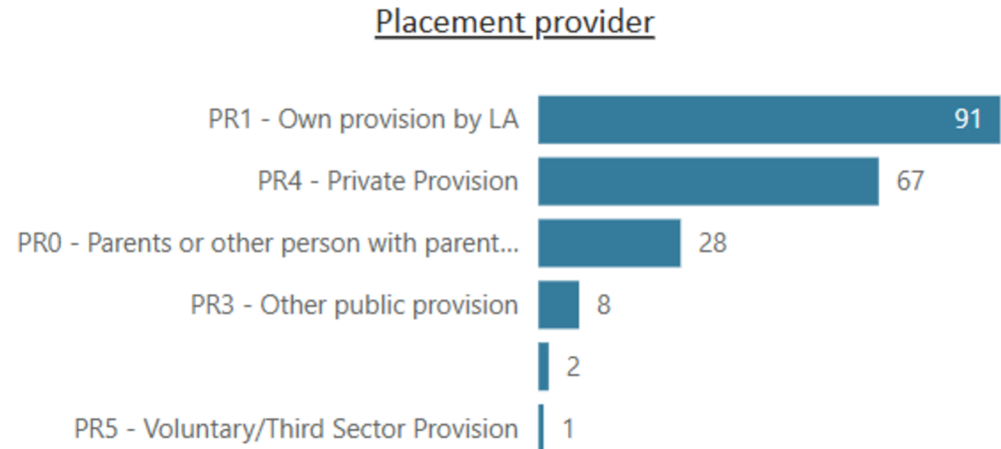


table F3.. % of children looked after by duration and number of placements at January 2025

% children looked after for at least 12 months	72%
% of children looked after with three or more placements during the year	8%
% of children looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years aged under 16 who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years	70%

table 7a. Newly approved fostering households by West Midlands authority March 2024

Newly approved households year ending March 2024

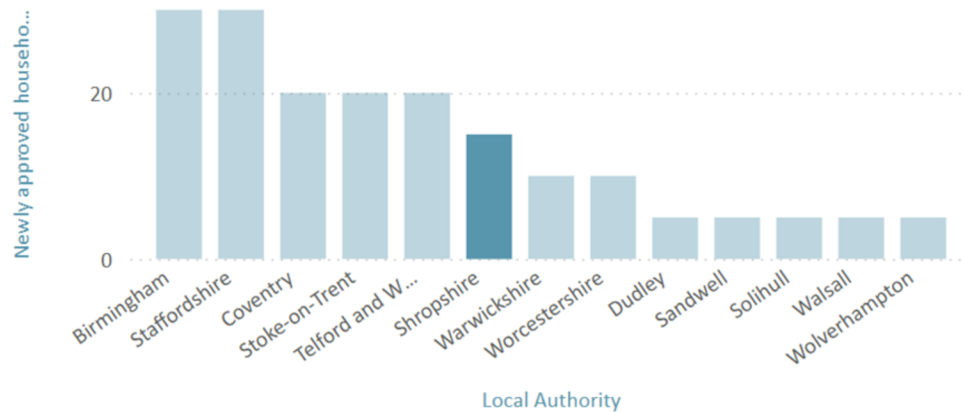


table G2. Number of Fostering enquiries vs population size by West Midlands Authority at March 2024

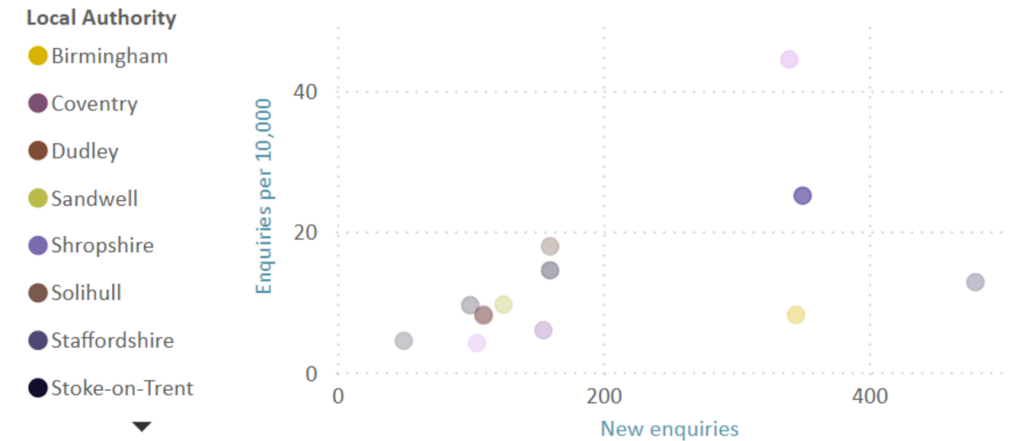


table G3. Shropshire Council fostering recruitment data at March 2024

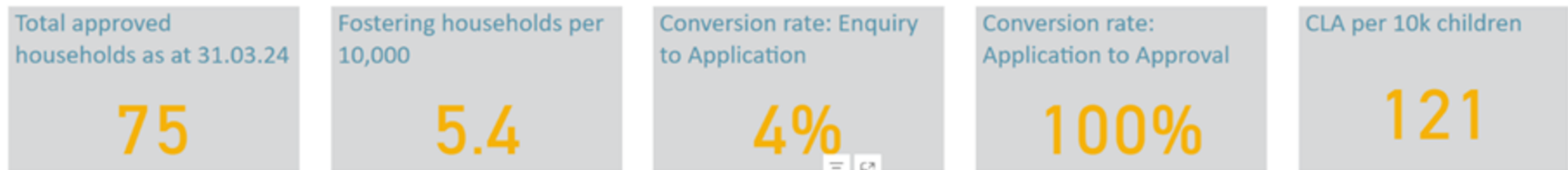


table H3. Number of Stepping Stones consultations.

Initial Consultations Planned Outcomes	2023/24	2024/25
Edge of Care	339 (65.32%)	307 (60.08%)
Reunification Home	83 (15.99%)	146 (28.57%)
Avoid Step up to Residential	53 (10.21%)	35 (6.85%)
Step Down to Foster Care	32 (6.17%)	13 (2.54%)
Transition to Independence / Supported Lodging	12 (2.31%)	10 (1.96%)

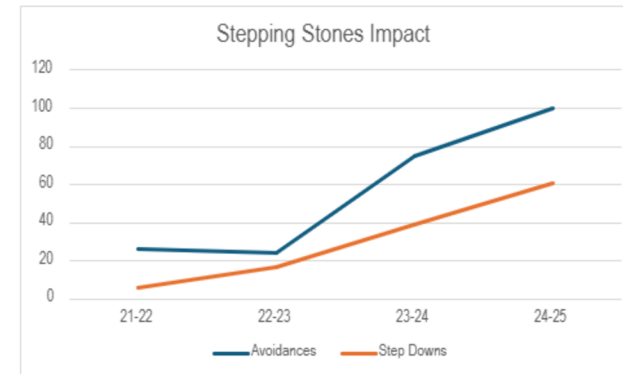


table H2. Number of avoidance and step-downs through Stepping Stones each year.

table H4. Number of Stepping Stones CLA ending or P1

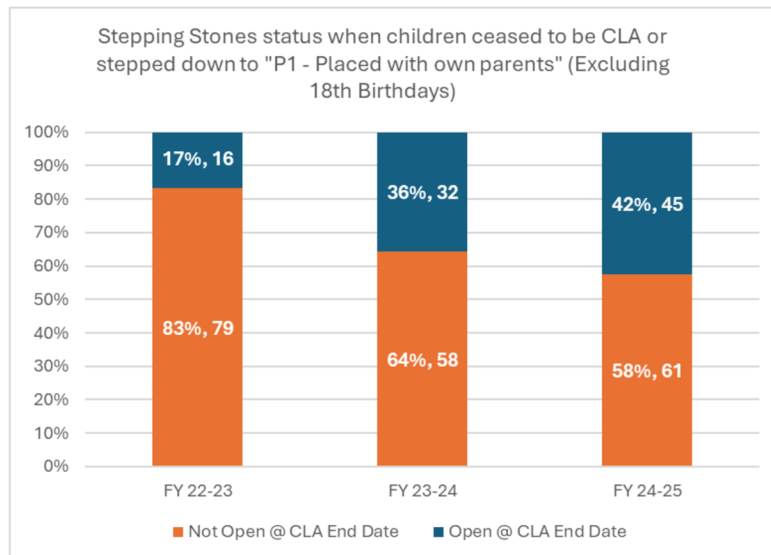


table H1. Number of children being supported by Stepping Stones

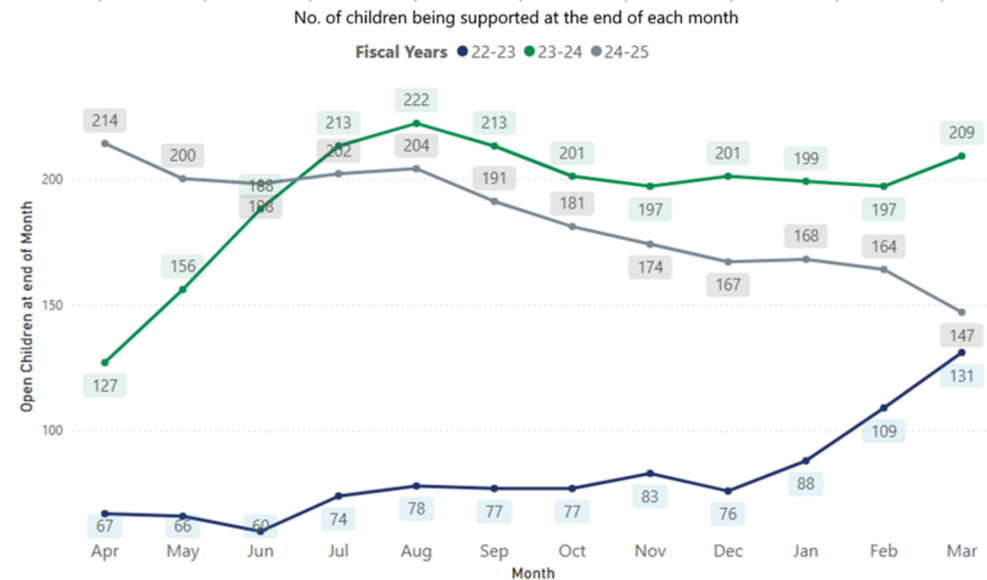


table I1. Number of LAC in children's homes

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Residential	64	64	65	79	89	108

table I2. % of LAC in children's homes

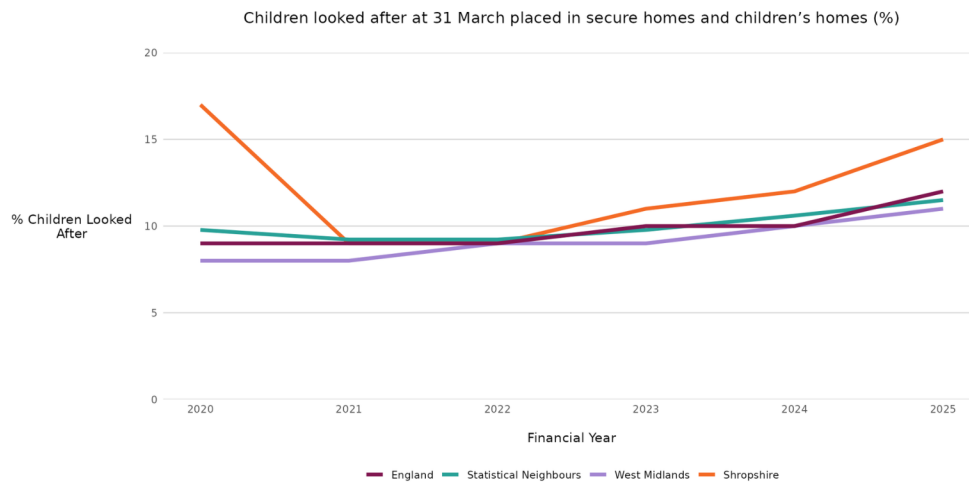


table I4. Internal vs External fostering each year.

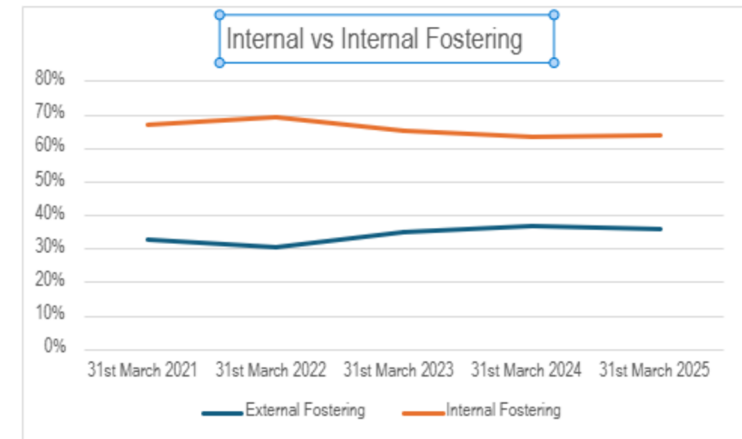


table I3. % of LAC in foster homes

