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Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough

Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

Thursday 21 September 2023

10.00 am

Third Floor, Southwater One, Southwater Square, Southwater Way,
Telford, TF3 4JG

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Councillor S Davies	Leader of the Council
Councillor R A Overton	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member: Homes & Enforcement
Councillor E M Callear	Cabinet Member: Education, Employment & Visitor Economy
Councillor L D Carter	Cabinet Member: Place (The Economy & Neighbourhood Services)
Councillor N A M England	Cabinet Member: Finance, Customer Service & Governance
Councillor C Healy	Cabinet Member: Climate Action, Green Spaces, Heritage & Leisure
Councillor R Mehta	Cabinet Member: Inclusion, Engagement, Equalities & Civic Pride

Councillor K Middleton Cabinet Member: Healthy, Safer & Stronger Communities & Partnerships

Councillor S A W Reynolds Cabinet Member: Early Years, Children & Young People

Councillor P Watling Cabinet Member: Adult Social Care & Health Systems

Invitees

Councillor A J Eade Conservative

Councillor W L Tomlinson Liberal Democrat

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CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday 13 July 2023 at 10.00 am in The Telford Room, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT

PUBLISHED ON WEDNESDAY 19 JULY 2023

(DEADLINE FOR CALL-IN: MONDAY 24 JULY 2023)

Present: Councillors S Davies (Chair), R A Overton (Vice-Chair), E M Callear, L D Carter, N A M England, C Healy, R Mehta, K Middleton, S A W Reynolds and P Watling.

Also Present: Cllr A J Eade (Conservative Group Leader) and Cllr W L Tomlinson (Liberal Democrats Group Leader)

CAB-8 Declarations of Interest

None.

CAB-9 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CAB-10 Leader's Announcements

The Leader announced that he would be making a Strong Leader decision on fly tipping to update the fixed penalty notices in line with the new legislative changes. It sought to increase charges to a maximum in order to cover the costs involved with investigation and the prosecution of cases. A report would be brought back to the next Cabinet meeting.

The Leader discussed the hospital reconfiguration which had taken another step forward. He had written to the government in respect of the hospital reconfiguration in March 2023, the Council's lawyers had written to the government in March 2023 and to date no response had been received to either letter. It was requested that the local Members of Parliament raise the relocation of the A&E and maternity services as significant issues. The Hospital Trust had been asked to work with the Council on the reconfiguration of services in order to ensure that Telford & Wrekin got a fair deal. The Leader confirmed he would continue to raise the cross party issues with Members of Parliament and the Department of Health until a response was received.

CAB-11 2023/24 Financial Monitoring Report

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Customer Services and Governance presented the report of the Chief Financial Officer.

The report gave an update on the latest financial monitoring position for the year in respect of the revenue budget, capital programme and income collection. Since the Medium Term Financial Strategy was approved at Full Council on 2 March 2023, the economic climate had continued to change with high inflation and energy costs and interest rate rises. Due to the cost of living crisis there was an increasing demand on Council services to support local residents and businesses.

Early monitoring for 2023/24 indicated a number of variations from the approved budget particularly in relation to Adult Social Care and Children's Safeguarding and the pay increase to meet the national living wage. Work to identify efficiencies and additional income was currently underway in order to meet the projected pressures and protect services.

Prior to the application of contingencies, the projected outturn position was expected to be over budget by £2.653m at year end. It was expected that by making use of budgeted contingency the overall position would be within budget for the year leaving £1.3m contingency balance for the rest of 2023/24.

The capital programme totalled £145m with 93% of the budget already allocated.

Income collection in relation to business rates, Council Tax and Sales Ledger were slightly behind target but all debt would be pursued and continue to be collected after the end of the financial year.

Due to the impact of Covid and the cost of living crisis which had affected visitor numbers, the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust (IGMT) had requested that an extension of 2 years to their current loan, due to expire on 31 January 2031, be granted. This extension would continue to support the valuable working partnership between the Council and the IGMT which was key to the effective management of the World Heritage Site, tourism and promoting Destination Telford.

Cabinet Members noted the report the hard work undertaken during the current challenging times. They welcomed the extension to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust loan as this was an important partner within the visitor economy and this would ensure they could continue to function and rebuild the business. The Council would continue to work to deliver services despite the pressures of the cost of living crisis and increased energy costs and continue to protect residents and invest into local businesses.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat group welcomed the report. Despite the lack of government funding services were still a necessity for local residents and he noted that the Council should be in budget at year end.

The Leader of the Conservative group praised the Council Officers for their work. He noted the failure of successive governments to address social care issues and the burden it put on Local Authorities.

RESOLVED – to RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL that:

- a) the 2023/24 revenue budget position be noted; the efficiency proposals, additional income and budget re-alignments summarised in Appendix D to the report and all associated changes to the Medium Term Financial Strategy be approved;**
- b) the position in relation to capital spend be noted; and the changes to the capital programme detailed in Appendix C to the report and all associated changes to the Medium Term Financial Strategy, including Treasury and Prudential Indicators be approved;**
- c) the current Treasury & Prudential Indicators position be noted;**
- d) the collection rates for NNDR, council tax and sales ledger be noted; and**
- e) the option to extend the IGMT loan repayment outlined in section 5.4 of the report and its terms to be delegated to the Director: Finance & HR and Executive Director: Housing, Communities and Customer Services with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Customer Services & Governance be approved;**

CAB-12 Health & Wellbeing Strategy

The Cabinet Member: Healthy, Safer & Stronger Communities and Partnerships presented the report of the Director: Health & Wellbeing.

The report introduced the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Telford & Wrekin for 2023-2027. There had been unprecedented challenges during the previous three years faced by the Council and its partners but despite this there had been many improvements and innovations, including collaborative working which has strengthened the health and wellbeing offer.

Work to tackle the wider determinants of health, support for the cost of living crisis, homelessness and improving 'start well, live well, age well' would continue. This would be achieved with strong preventative measures, a community centred approach and by tackling the causes of poor health, unhealthy weight and health care needs in order to reduce inequalities.

Further challenges were expected over the next five years which included continued recovery from the pandemic and the impact of the cost of living crisis. The refresh of the strategy was an opportunity to re-frame ways of working through health and wellbeing partners, with particular focus on people who faced the greatest risk of poor health and disadvantage.

Cabinet Members noted the report and expressed that there was always more that could be done to improve statistics and this was supported by putting in place good health and wellbeing strategies.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat group welcomed the report and expressed that the open green spaces, local nature reserve and volunteering opportunities supported mental health in the Borough. He asked that the Council encourage initiatives to generate income and join up with local medical practices to signpost events.

The Leader encouraged health partners to read the report as it set out the Council's preventative agenda. It also gave details of the leisure offer, green guarantee and volunteering opportunities. He hoped this would bring forward funding and integration in order to create a stronger, healthier community.

RESOLVED – that

- a) the draft Health & Wellbeing Strategy for 2023-2027 be approved for publication; and**
- b) the annual progress update on the implementation and impact of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy be agreed.**

CAB-13 Better Homes for All Update

The Cabinet Member: Homes & Enforcement presented the report of the Director: Housing, Employment & Infrastructure.

The Better Homes for All Programme was introduced in 2018, and updated in 2020 in order to improve conditions in the growing private rented sector within the Borough. It also set out how it would tackle rogue landlords. In 2022 the Council's programme to 'Protect Care and Invest to Create a Better Borough' was introduced to continue this programme of development which included a key objective for the Council's Housing Strategy to make the best use of existing homes.

Private rented sector (PRS) housing was now the only housing option for many people including young families and vulnerable adults due to a decline in social housing and this filled a gap in the market. Many single individuals were living in shared housing with houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) being their only option. An ageing housing stock and the condition of PRS housing was a major focus.

During the previous twelve months, the Council had dealt with 489 requests from tenants living in poor housing conditions a 30% increase. A total of 300 inspections had taken place identifying 511 hazards such as falls, damp and mould and fire. An additional 50 property inspections had been undertaken linked to the Safer Streets Programme which had now totalled 500 inspections. A total of 18 HMO licences had been put forward for full

inspections and 10 Multi Agency Targeted Enforcements Strategy (MATES) operations had taken place. There had been 140 enforcement notices, 12 Civil Penalty Notices, 1 formal caution and 3 prosecutions undertaken and 137 long term empty properties brought back into use.

Capital grant funding for affordable warmth of £4m had been granted.

A Landlord/Tenant Programme had been introduced to support landlords and tenants to resolve issues at an early stage. Inspections had taken place on properties for Homes for Ukraine programme, monitoring of supported accommodation and visiting HMOs to ensure licenses were met.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report and the work undertaken to raise the standard of private landlords. Having a dry, warm and safe home underpinned the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. With the increased cost of mortgages it was essential going forward that the standards of housing conditions remained high and it was vital that this work continued.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat group welcomed the report and noted that the majority of private landlords were of a good standard. This needed to continue and the Council be ready to support local residents when things go wrong.

The Leader of the Conservative group echoed comments made by the Liberal Democrat group leader. It was important to maintain the standard of living conditions and noted the pressures on landlords. He complimented the Officers on their difficult work and asked that this continued going forward.

The Leader reported that the Council had a good working relationship with the large social landlords, Telford and Wrekin Homes and NuPlace. They acted as a market disrupter and raised the bar in which was acceptable. Work was taking place with landlords and letting agents offering tenant matching services and guaranteed deposit schemes. Where there were poor living conditions this would be enforced and the Council secured the very first Landlord Banning Order in the UK. More powers were required to end no-fault evictions and a link between the payment of benefits and the standard of living conditions such as an incentive scheme could improve standards.

RESOLVED – that the continued progress of the Better Homes for All Programme be noted.

CAB-14 Climate Change Guidance for Development - Supplementary Planning Document

The Cabinet Member: Homes & Enforcement and the Cabinet Member: Climate Action Green Spaces, Heritage & Leisure presented the report of the Director: Housing, Employment & Infrastructure.

The report sought adoption of the Climate Change Guidance for Developers – Supplementary Planning Document (Climate Change SPD).

A Climate Change Action Plan (2020) had been published and this was reviewed on a regular basis. The Climate Change SPD was central to shaping new 'climate ready' development and built upon the existing Local Plan policy to set out clear guidance on the design of new housing, commercial and renewable energy developments.

A consultation and engagement programme took place in February and March 2023 and this resulted in the changes set out in the report.

The Climate Change SPD would allow the Council to continue with the effective use of its resources and support the efficient delivery of the Planning Application process.

Good quality homes were important but they also needed to incorporate fabrics that were able to adapt to conditions such as heat, cold and wet weather. It was important to future proof developments in respect of drainage schemes due to changes in weather patterns and the risk of flash flooding.

Future home standards were due to come into force in 2025 but, currently, new developments could be built out with no solar panels or EV charging points as this could not currently be mandated.

The SPD set out the direction of travel on energy efficient homes and this was a step forward in the right direction.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report and the work that had been undertaken. They noted the impact in terms of health in relation to damp and air quality and reducing fuel costs. Developers were encouraged to engage in the policies.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat group welcomed the report. He noted the issue of viability was a national planning issue and awaited the introduction of the national guidelines.

The Leader of the Conservative group acknowledged the advantages of solar panels, good insulation and ground pumps within developments but raised issues in relation to costs within the current housing market. He asked if the Council were lobbying government to bring this agenda forward and to request local powers to insist on better standards. It was noted that currently there was no easy solution.

The Leader stated that frustrations were felt cross party on sustainability of developments and he welcomed government plans to change the dynamics around developers/landowners. He noted the good practice that was taking place in Wales in relation to interest free loans for retrospective solar panels and pumps. The Council had been lobbying government on this issue but felt that the retrofit costs were far greater than bringing forward the future homes standards.

RESOLVED – that the Climate Change Guidance for Developers Supplementary Planning Document for determining planning application within the Borough of Telford & Wrekin be approved.

CAB-15 Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site - Supplementary Planning Document

The Cabinet Member: Climate Action Green Spaces, Heritage & Leisure and the Cabinet Member: Homes & Enforcement presented the report of the Director: Housing, Employment & Infrastructure.

The report sought adoption of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site (WHS) Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which would be used to provide locally distinctive planning guidance to help protect the gorge and support sustainable development within the WHS. As the WHS boundary extended into Shropshire the SPD would be used by both Local Planning Authorities if adopted by Shropshire Council at their Cabinet meeting on 19 July 2023.

To help local established communities the SPD contained property-level guidance that would help residents and businesses when bringing forward development proposals and set out how the planning system would fulfil the responsibility and opportunities that arise from WHS status. It would also form part of a suite of document covering the World Heritage Site and Severn Gorge Conservation Area including the WHS Management Plan the overarching framework and strategy for managing and protecting the Outstanding Universal Value of the area.

A consultation exercise engaging with stakeholders and organisations had been undertaken in January and February 2023 and the results of the feedback were contained within the report.

Cabinet Members commented that the WHS was a unique place and it could be challenging to make modifications to modern living standards whilst preserving the local heritage. The report contained clarity on new developments within the WHS which would bring greater consistency and protection. An easy read version of the document had been produced for residents together with drop in sessions and face to face query sessions. It was a challenge but the WHS guidance set out what was possible.

RESOLVED- that the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document for use in determining planning applications in relation to area of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site be adopted.

CAB-16 Ercall Magna Neighbourhood Development Plan - Referendum Version

The Cabinet Member Homes & Enforcement presented the report of the Director: Housing, Employment & Infrastructure.

The report sought approval for the implementation of the recommendations from the Independent Examiner in relation to modifications to the Ercall Magna Neighbourhood Development Plan and to proceed to a referendum on the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Ercall Magna Parish Council submitted their neighbourhood development plan in June 2022. All statutory checks and a six week publication period took place where written representations could be received. An Independent Examiner was appointed to conduct an external examination of the Ercall Magna Parish Neighbourhood Plan (EMNP) with the report being received in June 2023 with recommendations to proceed to Referendum subject to a number of modifications which had been applied to the Referendum Versions of the EMNP attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The Referendum version of the EMNP supported the policy approach to Ercall Magna and the rural area in the adopted Telford & Wrekin Local Plan.

A further report would be brought to Cabinet for consideration following the outcome of the Referendum.

RESOLVED – that

- a) **the findings of the Independent Examiner that, subject to his recommended modifications, the Ercall Magna Neighbourhood Development Plan meets the “basic conditions” and all other legal requirements as summarised in this report and in the Independent Examiner’s report be agreed;**
- b) **the required modifications to the Ercall Magna Neighbourhood Development Plan and that the Ercall Magna Neighbourhood Development Plan Referendum Version (July 2023) should proceed to Referendum be agreed;**
- c) **the Referendum Area should not be extended beyond the designated area to which the Ercall Magna Neighbourhood Development Plan relates be agreed; and**
- d) **the Returning Officer proceed to exercise all the relevant powers and duties and undertake all necessary arrangements for the Ercall Magna Neighbourhood Development Plan (Referendum Version) to now proceed to Referendum and for the Referendum to take place asking the question whether the voter wants Telford & Wrekin Council to use this neighbourhood development plan for the Ercall Magna Neighbourhood Development Plan area to help it decide planning applications in this neighbourhood area be agreed.**

CAB-17 Progress on the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan

The Cabinet Member: Inclusion, Engagement, Equalities and Civic Pride presented the report of the Director: Communities, Customer & Commercial Services.

The report provided an update on the progress made on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy and Action Plan and the Council's Equality Objectives under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

It sought adoption of Armed Forces Personnel (veterans and families) being given due regard with all other protected characteristics as set out in the report.

Positive steps had been taken which included the EDI being considered as part of the decision making processes, the implementation of employee led groups, the results of the recent employee survey, EDI focus on recruitment and selection and the engagement with the deaf community.

Engagement had been undertaken with local community groups, partners and Council employees with the first 4-year Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy being launched in July 2022.

The report set out the EDI Strategy vision and objectives and the positive steps being taken across the organisation to meet the Equality Objectives and the overall vision.

Whilst a lot had been achieved in the previous 12 months, there was still a lot to deliver longer term with the key actions set out in the report and progress would continue to be monitored.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report and the work and dedication to celebrate diversity across the Borough. The EDI strategy cut across all services and departments and there was a very positive culture in relation to inclusiveness. It evidenced the protect, care and invest agenda which now included care experience for young people. Work around Armed Forces Personnel, the introduction of the Neurodiversity Group and work with the Windrush generation had been very positive. The strategy would continue to develop to support and protect the local community.

RESOLVED – that

- a) the progress the Council has made over the last 12 months with regards to its 4-year Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy and Action Plan be noted;**
- b) Armed Forces Personnel (veterans and families) to be given due regard in the same way as those with all other protected characteristics be approved;**
- c) the publication of new EDI actions as set out in paragraph 5.0 and**

the progress on the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan be approved; and

d) the updated strategy to reflect the latest demographic data as set out in paragraph 6.1.1. of the report be approved.

CAB-18 Customer Feedback Reports for 2022-23

The Cabinet Member: Finance, Customer Services & Governance presented the report of the Director: Communities, Customer and Commercial Services.

The report provided an update on the Council's Customer Feedback between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 in order to provide assurance that the Council's response to complaints was effective and that lessons were learnt and continual improvement to services made.

Approval was sought to adopt the policy for dealing with complaints concerning CSE as set out in Appendix D to the report.

There had been new challenges during the year for the Council, residents and customers due to the cost of living crisis and an increased demand on services, particularly in relation to financial support.

Compliments had continued to increase year on year with 566 compliments being received, an increase of 19% during the reporting period, from 475 the previous year. This equated to a 95% increase over the last four years.

A total of 656 complaints were received across the Council in 2022/23 which was a 13% reduction from 759 in the previous year.

The number of Children's Statutory Complaints decreased during the year to the lowest number received in 8 years. Adult Statutory Complaints had a slight increase to 35 from 33 in 2021/22.

Corporate complaint response times were down from 12 days to 11 days for a response.

There had been a continuation of the Mystery Customer programme, customer satisfaction surveys and back to the floor exercises. The Corporate Contact Centre had achieved a 91% performance target with 99% of calls being handled within 10 minutes.

The Council were working with individuals with lived experience to help shape policies and there was an opportunity for complainants to access support and services.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report and encouraged the receipt of both compliments and complaints as they started vital conversations. They noted the reduction in children's statutory complaints and the cut to response times

to often complex complaints. The 95% increase in compliments spoke as a testament to the work of officers.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat group welcomed the report and the direction of travel in relation to complaints on children's and adult services. He thanked the public for being the eyes and ears of the Borough and encouraged the public to continue reporting issues. The Council had an excellent track record of being open and accessible and asked that the Council continued to maintain telephone access for residents as this remained an important feature.

The Leader discussed the report and the effective work that was undertaken with local residents. It was important that the Council remained accessible via extended contact centre hours, letters, telephone and the use of the app. The Members' enquiry system was a useful system that was used to track enquiries and response times in order for members to undertake their casework. Compliments and complaints enabled the Council not to become complacent or defensive but ambitious backed up by facts and evidence.

RESOLVED – that:

- a) **the Customer Feedback Reports for 2022-23 in respect of Adult Statutory Complaints, Children's Statutory Complaints and Corporate Customer Feedback be reviewed;**
- b) **the reduction in complaints received in 2022/23, the increase in positive feedback and the improvement in complaint handing performance;**
- c) **the new Policy and Procedure for Complaints involving Child Sexual Exploitation attached at Appendix D be approved; and**
- d) **delegated authority be granted to the Director for Communities, Customer & Commercial Services in consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member for Finance, Customer Services and Governance to make amendments to the policy going forward in line with changes to the appropriate legislation and other relevant information.**

The meeting ended at 10.59 am

Signed for the purposes of the Decision Notices

Anthea Lowe
Director: Policy & Governance

Date: **Wednesday 19 JULY 2023**

Signed

Date: Thursday 21 September 2023



Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough

Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

21 September 2023

SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy and Inspection Outcome

Cabinet Members:	Eileen Callear - Cabinet Member: Education, Employment & Visitor Economy Shirley Reynolds - Cabinet Member: Early Years, Children and Young People
Lead Director:	Simon Wellman – Director: Education and Skills
Service Area:	Education and Skills
Report Author:	Natalie Bevan - Service Delivery Manager: SEND and Personalisation
Officer Contact Details:	Tel: 01952 367364 Email: natalie.bevan@telford.gov.uk
Wards Affected:	All Wards
Key Decision:	Key Decision
Forward Plan:	1 August 2023
Report considered by:	SMT - 15 August 2023 Policy Development - 7 September 2023 Cabinet - 21 September 2023

1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1.1 Approves the recently revised Special Educational Need and Disability (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Strategy (**Appendix A**), recognising this as a local area partnership document between children/young people, parents, the Council, NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin ICS and other key partners.

- 1.2 Notes the outcome of the recent local area inspection of SEND undertaken by OFSTED/CQC which:
- a. resulted in the Council achieving the highest possible result;
 - b. judged our SEN arrangements to typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people whom have SEN and/or disabilities; and
 - c. recognises that appropriate action is being taken where improvements are needed.
- 1.3 Notes the letter from the Minister of State for Children, Families and Wellbeing, Claire Coutinho MP (**Appendix C**) congratulating the Council for the outcome of our inspection that recognised many positive aspects of our local area practice, alongside areas in need of improvement.
- 1.4 Notes that Telford & Wrekin Council has recently been selected by the Department for Education (DfE) to lead the new SEND pilot for the West Midlands, as part of its £70 million investment into a change programme in respect of the national SEND and AP system.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the positive outcome of the recent local area SEND inspection and resulting actions and to seek Cabinet approval for the attached SEND and AP Strategy which reaffirms the Council's commitment to achieving best outcomes for children and young people in the Borough and to ensure continuous improvement.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Telford and Wrekin's local area strategy for Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) & Alternative Provision (AP) required an update (previous issue dated 2016) in line with proposals laid out in the Department for Education's national SEND and AP Improvement Plan March 2023 and OFSTED/CQC new inspection framework of local area SEND arrangements (January 2023).
- 3.2 The strategy sets out Telford & Wrekin's local area vision for children and young people aged 0-25 years with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for children and young people who are accessing or may need to access alternative provision. It is a partnership document across the council, NHS and third sector services recognising that children and young people with needs will require and receive support from across education, health and care services.
- 3.3 The strategy, that weaves together SEND and AP for the first time, recognises that many children that attend alternative provision will often have SEND. Alternative provision refers to a range of providers that offer educational provision outside of mainstream education. It includes Pupil Referral Units, in Telford and Wrekin known as the Linden Centre for children in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and Kickstart for

children in Key Stage 4, alongside other organisations. Children and young people can attend alternative provision for short, medium and long term placements.

- 3.4 The SEND Code of Practice 2015 states that children, young people and their families should be involved in decisions that are about them at all levels and that coproduction should be at the heart of developing services. Coproduction therefore features at the heart of the new strategy and sets out our clear intention to work with our parents, children and young people.
- 3.5 The strategy was developed through workshops with professionals across education, health and care, parents and carers and young people during November and December 2022. A draft strategy was published for further consultation during February and March 2023 and the final document (**Appendix A**) includes amendments made in response to feedback received.
- 3.6 All local area arrangements for SEND in England are subject to inspection by OFSTED and CQC. It is a joint inspection between the two organisations given the Council and NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care Board are collectively responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND.
- 3.7 Telford and Wrekin were previously inspected in May 2017 and received a positive outcome. A new inspection framework was published by OFSTED and CQC in January 2023. Telford and Wrekin was one of the first of eight local areas, and the first in the West Midlands, to be inspected under the new framework which took place between 20 to 24th March 2023. The outcome judgment was that our arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children with SEND and where improvements are needed we are taking action. This is the highest possible result and means Telford and Wrekin will not be subject to a local area SEND inspection for a further 5 years. (Please refer to **Appendix B** for the inspection outcome letter).
- 3.8 To highlight some of the positive aspects of practice found during the inspection the OFSTED/CQC outcome letter specifies:
- Children and young people with SEND are visible, valued and included in the Telford community.
 - Partners work together well and have the passion, determination and commitment to develop the care and provision for children and young when SEND even further.
 - Children and young people with SEND benefit from effective joined-up working between education, health and social care providers.

- Children and young people appreciate the wide range of accessible services and activities available to them.
- Children and young people's needs are typically identified and assessed quickly and accurately. Hence the right help is put in place to meet their evolving needs.
- Typically, parent groups believe that area leaders listen and respond to their views.
- Area leaders have supported the development of the Shout Out for SEND (SOS) group, which is made up of a 'small but mighty' group of children and young people with SEND.

3.9 Two areas of improvement were identified as part of the inspection as follows:

- Leaders from NHS ST&W ICB need to work closely with other partnership leaders to improve the governance, monitoring and oversight of diagnostic pathways (including neurodevelopmental, mental health and speech and language therapy assessments) for children and young people with SEND, so that their needs are assessed and met consistently well and in a timely manner.
- Partnership leaders should improve communication with families, beyond the formal consultation routes, to share effective information and advice about the provision available to children and young people with SEND.

Our strategic action plan for SEND has been updated subsequently to reflect our actions around these points and is available via the local offer (www.telfordsend.org.uk)

3.10 Our inspection achievement was recognised by Claire Coutinho MP, Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing who sent a congratulatory letter (**Appendix C**).

3.11 In March 2023 the Department for Education published a national SEND improvement plan, in light of the significant challenges faced across England in administering a consistent, financially stable system that is accessible and well understood by parents. A number of reforms are suggested with a lead Local Authority (LA) from each region in England selected to work with three neighbouring authorities to pilot the reforms over the next two academic years.

3.12 In April 2023, Telford and Wrekin Council was asked to express an interest in becoming the lead LA for the West Midlands and following a competitive process was selected in May 2023. The 'SEND change programme', which will be funded, will commence from September 2023.

4.0 Summary of main proposals

- 4.1 The new SEND and AP strategy sets out the ambition for the area partnership over the next five years to continue developing services and make continuous improvements. It articulates the vision for our children with SEND to be valued, visible and included within their local community, providing them with educational opportunities to achieve their aspirations, leading to a happy, healthy and fulfilling life.
- 4.2 Linking with the Telford & Wrekin Health & Wellbeing Strategy it has a strong focus on the best start in life. We understand the need to intervene early and recognise that children and young people with SEND are especially important as they may be more vulnerable to health inequalities. The SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy is referenced within the Health & Wellbeing Strategy 'starting well' priority.
- 4.3 The strategy identifies 7 priority areas of focus which include:
- Localised high quality provision.
 - Early identification and help.
 - Participation in decisions.
 - A system that makes sense.
 - Use of data to inform decisions.
 - A supportive Alternative Provision offer.
 - Feeling valued and visible in their community.

Further detail about the priorities can be found in pages 9-22 in the strategy document (**Appendix A**).

- 4.4 Integral to the strategy is a focus on outcomes with the key question being *how do we know that what we do makes a difference?* The framework identifies 7 outcomes as follows:
- I am healthy
 - I am safe
 - I am happy
 - I am heard
 - I am friendly
 - I am independent
 - I am achieving

A description is provided about what each outcome means to children and young people, their families and professionals and a performance dashboard will be

created to measure ongoing impact. Further detail about the outcomes can be found in pages 23-30 in the strategy document (**Appendix A**).

5.0 Alternative Options

5.1 An alternative option would be to retain the existing SEND strategy (dated 2016) but this does not reflect the new DfE SEND and AP improvement plan published in March 2016 or OFSTED/CQC local area SEND framework (published January 2023) and therefore would not enable us to demonstrate how we best meet the needs of children and young people in accordance with current national and regulatory policy development.

6.0 Key Risks

6.1 Without a strategy the local area will not be clear about how we intend to develop our services and provision and further improve the outcomes for children and young people with SEND. This could result in

- increased revenue costs
- limited progress on SEND/AP improvement action plan.

7.0 Council Priorities

7.1 The proposals set out in this report support the following council priorities:

- Every child, young person and adult lives well in their community,
- All neighbourhoods are a great place to live,
- A community-focussed, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services.

8.0 Financial Implications

8.1 Telford and Wrekin Council received over £32 million of funding in 2023/24, as part of the Dedicated Schools Grant, to support children and young people with SEND. This includes funding for schools, specialist placements and support services.

8.2 The Government are investing £70m into their SEND Change Programme over the next two academic years. The West Midlands Change Programme Partnership of which Telford and Wrekin Council are the Lead Local Authority will receive in the region of £5.8m.

9.0 Legal and HR Implications

9.1 The Children and Families Act 2014 states that children, young people and their families should be involved in all decisions that are about them at all levels and that coproduction should be at the heart of developing services across education, health and care. The draft strategy has drawn upon the views and experiences of

young people and their families and thus the Council is able to demonstrate that it is meeting its statutory obligations. Ongoing legal advice on the implementation and adoption of the policy will be provided as and when required.

- 9.2 When reviewing any policy or strategy, the Council has to have due regard to the Equality Act 2010 and the public sector equality duty. The measures set out in the SEND and AP Strategy support those with protected characteristics and should promote equality for those with protected characteristics.

10.0 Ward Implications

- 10.1 A borough wide strategy will have a positive impact for families across all wards.

11.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

- 11.1 The strategy aims to close the gap in outcomes for children and young people with SEND, especially in relation to education, health and care and becoming economically independent.

12.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 12.1 This strategy relates to all SEND children with a diverse range of backgrounds and needs. This includes improving outcomes for children with disabilities.

13.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

- 13.1 None

14.0 Background Papers

Appendix A SEND and AP Strategy 2023-2028 Working Together for better SEND and AP outcomes in Telford & Wrekin

Appendix B OFSTED and CQC Area SEND inspection of Telford and Wrekin Local Area Partnership.

Appendix C Ministerial letter from Claire Coutinho, MP to Telford and Wrekin regarding outcome of the local area SEND inspection.

16.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Finance	10/08/23	10/08/23	TS
Legal	10/08/23	10/08/23	RP/AL
Director	11/08/23	11/08/23	SW

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Working together for better SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) outcomes in Telford and Wrekin

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2023-2028



Special Educational Needs, Disability and Alternative Provision Strategy

Telford & Wrekin SEND - Working Together Charter

Empower ALL to have a **voice**

CARE

for and about families lived experiences

In signing this charter we are committing to embed co-production principles at the heart of our services.



Actively listen

at the earliest opportunity to ensure families receive correct support /service

Feel Valued and Included

Be transparent and **CLEAR**

OPEN Communication

Celebrate children and young people as they are

Promote a more **holistic** understanding of where families are on their journey



TRUST

We will commit to working together to embed our principles.

"Ensure everybody's **voice IS HEARD**"

Be **OPEN** **HONEST** and **RESPECTFUL** in all communications



Feel Welcomed and Cared for

Make sure that all partners are involved and **ACCOUNTABLE**

Be **OPEN** to different views and perspectives

Working in Partnership

AGREE

on what each partner will contribute.

INVEST TIME



for working together

= PARTNER

FEEDBACK

YOU SAID... WE DID...



Involve, include and **AGREE** outcomes together

Ensure that all contributions are heard and valued **EQUALLY**



Foreword

Telford & Wrekin Council; NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care System (ICS); children, young people and their families; are pleased to present this SEND and Alternative Provision strategy.



Jayne Stevens
Strategic Co-ordinator:
PODS Parent Carer
Forum



Gareth Robinson
Executive Director:
NHS ICB Shropshire,
Telford & Wrekin



Jo Britton
Executive Director:
Children and Family
Services
Telford & Wrekin Council



Eileen Callear
Cabinet Member for
Education, Employment
and Visitor Economy
Telford & Wrekin Council



Cllr Shirley Reynolds
Cabinet Member for
Early Years, Children and
Young People
Telford & Wrekin Council

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As an area partnership we believe supporting children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is everyone's business and we are committed to providing excellent alternative provision for those who need it.

We are determined to do everything we can to provide better experiences and outcomes for all our children and young people with SEND and those who attend Alternative Provision.

We are proud of the existing support available for children and young people in Telford and Wrekin. This strategy sets out our ambitions over the next five years to continue to develop services and make

continuous improvements. It demonstrates our commitment to ensure that we work closely with and listen to children, young people and their families.

We want all our children and young people with SEND and those attending Alternative Provision to be valued, visible and included within their local community, providing them with the opportunity to achieve their aspirations and outcomes, leading to a happy, healthy and fulfilling life.

The Telford and Wrekin Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2023 – 2027) has a strong focus on starting well to ensure all local children and young

people get the very best start in life. Children and young people with SEND are especially important as they may be more vulnerable to health inequalities. The SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy is referenced as a key plan for delivering the Health and Wellbeing Strategy starting well priority.

We will provide access to services that will make a difference to families. These services will work effectively because they work together, are inclusive, easy to access, close to home, are adaptable for individual needs and aspirations whilst respecting the rights of children, young people and their families.

As an area partnership we are committed to working together for better outcomes for our children, young people and their families. This work is supported by sharing information, innovative ideas and best practice to support children and young people to achieve. The area partnership holds a shared accountability for wellbeing, fairness and equity for all.



Our vision

We believe that every child and young person deserves, and should receive, an excellent education and the chance to fulfil their potential. This includes having a clear focus on providing the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

The area partnership sets out Telford and Wrekin strategy to continually develop and improve services for children and young people aged 0-25 years with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those using alternative provision (AP).

A child or young person has special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) if they have a learning difficulty and/or a disability that means they need special education, care and health support.

Alternative Provision supports children who need extra help to stay in and enjoy learning at their mainstream school, or provides specialist places and support for those who would benefit from spending time away from their school. We recognise that many of the young people who use Alternative Provision will have SEND which is why we have unified our approach in this strategy.

We want to ensure that all children and young people have a sense of belonging and that they feel safe in their identity. We hold the ambition that every child and young person will have a sense of belonging in their education setting, when they attend health services for appointments, access Social Care support or join in activities and events in their local community.

This strategy has been co-produced with parents carers and families (including Parents Opening Doors); children and young people who have lived experience; early years settings; schools; colleges; advocates; frontline practitioners; the voluntary and community sector; and the NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care System.

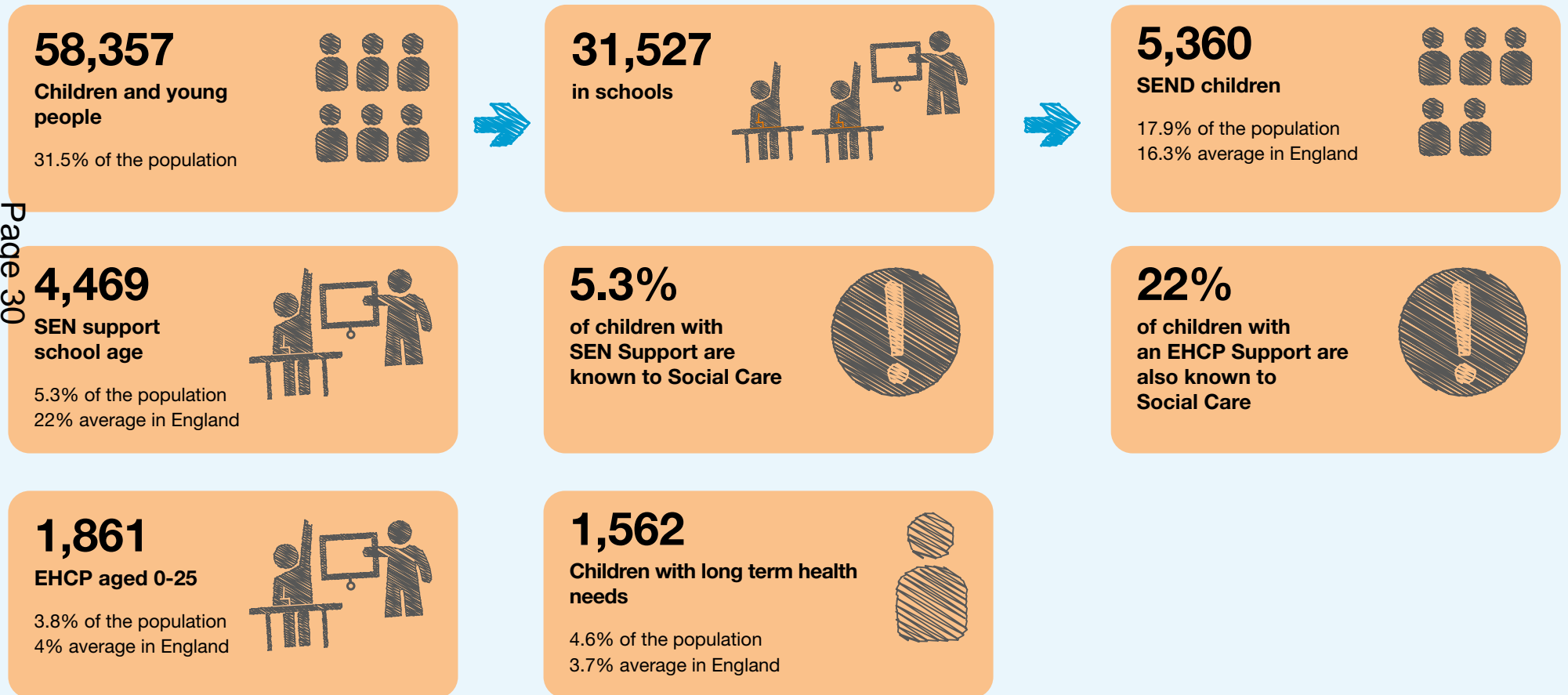
A child and young person guide can be found and downloaded in easy read on the [Telford and Wrekin Local Offer](#).



Context - Where are we now

In Telford and Wrekin, the overall population size has increased by 11.4%, from around 166,600 in 2011 to 185,600 in 2021. This is higher than the overall increase for England (6.6%), and for the West Midlands (6.2%).

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Your feedback - What children, young people and their families have said about SEND and Alternative Provision

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Localised provision		System that makes sense		Early identification and help		Participate in decisions	
Going well...	Better if...	Going well...	Better if...	Going well...	Better if...	Going well...	Better if...
Specialist provision hubs	Better awareness of hidden disabilities	SEND Working together charter	Strengthen Joint Commissioning	Right service, right time	Capacity building in services	Strong partnership working - PODS	No decision about me without me
Being part of a community	Quality teaching	Clear communication, partnership working	Easy to access, good quality support	Workforce development	Clear published pathways	You said, we did	Strengthen the voice of young people
Local Offer - local services	Short Breaks - local accessible activities	SEND newsletters	Easy to navigate, online and face to face	Family Hub development	Increase Mental Health services	Listening to children, young people and families	Workshops and events for families
Mental Health Support Teams in schools		Workshops and events	Outcome focused transition planning	Innovative, creative support	Clear thresholds and guidance	Live annual reviews	Better dispute resolution
Data informed and intelligence rich		Supportive alternative provision offer		Children and young people feel valued and visible in their community			
Going well...	Better if...	Going well...	Better if...	Going well...	Better if...		
Evaluative data to inform commissioning	Multi Agency Data Dashboard	Promote inclusive practice in schools and settings	Developing local provision	Outcome Framework	Promoting community services		
Sharing positive stories, experiences	Best practice from compliments	Co-designed intervention	Increasing capacity and offer	Celebrating children and young people	Clear outcome measures		
Using data to inform service developments	Learning from complaints	Responsive	Outreach first approach	Community activities and support	Listening to aspirations		
Sharing feedback	Multi agency approach to information systems	Rarely exclusion	Specialist provision in the right location		Empowering independence		

Priority 1: Localised high-quality provision

Our aspiration...

Is to provide a continuum of high quality, local provision in Telford and Wrekin across education, health and social care; to better meet the needs of young people with SEND and those requiring Alternative Provision.

We will...

- develop a continuum of provision to support young people that will better meet their needs to be successful in their local mainstream school or setting.
- ensure that every child and young person can access a positive learning environment where they have a sense of belonging to support their self-esteem and self-actualisation leading to increased aspirations and a successful life.
- continue to develop and implement training and awareness for SEND and hidden disabilities for all staff across the partnership.
- have an integrated training and education offer for education settings to support reasonable adjustments and increase their understanding of needs.
- support schools and settings to meet the medical needs of children young people with identified health conditions, with access to support and training from local health providers.
- have appropriate local health care provision that are easy to access by children, young people and their families.
- ensure that those who are working with children and young people most often can support the development of speech, language and communication skills through approaches such as Talk Boost and be aware of sensory needs through localised training.
- maximise outreach and community services, such as those from special schools or alternative provisions, to strengthen our localised offer within cluster areas.
- create family hubs focusing on early identification with families and parental support.
- build a thriving market for short break provision that includes an increase in the targeted preventative short breaks offer.
- ensure the effective use of the Dynamic Support Register and Care Education Treatment reviews to support children and young people with a Learning Disability or Autism who are at risk of going into a residential placement or into hospital due to mental health conditions or distressed behaviours, to receive the support they need in a timely way in their local community.
- implement transformation for meeting the Mental Health needs of children and young people through the Children and Young People's Mental Health Transformation Plan.

How we know we have made a difference...

The majority of children and young people with SEND will successfully attend their local mainstream school or setting.

Those in need of additional support from Alternative Provision will be supported to return to, and be successful in, their local mainstream provision.

All children and young people will have their education, health and care needs met locally, fewer children and young people will have to travel or stay outside Telford & Wrekin for their needs to be met.

Quality first teaching and access to an inclusive curriculum will meet the needs of children and young people with SEND, whatever education or early years setting they attend.

There will be an increase in schools and settings having a qualified SENCO and Senior Mental Health Lead in their senior management teams.

There will be an increase in young people successfully transitioning across education, health and care to the next stage of their journey.

There will be an increase in young people accessing higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships and supported internships leading to successful employment.

A low number of children and young people with a Learning Disability or Autism will go into a residential placement or into hospital due to mental health conditions or distressed behaviours.



Priority 2: Early identification and help

Our aspiration...

We will work in partnership across education, health and care to deliver the right support, in the right place and at the right time to meet the needs of children and young people earlier.

We will...

- develop our Best Start In Life programme by improving the Maternity Healthy Pregnancy Service.
- continue to develop the offer for early help and strengthening families.
- continue to manage requests for Education Health and Care plans, keeping within the statutory timescales.
- commit to the links between the early years 0 – 5 Multi-Disciplinary Assessment process and the Education, Health and Care Needs assessment.
- work with schools to have an open offer of resources for RADY (Raising the Attainment of disadvantaged Youngsters).
- support better integrated local public health and primary care teams.
- continue to ensure a high delivery and uptake of Annual Health checks, and ensuring these reach all young people aged 14 – 25 with Learning Disabilities.
- ensure that our Local Offer website continues to help children and young people and their families find the local information and support from across Telford and Wrekin.
- work with schools and settings to promote mental health and wellbeing ensuring that children and young people receive the right support, at the right time, from the right person (iThrive model) within our education, care and health settings and services.
- collaborate with safeguarding agencies to ensure SEND children and those in Alternative Provision are appropriately protected from physical and online harm and exploitation.
- increase parental confidence in understanding the Short Breaks offer.
- develop the short breaks capacity to provide a diverse offer of support including personal assistants and short breaks foster carers to meet eligible needs.
- promote the value of the newly established Healthier Together website to compliment the Local Offer website.
- provide a high-quality professional development offer for our workforce across the SEND local area.
- support children and young people through medication in the most effective way, being mindful of the limitations.

How we know we have made a difference...

There will be an increase in the numbers of staff who are confident they can meet the presenting needs of children with SEND.

There will be an increase in parental and professional confidence that early intervention is providing relevant and appropriate support for children and young people.

More families and children with SEND will be able to find and engage with local offer services through better online 'self-serve' advice and guidance.

Timely screening services will mean more children and young people with SEND will have their eyesight, hearing and dental needs addressed.

There will be fewer admissions into Accident & Emergency (A&E) for mental health support.

There will be increased confidence from young people that they are prepared to transition to adulthood.



Priority 3: Participate in decisions

Our aspiration...

We will build trust, listen to lived experience, welcome innovative ideas from children, families and partners to shape and improve long term outcomes for children and young people with SEND across Telford and Wrekin.

We will...

- strongly encourage an ethos that there should be no decision 'about me without me' across education, health and care, whilst considering the best options for children, young people and their families at the centre of the decision.
- embed the SEND Working Together Charter to ensure children, young people and their families are empowered to actively participate in decisions.
- use innovative approaches to capture and listen to the voice of children and young people, to know if we are making a difference.
- emphasise and amplify the importance of the voice of the child or young person as well as their parents and carers in our work.
- facilitate regular workshops with parents and carers and our children and young people, seeking their views to help us shape services.
- continue to implement a robust training offer for new and existing professionals and practitioners to improve their understanding of SEND to better identify, assess and meet the needs of children and young people.
- continue to develop and improve the Local Offer website, to make it more accessible for children, young people and their families.
- ensure open communication by publishing regular newsletters for professionals, parents, carers and families.
- continue to publish feedback using the 'You Said, we are doing' approach.
- seek to use evidence of lessons learned from compliments and complaints to make continuous improvements to our services.
- embed a robust practice for multi-agency audits within our system that will review and drive forward improvements, this will include collecting the voice of children, young people and their families.

How we will know we have made a difference...

There will be an increase in families who tell us they are feeling respected and valued.

There will be evidence of children and young people involvement in strategic developments.

Children, young people and their families will be involved in strategic meetings to help shape service improvements and developments.

We will see a reduction in conflict and tribunal action with families via dispute resolution, mediation and tribunals.

Improved feedback mechanisms will demonstrate an increase in satisfaction rates for how we communicate with families.

We will be able to demonstrate increased engagement with families through a range of forums across the system.

All practitioners will know for each child and young person their preference on how they communicate.



Priority 4: A system that makes sense

Our aspiration...

We want our children, young people and their families to have a positive experience when navigating our Area Partnership SEND and Alternative Provision services.

We will...

- recognise the value of the voluntary and community sector; developing a community based approach using their resources to support intervention in schools and settings
- maximise the opportunity to address contextual safeguarding needs for children and young people with SEND. Work alongside colleagues in the police to provide a co-ordinated offer to raise awareness of child criminal exploitation and vulnerability.
- ensure high quality information and advice is available to all families regardless of whether their child has an emerging or identified need.
- have a dedicated support pathway for children and young people that are vulnerable and out of education.
- have clear and accessible information detailing the offer of support for those who have or may have Autism, ADHD and other neurodevelopmental needs.
- have clear and accessible information detailing the offer of support for speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).
- have clear and accessible information for diagnostic pathways.
- clarify and better communicate the criteria for access to services and support on the local offer.
- have rigorous quality assurance that will ensure that service provision is consistent across Telford and Wrekin and meets the needs of the children and young people.
- make sure that Early Help Assessments and the Early Help Support Plan process is used at the right time to support young people and that the right partner agencies are involved.
- ensure that all staff across our local area partnership will know and understand their role in supporting children and young people with SEND, and the role of other professionals in the partnership.
- improve the experience of children and young people going through transitions with support from key workers and navigators.
- use websites and apps including the Local Offer and Healthier Together website to clearly explain the support that is available and how to access it.

How we know we have made a difference...

Children, young people and their parents and carers will tell us that we have a clear and well networked system of consistent and easy to access support services across education, health and care.

All Telford and Wrekin professionals will be able to and be encouraged to access online and face to face learning programmes focusing on inclusion.

There will be an increase in reports of positive experiences for children, young people and their families and referrers in relation to accessing diagnostic pathways.

Children and young people and their families will tell us that things are improving for them and that our plans to support them are of a good quality, meet their needs and are jointly produced with them.

There will be an increase in positive feedback received about the Local Offer.

There will be a reduction in waiting times for services across the partnership.



Priority 5: Data informed and intelligence rich

Our aspiration...

We will ensure that data systems enable key information to be available to all partner services to improve outcomes for children and young people.

We will...

- have a robust Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for SEND and Alternative Provision, demonstrating an understanding of how the whole system is working collectively across the area to forecast, jointly commission and develop effective services for children, young people and their families.
- publish a yearly report demonstrating the impact of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, showing the changes that have been made, identifying where developments are still in process and the actions being undertaken to supporting the changes.
- implement robust tracking and data systems to ensure that provision evolves with changing cohorts and inform strategic planning to better meet the future needs of children and young people.
- develop our SEND and Alternative Provision Local Area Data Dashboard, this will draw on robust multi-agency data to help leaders across the partnership to identify gaps in service to inform joint commissioning decisions.
- implement a framework to ensure that positive outcomes for children and young people are at the heart of commissioning decisions.
- ensure our multi agency approach will link education, social care and health to better protect our SEND and Alternative Provision children and young people who are vulnerable.
- track attainment data across all key stages and provide relevant support and training from services into schools to increase attainment levels.
- improve our capture of attendance data, implementing closer working between SEND services and the Attendance Team by implementing the 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance'.

How we know we have made a difference...

There will be a Local Area data dashboard that will be published regularly and used to report performance to our stakeholders and governance bodies.

There will be clear evidence that data is being used for joint commissioning decisions; recognising changing needs of the population.

There will be an increase in attainment levels for children and young people with SEND.

There will be an increase in attendance at their school or setting for children and young people with SEND.

Those who need services most will receive support in a way that is accessible to them.



Priority 6: Supportive Alternative Provision offer

Our aspiration...

We will develop a continuum of support, including outreach and local Alternative Provision, as well as intervention placements, to enable those young people to be successful in mainstream schools.

We will...

- work with partners in schools to support the development of 'Relational' approaches, alongside high quality first teaching, to better meet the needs of all students in a mainstream environment.
- work with schools and settings to provide a greater range of intervention support.
- work with local area partners to implement a consistent and coherent approach between alternative provision that includes mainstream education, special educational needs provision and services, early help, social care and local health services.
- ensure collective responsibility for fair and equitable access to alternative provision, and the oversight and quality assurance of this provision.
- develop the role of alternative provision in terms of our outreach first approach: identifying a clear strategic plan for inclusion and clear roles for all alternative providers,
- have a focus on resilience for young people attending Alternative Provision to have successful reintegration into mainstream provision.
- ensure specialist provision is in the right locations, including delivering alternative provision in mainstream schools.
- support an improvement in Outcomes for young people in Alternative Provision at Key Stage 4 that will support them into higher education, apprenticeships or employment.
- continue to consider the health needs of those accessing Alternative Provision.

How we know we have made a difference...

There will be an increase in children and young people accessing to Outreach support from Alternative Provision.

There will be an increase in children and young people reengaging in mainstream education.

Our actions will increase the number of children and young people supported in mainstream provision and subsequently into employment and training.

There will be an increase the attainment levels for young people accessing Alternative Provision.

There will be a reduction in modified time-timetables.

There will be a reduction in suspensions and permanent exclusions.

There will be an increase in confidence and awareness about the pathways to access Alternative Provision.



Priority 7: Children and young people feel valued and visible in their community

Our aspiration...

We want all children and young people with SEND and those in Alternative Provision settings to feel welcomed and to live well in their communities.

We will...

- ensure that our facilities are accessible for a range of physical and sensory needs.
- use images and articles in our mainstream corporate communications celebrating inclusivity, equality and diversity.
- always consider the needs of children with SEND in local initiatives.
- continue to work with community teams to raise awareness of SEND to promote inclusivity for all, including leisure services, accessible playgrounds, transport, public buildings, sports facilities, swimming pool hoists, accessible hydrotherapy facilities, Telford Town Park, Library services and community events.
- fully commit to making sure activities and events are inclusive, that children and young people have access to 10 by 10, summer schools and Happy Healthy Active Holiday clubs.
- develop our work with charities and organisations, to ensure there is a vibrant range of high-quality specialist activities and facilities in the community.
- encourage the use of independent travel training and personal transport budgets.
- further enhance our offer and support for children and young people to prepare for adulthood.
- work with all our schools, early years settings, post 16 providers, social care providers, health providers and partners to be welcoming and ensure that children and young people have a sense of belonging – regardless of their gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background or educational need.
- ensure children and young people are supported to communicate in the way or method they choose and feel most comfortable with.

How we know we have made a difference...

Children, young people and families will tell us that their experiences in our local mainstream schools with SEND are positive that they feel they are included, belong and are listened to.

There will be an increase in SEND young people who progress to higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships, supported internships and employment.

There will be a reduction in the number of children and young people who have to travel out of their local community for their education, health and care needs.

There will be increase in positive feedback from children, young people and their families telling us that they learn, contribute to, and take part in all aspects of setting/school/college life.

There will be an increase in children and young people with SEND accessing 10 by 10, Happy Healthy Active Holiday Clubs and summer schools.

There will be an increase in young people accessing Independent Travel Training.



Outcomes Framework

The Outcomes Framework demonstrates our commitment to achieve better outcomes for children and young people. Within the framework we have considered success measures for each outcome and indicators on how these can be collected across the partnership to capture the outcomes for children and young people in Telford & Wrekin.

The framework ensures that children and young people are prepared and supported to develop their skills to live a successful and fulfilling life.

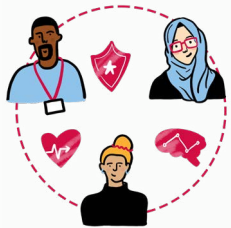
It demonstrates a shared commitment to ensure that children and young people receive inclusive and enabling services, with a focus on raising their aspirations.

How we know we have made a difference...

An outcomes dashboard will be created to track indicators against outcome measures.

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Outcomes



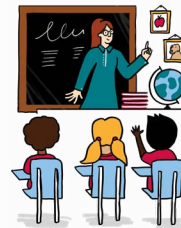
I am healthy



I am safe



I am happy



I am heard



I am friendly



I am independent



I am achieving

I am healthy

When we get this right it looks like:

Children and young people

I am well enough to have a fulfilling life, including carry out activities I enjoy and accessing the community.

I understand my health condition and/or disability

I understand why I have been prescribed my medication.

I make good choices about my diet, sleep and exercise.

I have access to appropriate services when I need them, without having to wait for long periods of time.

My physical and mental health are supported and things are improving or not deteriorating.

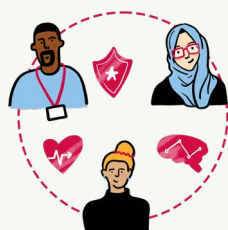
My needs are respected and understood by people at school, and they know how to support me.

I am supported locally, by health professionals, to fully understand my health needs and how to manage them safely in my daily life.

I am supported by a relevant charity for my needs.

My health passport is read by hospital staff so I don't have to repeat myself.

I access my Annual Health Check (if I qualify at 14+)



Parent Carers and Family Carers

I have trust and faith in the professionals who are supporting my child or young person and my family.

I understand my child or young person's health condition and/or disability.

I understand why my child or young person has been prescribed medication and what it is for.

I understand the pathway that my child or young person is accessing to receive treatment or support for their health condition or disability.

I appreciate that everyone is doing the best they can for my child's health and wellbeing.

Professionals

I am confident in using medical equipment, such as wheelchairs, bed equipment, hoists, and aids to help with incontinence, mobility or hearing.

Where appropriate I ensure that community children's nurses help to meet medical needs.

I understand and action continuing care packages when it is appropriate to do so.

I know where to request additional training or support to better understand the health needs of children and young people.

Children's community nurses are available to attend trips or alike, so children and young people don't miss out due to their feeding or medical needs.

I have a clear understanding of how to make links and referrals to services as appropriate to support health and wellbeing.

I feel confident to support the needs of children and families with their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

I am safe

When we get this right it looks like:



Children and young people

I am empowered to make choices that support my safety.

All people who support me receive enough training to know how to really care for me.

All my needs are considered and met.

My physical and mental health is taken seriously and I feel supported.

I feel safe at school, and I am supported if I get bullied.

My home and school are safe environments.

I can move around school on my own.

I can get to school safely.

I have a trusted person I can talk to.

I feel like I belong in my community, at school and when I go out to activities.

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Parent Carers and Family Carers

I help my child get into a good routine, ensuring they go to bed and wake up at a good time for school or setting.

I talk through the school day with them, including playtimes and lunch time making sure my child knows who is collecting them and from where.

I've spoken with my child's nursery/ school/college and am confident they have systems in place to identify my child(ren)'s special education needs and that there is appropriate support for them with their education and with taking part in activities.

My child or young person is never excluded, isolated or discriminated against because of their special education needs or disability.

I understand how to access advice and support if I feel my child or young person is being discriminated against.

Professionals

I work in a safe environment for children and young people with robust safeguarding practices.

There is a designated safeguarding lead teacher responsible for dealing with child protection and I know what to do if I need to raise a concern including to children's social care or to the polices.

I provide education for children and young people that teaches them to be safe.

There are effective procedures in place so that staff and team members, including volunteers, don't pose a risk to children.

All staff are trained, know how to respond to concerns and keep-up-to-date with policy and practice.



I am happy

When we get this right it looks like:

Children and young people

I am a cheerful person.

I am able to access activities and have fun.

I enjoy learning, and I understand my lessons.

I find it easy to be happy.

I am loved and feel appreciated.

I feel satisfied that I can achieve my aspirations (dreams).

I have good self-esteem and feel confident.

I can identify people who make me feel happy.

I have someone I trust to talk to when I am upset or worried.



Parent Carers and Family Carers

I know that the learning attitude that my child arrives at the school gates with each day can directly improve their performance.

I encourage a love of learning.

I make sure they have plenty of sleep and rest.

I encourage them to follow their passion and find their 'super power'

I let them know that it's OK not to be great at everything, some things are not their superpowers and that's OK.

I explain to my child or young person the importance of resilience, failure is a stepping-stone to success - to get good at something you have to start out being bad.

I think happy and I laugh often with my family.

Professionals

I take time to get to know my pupils not only their names but their likes and dislikes and what is going on in their lives.

I greet children and young people appropriately. them all by name when they enter the class.

I make sure that education is provided at the right level for each child, that it is accessible and enjoyable.

I use humour when it's appropriate to do so and make the lessons fun and engaging.

I give lots of praise particularly around highlighting good behaviour. I make sure there is time for play.

I encourage children and young people to be resilient, to support good emotional, mental and physical health.



I am heard

When we get this right it looks like:



Children and young people

I am able to communicate in my preferred way and given a range of ways to express my needs.

The communication and language used around me is easy to understand.

My feelings, thoughts and wishes are heard, understood and respected.

I am listened to by everyone that supports me.

My views are used to make decisions, there is 'no decision about me, without me'.

I understand my options, and they are explained clearly to me.

I am supported to make informed decisions.

I understand the difference my voice can make to influence change, both for myself and for other children and young people.

I understand that I can ask for an advocate to speak for me if I am unable to do so.



Parent Carers and Family Carers

I use active listening techniques with my child or young person, it lets them know I am interested in what they have to say.

I give my full attention to my child; make eye contact and stop other things I am doing; get down on my child's level; and reflect or repeat back what they are saying and what they may be feeling to make sure I understand.

My children know that I am going to listen to them, this makes it more likely they will talk with me about their hopes and problems when they are older.

I support my child or young person to make their decisions, working with them to explain options and review support.

I understand that I can ask for an advocate for both my child, young person or myself if I need someone to speak for my family if I am unable to do so.

I treat professionals working with my family with respect.

Professionals

I think about young people with SEND or attending Alternative Provision as 'experts by experience'.

I deliver child centred services that meet each child and young person's individual needs.

I take time to listen to their feedback and act on what they say.

I develop services that are 'fit for purpose'.

I make sure that all children and young people are treated with respect.

I make sure that all children and young people feel I work with feel listened to, respected and valued.

The young people I work with feel what they say matters; this builds their confidence and self-esteem.

I have an understanding on the Mental Capacity Act.



I am friendly

When we get this right it looks like:

Children and young people

I can make friends and be involved with things my peers do.

I am supported to make connections with my peers if forming friendships is challenging for me.

I have friends to talk to and relax with.

I have people in my life that really care about me.

I have people I can trust to help me.

I can join clubs and teams.

I understand bullying and know where to go for help should I need it.

My transitions are supported.

I feel included in my community - both physically and online.



Parent Carers and Family Carers

I set aside some time every day to talk to my child(ren) about how their day went and what they're expecting from tomorrow.

I help my children to anticipate any tricky situations and plan how they might behave.

I organise meet-ups with other parents and their children.

I am alert to possible signs of bullying and can talk to the school if arguments and upsets seem to be repeating themselves.

I speak to a number of local clubs and charities that offer drop-ins and social groups for children with SEND.

I attend community activities and events with my family and feel included.

Professionals

I take an active role in nurturing, supporting and promoting children's relationships and social skills.

I support children and young people to build positive relationships with others.

I help children to develop 'social competence' and the ability to interact with others with care, empathy and respect.

I am inclusive with all children I work with, including them in all activities and projects together.

I lead class discussions on inclusivity and what it means to be a friend.

I often put buddy systems in place for playtimes and lunchtimes.

I use the preferred pronouns for children and young people.

I am independent

When we get this right it looks like:



Children and young people

I have a range of options for education, employment and where I would like to live.

I have a choice about my future, and my choices are respected.

I can talk about my aspirations for the future, including my career aspirations and where I would like to live.

I am ambitious and want to achieve my goals, such as higher education and employment

I can get to school or college on my own or with friends.

I can travel independently.

My personal hygiene is good.

I am living life to the best of my ability.

I know how to save and manage my money.

I understand how to live a healthy lifestyle.

I understand that I can ask for an advocate to speak for me, if I am unable to do so.



Parent Carers and Family Carers

I feel part of our community and receive good information and advice about the range of local provision available.

I feel secure about our support options and after having met with our education, health and care providers.

I feel confident in their ability to support my family with appropriate resources available to them should my child or young person's needs change.

I encourage my child or young person to consider their aspirations and talk about their future career options including higher education, volunteering and employment.

I encourage my child or young person to think about how they can prepare to live independently.

I encourage my child or young person to think about how they can build relationships, friendships and access support in their local community.

Professionals

I know the support team around the child or young person and their family and ensure that their is clearly heard and respected.

I actively coordinate next steps with families, particularly for those with the most complex needs.

I input into the transition to adult services for young people with SEND to reduce the possibility of a "cliff-edge".

I work with the child, young person and their family to access assessments and services that they require, including support through transition and accurate referrals.

I encourage children and young people to be ambitious and talk about their aspirations.

I encourage children and young people to prepare for adulthood, including looking for opportunities in employment, volunteering and higher education.



I am achieving

When we get this right it looks like:

Children and young people

My achievements are celebrated and I feel valued.

All of my achievements are recognised, no matter how small they may seem to others.

I am working towards realistic goals in my future. I have a good work/life balance.

I have a sense of success and I know it is okay to make mistakes or fail.

I have a range of career or education options, my education/ qualifications are not limited.

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Parent Carers and Family Carers

I help my child or young person focus on their goals without putting too much pressure on them.

I get support from school to help my child or young person to study well and at the same time balance their academic work with all the other important things in their life.

My child or young person has a clear pathway to achieving their goals and knows who will help them on this journey.

My child or young person feels accepted, valued and equal.

Professionals

I encourage my pupils to achieve their goals by acting on what they learn in and outside class.

I am ambitious for all children and young people that I work with.

I recognise what an appropriate level of challenge looks like for each individual child or young person.

I make sure that I adapt and tailor learning opportunities and support for individuals

I talk to young people about real life examples of how people have what turned academic achievement into personal accomplishment.

I motivate children and young people to achieve their goals.

I help children and young people achieve success for themselves and do things and be part of things that benefit others.



Working together for better outcomes

Working together charter

+ priorities

=

Outcomes



- 1 Localised high-quality provision
- 2 Early identification and help
- 3 Participate in decisions
- 4 A system that makes sense
- 5 Data informed and intelligence rich
- 6 Supportive alternative provision offer
- 7 Children and young people feel valued and visible in their community

- 1 I am healthy
- 2 I am safe
- 3 I am happy
- 4 I am heard
- 5 I am friendly
- 6 I am independent
- 7 I am achieving



Using the voice of the child and young person to continually improve.

How we will deliver our priorities and outcomes

Strategic Delivery: Across Social Care, Education and Health

Professionals across Telford and Wrekin understand that for us to deliver cohesive, holistic support to our children and families we must work together with the child's or young person's aspirations and needs at the centre of our efforts.

To enable this we are dedicated to working together for better outcomes, through embedding the priorities in this strategy into service and delivery plans.

Local Area Partnership Governance

To monitor the effective delivery of our strategy the **SEND and Alternative Provision action plan** will be overseen by the SEND Partnership Board.

The SEND Partnership Board is attended by representatives from education, health, care, young people and parent carers.

Reviewing and monitoring our strategy

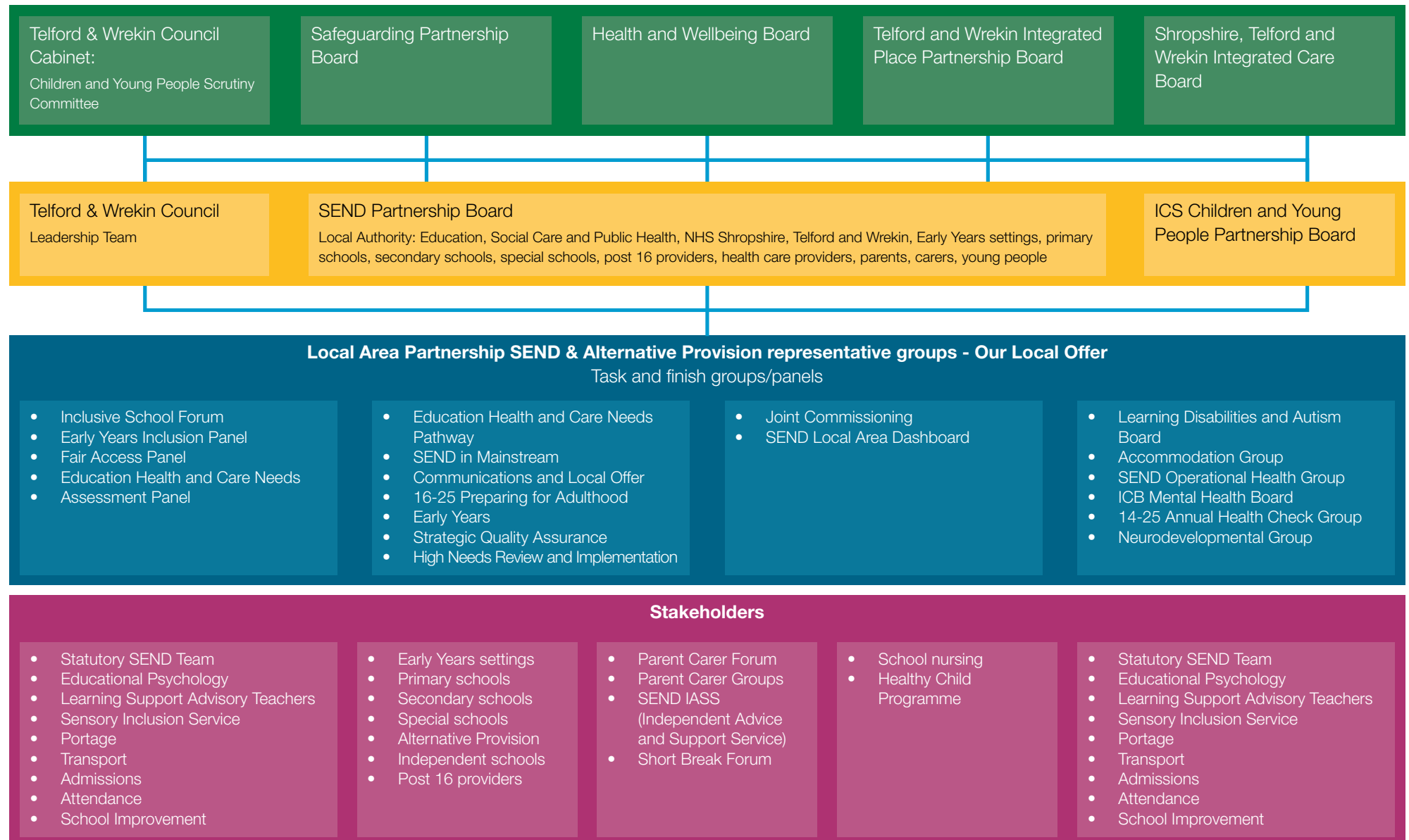
The SEND and Alternative Provision Action Plan tracks and monitors projects that support implementation and developments across the partnership. The Action plan will be regularly updated, presented to SEND and Alternative Provision Partnership Board and published on the SEND Local Offer.

The Strategy and Action Plan will sit alongside our local area SEND and Alternative Provision self-evaluation framework which supports our continuous journey of self-improvement.

We have the ambition to continually ensure that the area partnership has arrangements that lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people and that we are taking action where improvements are needed.

We will ensure to maintain open communication across the partnership, to continually feedback through the 'you said, we are doing' approach, being honest and transparent about the improvements we are able to implement and the challenges we may face.

Local Area Partnership Governance and Oversight Functions



Local Offer for Special Educational Needs and Disability

Discover all you need to know about education, health and care services in Telford & Wrekin. www.telfordsend.org.uk

On the Local Offer website you can find information and advice about services, support and activities for children and young people aged 0-25 with special educational needs and disabilities all in one place.



Find clear and accessible advice, information and support on...

SCAN WITH YOUR
SMART PHONE...



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A central infographic grid with a cartoon character in a yellow shirt and green shorts giving a thumbs up. The grid is divided into four colored sections: blue (top left), orange (top right), yellow (bottom left), and green (bottom right).

- Blue section:** 'Leisure, fun and short breaks activities' with a butterfly icon. Below it, a signpost with three arrows pointing to 'Personal Budgets' (with a document icon), 'Health Services' (with a stethoscope icon), and 'Travel Assistance'.
- Orange section:** 'Specialist services including education health and care plans' with icons of a globe, a nurse, and a heart.
- Yellow section:** 'Mental Health and Wellbeing' with a sun icon. Below it, 'Social care' with a heart icon and 'Preparing for Adulthood' with a plant icon.
- Green section:** 'How schools support special educational needs' with a paper airplane icon. Below it, 'FAQ's for Parent, Carers and Families' with a speech bubble icon and 'Local offer for Young People' with an icon of a person on a spring.

A 'SEND Newsletter' icon is also present in the green section.

to visit

<https://www.telfordsend.org.uk/site/index.php>

Area SEND inspection of Telford and Wrekin Local Area Partnership

Inspection dates: 20 to 24 March 2023

Dates of previous inspection: 22 to 26 May 2017

Inspection outcome

The local area partnership's arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The local area partnership is taking action where improvements are needed.

The next full Area SEND inspection will be within approximately 5 years.

Ofsted and CQC ask that the local area partnership updates and publishes its strategic plan based on the recommendations set out in this report.

Information about the local area partnership

Telford and Wrekin Council and NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care Board (NHS ST&W ICB) are jointly responsible for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Telford and Wrekin.

There has been stability in the senior leadership of Telford and Wrekin's SEND services since the last inspection. The partnership is well established. The commissioning of health services changed across England in 2022. On 1 July 2022, NHS ST&W ICB became responsible for the commissioning of health services in Telford and Wrekin.

Alternative provision across the local area is delivered via a number of providers, including schools and academy trusts. Area leaders oversee the commissioning of placements in alternative provision.

What is it like to be a child or young person with SEND in this area?

Children and young people with SEND are visible, valued and included in the Telford and Wrekin community. For example, the voices of children and young people, and their parents, are sought during the statutory assessment process. As a result, education, health and care (EHC) plans capture the interests, thoughts and feelings of the child or young person clearly. Area leaders check the quality of these plans to ensure consistency. EHC plans are issued in a timely manner.

Children and young people appreciate the wide range of accessible services and activities available to them. They have enjoyed some impressive recent initiatives, such as the 'ten by ten' project and successful holiday schemes organised by Parents Opening Doors, a local parent carer forum. The Autism Hub organises a weekly drop-in session where children and young people can mix with their peers while their parents enjoy a coffee. These activities help children and young people to feel included in the local area. However, some activities have become so popular that they are oversubscribed. Not all parents and carers are clear about the options that their children can access.

Children and young people with SEND benefit from effective joined-up working between education, health and social care providers. This is particularly strong in the early years. Partners also work together well to prevent any unnecessary hospital admissions for those children and young people who are supported through the dynamic support register process. As a result of effective partnership working, children and young people's needs are typically identified and assessed quickly and accurately. Hence, the right help is put into place to meet their evolving needs.

Some children and young people with SEND wait too long for health assessments, such as mental health and neurodevelopmental assessments. This leads to frustration and delays for children and young people and their families. In response to this, area leaders of provider NHS services have put into place some creative solutions to address a range of issues. These include meeting children's needs while they wait for health services. This is known as 'waiting well'.

Children and young people who require physical adaptations to attend a mainstream education setting benefit from a joined-up approach between occupational therapy, physiotherapy services and education providers. Schools and settings speak positively about the help and support available to them. This includes the education psychology service, the learning support advisory team and the virtual school.

Children and young people who attend specialist provision benefit from a system where they are continually assessed. If it is in their best interests, a child or young person with SEND will transfer to a mainstream school that is more fitting to their needs. This fluidity between specialist settings and hubs in mainstream schools is supported by effective transition. This helps children and young people to transfer successfully back into mainstream education.

What is the area partnership doing that is effective?

- Area leaders evaluate themselves accurately and are continuing to make improvements to the provision for children and young people with SEND and their families. Partners work together well and have the passion, determination and commitment to develop the care and provision for children and young people with SEND even further.
- Leaders have developed the 'belonging strategy' to improve the educational experience for children and young people with SEND. The strategy is underpinned by the work of the behaviour support advisory team and the effective use of alternative provision. Alternative provision is used as an 'intervention and not respite'. Leaders and staff are committed to provide those at risk of exclusion with the strategies needed to remain in mainstream education, wherever possible. As a result, the belonging strategy has a positive impact on reintegrating children and young people with SEND back into mainstream settings. Consequently, this has reduced the number of suspensions and exclusions in primary and secondary schools.
- The area has a multi-layered approach to addressing any concerns around absence levels for all children and young people, including those with SEND. This is having a positive impact on rates of attendance. Area leaders closely monitor young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Effective systems help to support these young people to return to a suitable placement. As a result, the number of young people with SEND who are NEET is below the national average.
- Area leaders listen to and act on the views of parents and carers. For example, additional provision for young people with SEND was set up within an existing educational setting, following feedback from a parent group. Also, area leaders responded to concerns raised around transport by making relevant changes. Typically, parent groups believe that area leaders listen and respond to their views.
- In response to the significant increase in demand for speech and language therapy, a system-wide plan has been implemented acknowledging that all partners have a role to play in supporting children to develop their speech, language and communication skills. There is a range of provision available for families and professionals to access while awaiting assessment. These include training programmes to enhance knowledge and skills for those working directly with children and young people with SEND. The redesign of the service delivery has supported a reduction in waiting times and there is a comprehensive action plan to remedy this further.
- Children and young people receive a wide and effective range of support from social care at an individual level. For example, area leaders provided an opportunity for young adults to 'flat share' to promote independence and maintain friendships. Support from social care has been strengthened to ensure that it is

equally strong at the early intervention stage as it is for children and young people known to the children with disabilities team. There is a broad range of respite opportunities in the community for families to enjoy, with additional capacity being developed. The hiatus caused by national factors resulted in more limited respite provision, but area leaders responded to this. For example, they increased the use of foster care to fill the gap.

- Young people with SEND who access further education and skills (FES) settings experience a well-planned transition process. This includes having their needs identified and assessed accurately in a timely manner. This enables the young person to settle well. In some FES settings there are different tiers of provision for young people depending on the complexity of their need. In FES, effective partnership working supports young people with SEND to achieve well. For example, some young people with SEND move into supported internships, voluntary work or paid employment.
- Area leaders identified that, at the end of Year 11, outcomes for pupils with SEND in English and mathematics are lower than national outcomes. In response to this, they are now working more closely with secondary schools and keeping a closer eye on pupils' progress. In addition, the belonging strategy is helping to keep pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs in mainstream schools. This means that more pupils with SEND are now transitioning into post-16 education and training.

What does the area partnership need to do better?

- There has been an absence of robust oversight of health services for children and young people with SEND by NHS ST&W ICB. Consequently, the commissioning of some services does not meet the current demand and actions to address the situation have not moved sufficiently at pace. NHS ST&W ICB knows that more needs to be done to monitor, adapt and respond to the growing demand for a range of health services. They are looking to find sustainable solutions so that the needs of children and young people with SEND can be continually met. For example, a number of health services have closely scrutinised their operating models and secured additional funding to implement waiting list reduction initiatives.
- Some parents and carers are not aware of the advice, help and support that are on offer to them to support the needs of their child. There is a disconnect between the actual provision for children and young people with SEND and the experiences of some families in the local area.
- Some parents and carers are concerned about their child's next steps when they reach 18 if they are not in specialist education. Area leaders are continuing to develop the working relationship between adult and children's services. If the young person is known to the children with disabilities team, transition from children's services to adult social care typically works well. Area leaders have recently created the role of SEND champions, which is starting to ensure greater

consistency in practice across all services to support transition into adulthood.

- Area leaders provide parents and carers with useful support and guidance when applying for a personal budget. This works particularly well in the children with disabilities service. However, some parents would value more services to spend their budget on and do not find the process straightforward.
- Currently, how the voices of children and young people are heard and acted on at a strategic level is in its infancy. Area leaders have supported the development of the Shout Out for SEND (SOS) group, which is made up of a 'small but mighty' group of children and young people with SEND. However, their reach and impact are still growing.

Areas for improvement

Leaders from NHS ST&W ICB need to work closely with other partnership leaders to improve the governance, monitoring and oversight of diagnostic pathways (including neurodevelopmental, mental health and speech and language therapy assessments) for children and young people with SEND, so that their needs are assessed and met consistently well and in a timely manner.

Partnership leaders should improve communication with families, beyond the formal consultation routes, to share effective information and advice about the provision available to children and young people with SEND.

Local area partnership details

Local Authority	Integrated Care Board
Telford and Wrekin Council	NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care Board (NHS ST&W ICB)
Jo Britton, Director of Children and Adult Services	Tracey Jones, Deputy Director of Partnerships
www.telford.gov.uk	www.shropshiretelfordandwrekin.ics.nhs.uk
Telford and Wrekin Council Addenbroke House Ironmasters Way Telford West Midlands TF3 4NT	NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Halesfield 6 Telford West Midlands TF7 4BF

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out at the request of the Secretary of State for Education under section 20(1)(a) of the Children Act 2004.

The inspection was led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted, with a team of inspectors, including: two HMI from education and social care; a lead Children's Services Inspector from the Care Quality Commission (CQC); and another Children's Services Inspector from CQC.

Inspection team

Ofsted

Chris Pollitt, Ofsted HMI, Lead Inspector
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Louise Hocking, Ofsted HMI
Helen Forrest, Ofsted HMI

Care Quality Commission

Kaye Goodfellow, CQC Lead Inspector
Rebecca Hogan, CQC Inspector

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Claire Coutinho MP

Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing

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tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfes

Shaun Davis, Leader of the Council
Jo Britton, Director of Children's Services
Gareth Robinson, Executive Lead, ICB

26 July 2023

Dear Shaun, Jo and Gareth,

Ofsted and Care Quality Commission Area SEND inspection report

I would like to congratulate you on the recent findings in your Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection report, published on 3rd July 2023.

I have taken a close interest in the inspection outcome and I am pleased to see how actions taken by leaders across the local area partnership have directly led to such positive outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

I was especially encouraged to read that "redesign of the speech and language therapy service delivery has supported a reduction in waiting times", that the "multi-layered approach to absence levels has led to the number of young people with SEND who are NEET being below the national average" and that "a well-planned transition process is in place for young people with SEND who access further education and skills". I was also encouraged to read that "alternative provision is used as an intervention and not respite" and that "a wide and effective range of social care support is available at individual level and has been strengthened at the early intervention stage".

I am grateful for the hard work of the partnership in achieving these and I ask that you look at effective ways to share your best practice with other local area leaders, the Department and NHS England.

I also noted that your report highlighted two areas for improvement including closer working with other partnership leaders to improve the diagnostic pathways and improving communication with families beyond the formal routes.

Given the successes that the partnership has already achieved, I have every confidence that you as leaders will take the action required to bring about the recommended improvements to your SEND services.

Ofsted and CQC have asked that you update your local area partnership SEND Strategic Plan within 30 working days of the report publication date, and my officials and NHS England colleagues are already supporting you in this process. Once updated, please publish your updated Strategic Plan on the local authority's and other relevant organisations' websites.

Sue Creese as your Case Lead will continue to be your main contact with the Department, and Deborah Ward will be your contact at NHS England.

I look forward to hearing of your continued commitment to improving SEND services to build on the great successes yourselves and your colleagues have already achieved.

I am copying this letter to David Sidaway, Chief Executive, Natalie Bevan, Service Delivery Manager: SEND & Personalisation, Education and Skills and to local MPs, Lucy Allan and Mark Pritchard.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Claire Coutinho', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Claire Coutinho MP
Minister of State for Children, Families and Wellbeing



Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough

Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

21 September 2023

Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Support Policy

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Shirley Reynolds - Cabinet Member: Early Years, Children & Young People
Lead Director:	Darren Knibbs - Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support
Service Area:	Children's Safeguarding & Family Support
Report Author:	Kelly Burgess – SDM: Fostering, Adoption and Permanence
Officer Contact Details:	Tel: 01952 380353 Email: Kelly.Burgess@telford.gov.uk
Wards Affected:	All Wards
Key Decision:	Key Decision
Forward Plan:	23 August 2023
Report considered by:	SMT – 22 August 2023 Business Briefing – 7 September 2023 Cabinet – 21 September 2023

1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting:

Cabinet is asked to:

- 1.1 Approve the updated Special Guardianship Order (SGO) support policy attached at Appendix A of this report; and
- 1.2 Delegate authority to Director: Children's Safeguarding and Family Support, following consultation with the Cabinet Member: Early Years, Children & Young People, to implement the policy with immediate effect.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 In 2000, a review into adoption arrangements for children recognised that adoption is not suitable for all children. However, foster care is not always the best option for caring for a child as it does not always provide a sense of security or permanence for the child or young person.
- 2.2 It is recognised that Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) provide the permanence of a 'forever family' for a child or young person by ensuring that there is a legal arrangement in place, approved by the Court, which cannot be revoked without the court's agreement.
- 2.3 The purpose of this report is to set out the support available to Special Guardians so that when it is considered to be an appropriate care arrangement for a child/young person, foster carers are encouraged to become Special Guardians, knowing that there is long-term support available to them and to the child. This gives children the security of a long-term placement, so they know which adults they will live with and who will be responsible for them when they cannot live with their birth parents and, hopefully, with Special Guardians who were previously their foster carers and so also providing consistency.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 A Special Guardianship Order, introduced by the Adoption and Children Act 2002, is a private law order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's 'special guardian' and is intended to provide a permanent arrangement for children where adoption might not be appropriate, for example where there may be cultural difficulties with adoption or where children require permanence but retain a strong bonded relationship with their birth families and are not able to live with them.
- 3.2 It is considered to be a more secure order than a Child Arrangements Order because a parent cannot apply to discharge it unless they have the permission of the court to do so. It does not end the legal relationship between the child and his/her birth parents that adoption does.
- 3.3 The Special Guardianship Guidance for Local Authorities states that an SGO:-
 - gives the carer clear responsibility for all aspects of caring for the child and for taking the decisions to do with their upbringing. The child will no longer be looked after by the local authority
 - provides a firm foundation on which to build a lifelong permanent relationship between the child and their carer

SGO Support Policy

- is legally secure
- preserves the basic link between the child and their birth family
- is accompanied by access to a full range of support services, including where appropriate, financial support.

3.4 An SGO gives a greater share of parental responsibility to the Special Guardian(s), who can exercise that parental responsibility to the exclusion of others with parental responsibility (other than another Special Guardian to the child). A Special Guardian is usually someone with a close relationship to the child, such as a family member, former foster carer or family friend. This gives them day-to-day control in respect of decisions about a child (which school they go to, medical consent, authority to take abroad (for up to three months unless agreed otherwise by the court)).

3.5 Birth parents continue to retain shared parental responsibility. This means that children can continue to have links with their birth parents, if it is appropriate to do so.

3.6 The local authority has a statutory duty to make provision for a range of services to support people impacted by a Special Guardianship Order. This includes support for the child or young person, as well as support for the Special Guardian(s) and can include financial support, training, advice and information.

3.7 The current SGO policy in place in Telford & Wrekin includes, amongst other things, the following support:-

- A child-related allowance (minus the equivalent of child benefit) until the child is 18 years old (or if they are disabled, until the young person has completed their secondary education and this is after their 18th birthday). This is means tested for private applications when the child has not previously been in local authority care.
- Former foster carers continue to receive the equivalent to their fostering fee for 2 years
- Access to specialist SGO support workers who can provide emotional support, advice and guidance to all Special Guardians
- Annual SGO reviews
- Access to the Adoption Support Fund for children who were previously looked after by the local authority (see 3.9)
- Access to a needs-led assessment from the local authority to consider requests for things such as respite or financial support
- Support to access funding from agencies, such as DLA/PIP
- Access to support from the Virtual School for children who were previously fostered, including Pupil Premium funding

- Ongoing training that is also available to foster carers and some bespoke training to Special Guardians
- Bi-monthly SGO forums
- Newsletters

3.8 This policy includes the following additional support:-

- Former foster carers continue to receive the equivalent to their fostering fee until the child is 18 years old (or until the young person has completed their secondary education and this is after their 18th birthday, regardless of their disability status)
- Eligibility for leaving care grants to the young person (setting up home grant and education grant)

This means that former foster carers and children previously in the care of the local authority continue to receive financial support that they would have been eligible for had they remained in foster care.

3.9 As well as the support above, children who have previously been in the care of the local authority and then become subject to an SGO are eligible for funding from the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). The ASF provides funds to local authorities to pay for essential therapeutic services for eligible adoptive and special guardianship order (SGO) families. This funding provides up to £2,500 per child per year for specialist assessment and £5,000 per child per year for therapy. In 2022-2023, £74,299 was accessed from the ASF to fund assessments or therapies for children subject to an SGO. This subsequently enables the Council to use their resources better to support those children and families who cannot access the ASF.

3.10 In the current year, as of 17 August 2023, there have been 9 SGOs granted. Of these:-

- 3 children were previously fostered by 2 Family & Friends carer families
- 2 children were previously fostered by 2 mainstream (not Family & Friends ie the children were not previously known to the carers) foster carers
- and 4 were private applications by 2 families.

3.11 As at 17 August 2023, there are 24 assessments that are ongoing, of which:-

- 10 are with Family & Friends foster carers;
- 4 are with internal mainstream (not Family & Friends) foster carers;
- and 10 are private applications.

3.12 Given the impact that an SGO has on the child or young person and the long-term benefits of being able to provide a permanent arrangement for them, Telford & Wrekin Council has been promoting SGOs with foster carers (birth family and friends carers, as well as mainstream foster carers). This activity has seen an increase in the numbers of foster carers who have notified us that they would like

to apply for an SGO. It is anticipated that the proposed policy will help to further increase the number of SGOs.

- 3.13 For children who are placed with external foster carers, an SGO will mean that the carer continues to be paid the fee and allowance for the duration of the child's minority and the local authority agency fee (to the Independent Fostering Agency) will cease, creating a saving.

4.0 Summary of main proposals

- 4.1 The draft policy attached at **Appendix A** to this report again sets out the support available to both children and Special Guardians. The only substantive change to the policy in this updated version is in respect of the financial support available to Special Guardians. It is proposed that Special Guardians will continue to receive financial support equivalent to both the foster carer fee (for former foster carers) and the child-related fostering allowance until the child reaches the age of 18 years old even if this extends beyond the current 2 year period. In the event that the child or young person is disabled and/or previously looked after, the child-related allowance will continue until they have completed their secondary education i.e. potentially, beyond 18 years of age.
- 4.2 The proposal is that the local authority will take into consideration all child-related benefits i.e. child tax credits, that are available to the Special Guardian (unless the Special Guardian is in receipt of Income Support or Pension Credits) and encourage Special Guardians to claim for universal benefits (Universal Credit). The local authority will support Special Guardians in applying for this benefits and these will be taken into consideration and the payment made by the local authority reduced by the same sum paid to the Special Guardian in benefits.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that, making this significant change to the financial support available will encourage foster carers to consider becoming Special Guardians as they will not face a financial disbenefit if they cease being a foster carer to become a Special Guardian instead. In turn, this will enable the Council to provide better long-term outcomes for children who are not able to live with their families by ensuring they have a forever family.

5.0 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Cabinet could choose not to approve and implement the updated policy and continue to operate under the existing policy. However, this will not encourage individuals to put themselves forward to be considered as a Special Guardian, meaning fewer children will have the stability of a legally secure placement.

6.0 Key Risks

- 6.1 The success of this policy could result in a reduction in the number of foster carers available. However, this is mitigated by the continued recruitment activity for new foster carers. Additionally, an SGO will not be in the best interests of all children so it is not envisaged that all foster carers will move to become Special Guardians.

7.0 Council Priorities

- 7.1 The proposals contained in this report support the Council's priority to ensure that every child, young person and adult lives well in their community.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 It is anticipated that the direct financial implications associated with these proposals will be cost neutral. This is because the existing fees payable to foster carers that would be paid if a child remained in foster care will be payable to the Special Guardian instead. There may be a slight cost saving by the removal of agency costs for any children who are placed with external foster carers i.e. with independent fostering agencies who then become subject to a Special Guardianship Order.
- 8.2 There may be less demand placed on fostering social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers and other staff if there are fewer children being looked after through foster care arrangements which, in turn, may result in some reduced costs in this respect. However, it should be noted that there continues to be significant demand on children's services and so any cost reduction may serve to offset the costs associated with increased demand.
- 8.3 There may be a slight cost saving delivered as a result of children subject to an SGO being able to access funding from the Adoption Support Fund for assessments or therapies, rather than from the local authority if they were to remain in local authority care.

9.0 Legal and HR Implications

- 9.1 The Council is required, under the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005, Adoption and Children Act 2002 and Special Guardianship Guidance (January 2017) to provide support to those wishing to become Special Guardians. The proposals contained in this report, and Appendix A meet the statutory requirements

10.0 Ward Implications

- 10.1 There are no ward implications.

11.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

- 11.1 It is anticipated that children currently in the care of the local authority will be able to enjoy a permanent option to their care and that existing foster carers will no longer be discouraged from applying for an SGO due to financial detriment. The foster carers who take out an SGO will continue to receive the same income as they did when they were a foster carer for that child.
- 11.2 Children who are in the care of the local authority prior to the SGO being granted (and over the age of 11 years) will also be eligible for some elements of leaving

care provision that they would have been eligible for had they remained in the care of the local authority and therefore they will not be unduly disadvantaged.

12.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

12.1 This policy is intended to apply a no detriment offer to foster carers who then obtain an SGO, so that they will continue to receive the same financial support (taking any child related benefits into account).

12.2 Children who are currently in care and then exit local authority care as a result of obtaining an SGO will no longer have the stigma of being a child in care and will also no longer have numerous visits and meetings with social workers (child's social worker, fostering social worker, Independent Reviewing Officer) associated with being in care (the Special Guardians will still be able to seek support from the SGO support workers and have an annual review).

13.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

13.1 There are no climate change and environmental implications.

14.0 Background Papers

None

15.0 Appendices

A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Support Policy

16.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Legal	07/08/2023	25/08/2023	AL
Finance	07/08/2023	13/09/2023	TD
Director	24/08/2023	30/08/2023	DK

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Children's Safeguarding & Family Support

Special Guardianship Support Policy

Special Guardianship Support Policy

Title	Name of Policy
Purpose/scope	The policy offers a framework that ensures consistent support to Special Guardians and offers a no detriment financial support to existing foster carers applying for an SGO. This policy is underpinned by the aim to identify permanence arrangements for children and support families to enable children to not be in local authority care when it is appropriate.
Subject key words	Support Services, Special Guardianship, Parental Responsibility, finance, legal
Council Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • every child, young person and adult lives well in their community • a community-focussed, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services.
Lead author & contact details	<p>Jan Bright, Quality Assurance and Strategic Lead for Permanence</p> <p>Kelly Burgess, Service Delivery Manager Fostering, Adoption and Permanence Kelly.Burgess@telford.gov.uk</p>
Date Established	September 2023
Date of Next Review	September 2025
Service Improvement & Efficiency Validation	Cabinet
Legal Sign Off	
Finance Sign Off	
Approver	Director: Children’s Safeguarding and Family Support

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1. Introduction

Every child needs a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. Special Guardianship is one way of providing this when children cannot live with their birth parents but without the severance from the birth family as in adoption.

The purpose of this policy is to provide information to practitioners, Special Guardians, and prospective Special Guardians about the support available when a child is subject to a Special Guardianship Order.

2. What is Special Guardianship

A Special Guardianship Order is an order made by the court to appoint one or more people to be a child's 'Special Guardian'. It is intended for those children who cannot live with their birth parents and who would benefit from a legally secure placement.

Special Guardians are granted parental responsibility for the child and, although parents retain their parental responsibility, this is limited as the Special Guardianship Order allows the Special Guardian(s) to make the day-to-day decisions for the child without seeking consent from the parents or anyone else with parental responsibility for the child (apart from another Special Guardian). However, it does not end the legal relationship between the child and their birth parents.

Parental responsibility refers to the rights, duties, powers, and responsibilities that the law says a parent has in relation to a child. This includes things such as making decisions regarding which school to attend or having responsibility for clothing and feeding a child.

However, the parents retain the right to consent or not to the child's adoption or placement for adoption. In addition, there are certain steps in a child's life, which require the consent of everyone with parental responsibility or the permission of the court, for example:

- Causing the child to be known by a different surname
- Removing the child from the United Kingdom for longer than three months

The court may, at the time of making the Special Guardianship Order, give permission for the child to be known by a new surname and/or to be removed from the United Kingdom for longer than three months, either generally or for specified purposes.

Despite the overriding power that Special Guardians have, parents and others with parental responsibility should be consulted on issues such as internal United Kingdom relocation and major medical procedures. Parents can make an application to the family court for a specific issue order to challenge the decision of a Special Guardian.

3. Who can apply?

The people listed below can apply for a Special Guardianship Order providing that they are 18 years of age or older:

- A person who is already the child's legal guardian;
- Anyone the child lives with because of a Child Arrangements Order (CAO);
- A relative with whom the child has lived with for a period of at least one year immediately prior to the application being made;
- A local authority foster parent with whom the child has lived for a period of at least one year immediately prior to the application being made;
- Anyone who has the agreement of anyone named in a CAO as someone who the child will live with;
- Anyone the child has lived with for a period of at least three out of five years;
- Where the child is in care, anyone who has the local authority's consent; and
- Anyone who has consent from those with parental responsibility.

Other people require the permission of the court to make an application for a Special Guardianship Order and permission must be granted prior to the prospective Special Guardian informing the local authority of their intention to apply.

Telford and Wrekin Council encourages all prospective Special Guardians to attend one of the Telford and Wrekin Special Guardianship workshops prior to notifying the local authority of their intention to apply for an order. The workshops are designed to provide information about the implications of the order and provide an opportunity for prospective Special Guardians to ask questions. However, this does not replace the need to obtain independent legal advice.

4. How to apply for Special Guardianship

Notice of intention to apply

All prospective Special Guardians must give the relevant local authority three months' notice of their intention to apply for a Special Guardianship Order. This will need to be made in writing and include the names of everyone wishing to become a Special Guardian and the name of the child/ren. The relevant local authority is the local authority where the child resides, or the local authority responsible for placing the child if the child is in its care.

On receipt of a notice, or if the court makes a request, the local authority must investigate and prepare a report to the court about the suitability of the applicants to become Special Guardians. Under section 14A-F of the Children Act 1989, as amended ("the Act"), the local authority must make arrangements for the provision of Special Guardianship support services which includes consideration of whether or not to provide any form of financial support (see section 8).

For children who are in the care of the local authority and subject to a Care Order or Interim Care Order, the prospective Special Guardian will need to notify, in writing, the child's social worker or their fostering social worker of their intention to apply for an order. Telford and Wrekin's legal services will submit the application to the court upon receipt of the completed Special Guardianship assessment, support plan, and any other documents required by the court. Alternatively, the prospective Special Guardians may make their own application to the court. The court cannot grant a Special Guardianship Order without an assessment from the local authority.

The SGO support plan outlines the support available to the Special Guardians and is presented to the court along with the assessment report (see section 6).

For children who are not known to the local authority i.e. not in care, or when the local authority is not in support of an application, anyone wishing to apply for Special Guardianship will need to notify the local authority of their intention to apply three months in advance of making the application to the court. This notification needs to be made in writing to Family Connect at familyconnect@telford.gov.uk. The prospective Special Guardian will also need to tell anyone named in existing court proceedings or orders regarding the child of their plan to make an application. They will be required to attend a Mediation, Information and Assessment Meeting (MIAM) prior to making an application unless they are exempt from this requirement (see <https://www.gov.uk/apply-special-guardian/apply> for further information). A MIAM is an individual meeting between a parent and an accredited mediator.

Prospective Special Guardians may wish to instruct their own solicitor to make the application and represent them in the court proceedings. The court cannot grant a Special Guardianship Order without an assessment from the local authority.

5. The circumstances in which a Special Guardianship Order may be made.

The court could make a Special Guardianship Order in any family proceedings concerning the welfare of a child. This applies where no application has been made and includes adoption proceedings. However, the court **must** be in receipt of a report from the local authority in order to grant an order although it is not bound by the recommendations of the report (see section 6).

In practice, where care proceedings are underway, the permission of the court and usual three months' notice period are often not required by the court so as to minimise delay for the child and secure positive living arrangements for a child at the earliest opportunity. A prospective Special Guardian is likely to have undergone a viability assessment (initial consideration of whether the person/s are potentially a realistic option to care for the child until they reach adulthood), undertaken by the local authority, which will have gathered some of the required information and therefore the local authority is required to undertake the Special Guardianship assessment in a shorter period of time.

Prospective Special Guardians may wish to instruct their own solicitor to make the application and represent them in the court proceedings.

6. Preparing the Report for the court

The social worker or social workers preparing the court report should be suitably qualified and experienced. There are no specific requirements as to the level of qualification or experience required and it will be for the manager of the relevant social work team to ensure that the allocated worker is competent to write the report.

In all cases there will need to be:

- An assessment of the current and likely future needs of the child (including any harm the child has suffered and any risk of future harm posed by the child's parents, relatives or any other person the local authority considers relevant).
- An assessment of the prospective Special Guardian's parenting capacity including:
 - Their understanding of, and ability to meet, the child's current and likely future needs, particularly any needs the child may have arising from harm that the child has suffered;
 - Their understanding of, and ability to protect the child from, any current or future risk of harm posed by the child's parents, relatives or any other person

the local authority consider relevant, particularly in relation to contact between any such person and the child;

- Their ability and suitability to bring up the child until the child reaches the age of eighteen; and
- An assessment of the proposed family time arrangements and the support needs of the child, parents, and the prospective Special Guardian.

The assessment of the applicants will include a medical completed by their General Practitioner, a check with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), employment references, education checks for any child living in the household, personal references, and any other checks the local authority believe are necessary to complete the assessment and support plan. Prospective Special Guardians will be asked to provide written consent prior to checks being undertaken.

7. Support

Who is responsible for providing support?

The local authority must make arrangements for the provision of a range of support services in their area to meet the needs of people affected by Special Guardianship.

Special Guardianship support services are defined as:

- Financial support;
- Services that enable groups of children that are the subject of a Special Guardianship Order (or where such an Order is being formally considered), Special Guardians, prospective Special Guardians, and parents of the child to discuss matters relating to Special Guardianship;
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to family time between the child and their parents or relatives or any other person with whom the child has a relationship that the local authority considers to be beneficial to the welfare of the child;
- Therapeutic services for the child;
- Assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between the child and their Special Guardian or their prospective Special Guardian, including training so that the Special Guardian or prospective Special Guardian is able to meet any special needs of the child; respite care; and mediation in relation to matters relating to Special Guardianship Orders; and
- Counselling, advice, and information.

Support services should not be seen in isolation from universal services, and it is important to ensure that families are assisted in accessing universal services and are aware of their entitlements to benefits.

The local authority has responsibility for the assessment and provision of services for the child, the Special Guardian and any children of the Special Guardian living in their area. However, where the child was previously in the care of the local authority, the local authority where the child was last looked after is responsible for the assessment and provision of services for a period of three years. Thereafter, the local authority where the Special Guardian now lives will take on this responsibility.

If a child is not in the care of a local authority, the local authority where the Special Guardian lives has the responsibility for assessing and providing support services. This includes assessment and any support that is needed by the child's relatives who may live elsewhere. If the Special Guardian and his/her family move, then the responsibility passes to the new local authority. The local authority where the Special Guardian previously lived should cooperate as needed to ensure a smooth transition for the child.

Ongoing financial support (i.e., that is paid on a regular basis), which was agreed before the Special Guardianship Order was made, remains the responsibility of the local authority that agreed it so long as the family remains eligible for payments.

Where the child is in the care of the local authority or was in the care of the local authority immediately prior to the making of the Special Guardianship Order, the following people *must* receive an assessment at their request:

- The child;
- The Special Guardian or prospective Special Guardian; and
- A parent.

The following people *may* be offered an assessment of their need for Special Guardianship support services:

- The child;
- The Special Guardian or prospective Special Guardian; and
- A parent.
- A child of the Special Guardian; and
- Any person with a significant ongoing relationship with the child.

If a local authority decides not to assess in cases where they have discretion as above, they must notify the decision in writing, including reasons for the decision, to the person making the request. The person who requested the assessment must be allowed at least 28 days to make representations in relation to the decision.

It will not always be necessary to undertake an assessment before providing information, advice, or counselling services. However, if the local authority is considering providing any of the support services, then a full assessment should be carried out. However, where a request relates to a particular service or where it is clear a particular service is required, the assessment process can be limited to looking at the need for that service.

Where an assessment identifies the need for ongoing support services, a Special Guardianship Support Plan must be completed.

Other agencies, such as education and health, may need to be consulted about the contents of the Plan.

The Plan should be written in such a way that everyone affected can understand and set out:

- The services to be provided;
- The objectives and criteria for success;
- Timescales for provision;
- Procedures for review; and
- A named person to monitor the provision of services in accordance with the Plan.

In Telford & Wrekin, the Family and Friends Support Team is responsible for ensuring that the support identified within a support plan is provided and that it is reviewed annually. SGO support workers will co-ordinate and manage the support and review process. If additional support is required after the order is granted, the team may make a referral to Family Connect who will decide whether a further assessment is required for support under Child in Need, or Child Protection procedures as necessary, or a referral to Strengthening Families is required. In some cases, a referral may be made to the Adoption Support Fund for children who were previously looked after by the local authority or where a Child Arrangements Order was in place for the child to live with the Special Guardian.

The Family and Friends team will undertake an assessment of need when a child wishes to have, or their Special Guardian believes the child needs access to therapeutic support, unless a Child and Family assessment or Early Help assessment has been completed in the last three months.

Special Guardians, parents, and child/ren will be able to contact the Family and Friends Support Team for advice and guidance or to find out how to access any relevant training. Special Guardians will be offered a formal review of the support

plan on an annual basis to ensure any identified support is being provided or to consider whether any amendments are required to the plan to meet their individual needs and the needs of the child.

A review must take place on an annual basis if the Special Guardian is in receipt of financial support from the local authority.

8. Eligibility for financial support

The Special Guardianship Guidance (2017) published by government sets out the requirements placed on local authorities in respect of financial support. This guidance is based upon the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 which provides the legal framework for the provision of financial support. The Special Guardianship Guidance sets out that Regulation 6 states that financial support, 'should be payable in accordance with the Regulations to help secure a suitable Special Guardianship arrangement where such an arrangement cannot be readily made because of a financial obstacle'.

Regulation 6 sets out the circumstances in which financial support may be paid to a Special Guardian or prospective Special Guardian as follows:

- Where it is necessary to ensure that the Special Guardian or prospective Special Guardian can look after the child;
- Where the child needs additional care, which requires a greater expenditure of resources than would otherwise be the case because of illness, disability, emotional or behavioural difficulties or the consequences of past abuse or neglect;
- Where the local authority considers that it is appropriate to contribute to any legal costs, including court fees, of a Special Guardian or prospective Special Guardian associated with:
 - (i) The making of a Special Guardianship Order or any application to vary or discharge such an order;
 - (ii) An application for an order under Section 8 of the Children Act 1989 (a Child Arrangements Order, a prohibited steps order, or a specific issue order); or
 - (iii) An order for financial provision to be made to or for the benefit of the child;
- Where the local authority consider it appropriate to make a contribution to the expenditure necessary for the purpose of accommodating and maintaining the child, including the provision of furniture and domestic equipment, alterations to

and adaptations of the home, provision of means of transport, and provision of clothing, toys and other items necessary for the purpose of looking after the child.

Payment of financial support under (b) is typically considered where the child's condition is serious and long-term. For example, where a child needs a specific diet or where items such as shoes, clothing or bedding need to be replaced at a higher rate than would normally be the case with a child of a similar age who is unaffected by the particular condition.

When a child who was previously looked after has a condition that is serious and long term, the local authority will continue to pay the allowance and the equivalent of the fostering fee the foster carer received at the time the SGO was granted until the child reaches the age of 18. The allowance (not fee) may be paid after the child turns 18 years if they are completing the first course of their secondary education ie GCSE, A' level, NVQ, BTech.

Financial support paid under (c) is payable so that the local authority may contribute to initial legal costs where appropriate but also any future legal costs that are associated with the order, to continue to support the existence of the order, again, where the local authority considers this to be appropriate (see next section (8a)).

In many Special Guardianship arrangements, contact/family time between the child and their relatives or others with whom the local authority consider the child to have a beneficial relationship is very important. This should be assessed by the local authority in the first instance and would mostly be where the contact/family time is at a distance. Where assistance with travel costs is required, this may either be given in cash under Regulation 3 (1) (b) or, if such costs are on a recurring basis, as part of any financial support provided under Regulation 6 (2) (b) to support the arrangements for ensuring the Special Guardian can look after the child. Once assessed, this would be included in the SGO support plan.

a. Financial support for legal representation if you are the child's foster carer

Although the local authority will make the application to court for a Special Guardianship Order for a child in its care, it is important that prospective Special Guardians seek independent legal advice. Funding will be made available for foster carers to access independent legal advice in respect of applying for an SGO, for the initial sum of up to £350.00. Should the foster carer require further funding for legal advice and support, this will need to be agreed by the local authority in advance of further legal advice being sought.

In some cases (particularly when parents are not in agreement with an SGO), it may be necessary for a prospective Special Guardian to be legally represented at

court. Should this funding become available through legal aid, that should be accessed in the first instance. The Council will pay a maximum of £1,500 towards, exclusive of VAT, where it is deemed necessary for the Special Guardian to seek legal representation, and only after this has been agreed by the Service Delivery Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Permanence or the Service Delivery Manager for Children in Care. This financial support would only be provided if it is agreed in advance of securing any legal representation as part of court proceedings. The local authority will not pay for legal costs that exceed this amount.

Payment towards legal costs may also be considered where there is an application to vary or discharge a Special Guardianship Order (usually made by a parent), or where there is an application made under Section 8 of the Children Act 1989 (usually around contact) or for an order for financial provision to be made to or for the benefit of the child.

The Service Delivery Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Permanence or the Service Delivery Manager for Children in Care must authorise any legal costs to be paid. Arrangements for all such payments will be negotiated between the Council's Legal Services and the solicitors for the Special Guardian in **advance** of any legal consultation or legal representation at court, and with reference to the rates set out in the current court guideline hourly rates.

b. Ongoing financial support if you are the child's foster carer/s

Whilst fostering, all Telford and Wrekin foster carers receive an allowance for each child they care for, and this changes according to the child's age. Foster carers also receive a fostering fee (remuneration). The allowance and the fostering fee form the basis of the payments former foster carers will receive once a Special Guardianship Order is granted. However, Special Guardians, who were formerly foster carers, will not receive mileage, holiday, respite, festival, or birthday payments that were previously paid to them as foster carers.

(i) Allowances

The local authority ensures that all former foster carers who become Special Guardians for a child continue to receive the equivalent of the allowance (minus child benefit and any other child related benefits), which will increase according to the child's age in line with fostering rates until the child reaches the age of 18 or completes their secondary education (ie GCSE, A'Level, NVQ, Btech) if their 18th birthday falls before their course finishes. In this event, the local authority will ask the Special Guardian to provide evidence from the education provider to show the young person is continuing in secondary education after their 18th birthday and the date their course comes to an end.

The local authority will be responsible for overseeing all payments in relation to Special Guardianship and in supporting all prospective Special Guardians and Special Guardians to apply for the benefits they will be entitled to once an order is granted.

A representative from the local authority will request evidence from the prospective or Special Guardian that they have completed a recognised Benefits Calculator, for example Turn2us, to determine if they are eligible for benefits. It is the responsibility of the Special Guardian to claim child benefit and any other benefits they are entitled to once the order is granted. The local authority will be responsible for deducting the equivalent of any child related benefits (such as child tax credits or the child element of universal credit) the Special Guardian receives except for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) for the child from the allowance.

The equivalent to Child Benefit will be deducted from all allowances automatically by the local authority once an order is granted at either the higher or lower rate depending upon the child's position within the Special Guardian's family. This is because the Special Guardian can claim Child Benefit in their own right. The equivalent to Child Benefit will not be deducted for anyone in receipt of Income Support or Pension Credit.

The local authority will ensure that former foster carers who are in receipt of child related benefits receive the same amount of allowance for the child they received as a foster carer in total although this will come from different sources i.e., Telford and Wrekin Council, Child Benefit Agency, and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). Those who are in paid employment, where their income fluctuates throughout the year, will need to provide the local authority with the notification from the DWP each time their benefits payments alter.

NB This is because Special Guardians can apply directly to the Child Benefit Agency, and the Department of Work and Pensions for Universal Credit as they have parental responsibility for the child they are caring for and the local authority will not pay if there is a benefit the Special Guardian can claim on behalf of the child.

Under Regulation 13, any financial support provided by Telford and Wrekin must not duplicate any benefit payments the Special Guardian can claim for the child.

The prospective Special Guardian will be asked to contact the Department of Work and Pensions to find out if they will be entitled to benefits once they become a Special Guardian prior to the order being granted. If it has not been possible to obtain a forecast prior to the order being granted, the local authority will undertake a financial assessment after a period of three months to capture any benefits being

received. Any benefits received in relation to the child will be deducted from the allowance.

The former foster carer will be required to provide evidence to the local authority of the benefits they are receiving from the Department of Work and Pensions or evidence that they are not entitled to claim benefits.

(ii) Fee (remuneration)

As set out in Regulation 7, financial support for Special Guardians does not ordinarily include the continuation of the fostering fee beyond the first two years although it can continue if the local authority considers it appropriate. The local authority recognises that this has been a barrier to many foster carers pursuing a Special Guardianship Order and, after full consideration, the local authority considers it appropriate to continue to pay the fee until the child reaches the age of 18. This will be at the fee level the carer was receiving at the time the order was granted and will not change.

As the fostering fee was a payment to the foster carer rather than for the child, it will need to be declared as an income for tax purposes.

(iii) Independent Fostering Agencies

Where the foster carer was approved by an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA), the allowance and fee payment may be negotiated individually as there may be significant disparity between the allowance and fee paid to a local authority foster carer and that which has been received from an Independent Fostering Agency. Any financial support to former foster carers from an IFA must be approved by a Telford and Wrekin finance panel (ie Resource Allocation Management Panel (RAMP)).

If in receipt of benefits, child related benefits will be deducted.

(iv) Special Guardians who are not resident in the United Kingdom

Consideration for financial support will be considered on a case-by-case basis for both the allowance and the fee if the Special Guardian was a former foster carer. All payments will be at the discretion of the local authority.

c) Financial support when children are not looked after by the local authority and a Special Guardianship Order is pursued as a private matter.

Financial support to make an application.

Public funding rules for legal aid changed from May 2023 and were extended to private law Special Guardianship applications, which apply to:

- Prospective Special Guardians making applications for Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) in private family law proceedings; and
- Anyone with parental responsibility when responding to applications for Special Guardianship Orders.

More information is available at [Civil news: changes to scope of family legal aid - GOV.UK](#)

d) Ongoing financial support if you are not the child's foster carer.

The Council will not automatically provide financial support to the prospective Special Guardian if the child was not previously in the care of the local authority. The local authority will advise on the benefits they may be entitled to claim. Where a child has a disability, the local authority will support the Special Guardian to apply for all relevant benefits.

All children with a disability continue to be eligible for support from the local authority under s.17 of the Children Act 1989, regardless of whether they were previously in the care of the local authority, or not. The Children with Disabilities Team can support families of a child with a disability, whether they are living with Special Guardians or their parents, with advice, guidance and provision of services, including access to grants i.e. the provision from the local authority, as a result of the child having a disability, is not affected by obtaining a Special Guardianship Order.

In exceptional circumstances relating to unusual and continuing expenses due to the child's illness, disability, emotional and behavioural difficulties or the consequences of past harm, the Council will consider providing a discretionary payment or provide resources to meet the identified needs of the child, the duration of which will be identified at the outset.

The payment of any financial support to Special Guardians of children who have not been in foster care is at the discretion of the Council and is subject to an assessment of need and a financial assessment. It is not intended to remove responsibility from the birth parents to make adequate financial provision for the care and upbringing of their children. It also is not intended to be used in place of other child-related benefits, such as DLA/PIP.

The local authority will be responsible for undertaking a financial assessment and the prospective Special Guardian will be asked to provide financial details as follows:

Where a Special Guardianship Order is made to a member of the child's extended family or other connected person who was not the child's foster carer, a full means test assessment will be completed using the Department of Education (DfE) standard assessment.

The means test assessment requires a statement of household income and expenditure from the prospective Special Guardian. Child Benefit will be deducted, and other benefits (e.g., child tax credit and the child element of universal credit) will be taken into consideration as part of a financial assessment. This is because Special Guardians can apply directly to the Child Benefit Agency and the Department of Work and Pensions for benefits for the child once they hold parental responsibility for the child they are caring for.

The prospective Special Guardian or Special Guardian will need to show the local authority that they have completed a recognised Benefits Calculator, for example Turn2us, to show if they are eligible for benefits.

Financial support may consist of a one-off payment or periodic payments in cases where the Special Guardian is unable to meet the child/ren or young person's needs without financial support.

All requests for financial support must be agreed by Telford and Wrekin's Resource Allocation Management Panel (RAMP). Financial support will not be agreed by Telford & Wrekin Council where it does not agree the placement is suitable or where it deems the circumstances do not meet the criteria for financial support.

Any allowance cannot exceed the equivalent of Telford & Wrekin's standard fostering allowance for the child's age group and will take any eligible state benefits claimed into account (information on the current fostering allowances can be obtained from the Telford & Wrekin fostering service).

e) Housing Cost Contribution

If a Special Guardian has non-dependent adults (over the age of 18 and not in full time secondary education or training) living within the household, the local authority will deduct a Housing Cost Contribution (HCC) from their housing costs in respect of each non-dependent adult. The HCC will follow the rates used in Universal Credit monthly rates, under non-dependent's housing costs contribution, which is usually updated each April.

f) Annual Review of Special Guardian support

All Special Guardians are offered an annual review to determine if the level of support being provided is meeting the needs of the child, Special Guardian, and parent/s to allow the Special Guardian to continue caring for the child.

A financial review **must** take place if the Special Guardian is receiving financial support from the local authority. The Special Guardian has a responsibility to notify the local authority of any changes to their financial situation (whether it has improved, or worsened). If the Special Guardian's financial position has not changed (and they would have a responsibility to inform the local authority of any changes), financial support would remain the same. The Special Guardian will need to confirm the child continues to reside with them and provide evidence that they are claiming all benefits they are entitled to.

The local authority will write to the Special Guardians to give them 28 days' notice that payments will cease if financial information has not been provided and therefore the local authority has been unable to undertake a review within the required timescales. If a Special Guardian is not able to attend a review due to extenuating circumstances, they must notify the local authority as soon as possible.

Once the payment has ceased, should the Special Guardian subsequently provide the financial information requested, then payments will commence from when the evidence has been received by the local authority. Some extenuating circumstances may be considered, such as hospitalisation.

g) Cessation of financial support

Regulation 9 of the Special Guardianship Regulations (Children Act 1989) provides that financial support ceases to be payable to a Special Guardian or prospective Special Guardian if:

- a) the child ceases to have a home with them;
- b) the child ceases full-time education or training and commences employment;
- c) the child qualifies for benefits in their own right; or
- d) the child attains the age of 18 unless they continue in full-time education or training. The support may continue until the end of the first course/ training they are undertaking.

h) Conditions of financial support paid periodically.

Regulation 10 of the Special Guardianship Regulations (Children Act 1989) provides that financial support that is to be paid periodically is not payable until the Special Guardian or prospective Special Guardian agrees to the following conditions:

(i) that they will inform the local authority immediately if:

- the child is no longer in their care;
- there are changes to their address;
- any of the changes mentioned in regulation 9 (see previous section on “Cessation of financial support”) occur; or
- there is a change in their financial circumstance or the financial needs or resources of the child which may affect the amount of financial support payable to them;

and, where the information is given orally, that they will confirm this in writing to the local authority within seven days.

ii) that they will complete and supply the local authority with an annual statement as to the following matters:

- their financial circumstances;
- the financial needs and resources of the child; and
- their address and whether the child continues to have a home with them.

The local authority should be prepared to provide advice and assistance on completing the forms, on request where necessary.

Regulation 10 provides that the local authority may set any other conditions they consider appropriate, including the timescale within which, and purposes for which, any payment of financial support should be utilised. Where any condition imposed is not complied with, the local authority may suspend or terminate payment of any financial support and seek to recover all or part of the financial support they have over paid.

However, where any condition is not complied with or where there is a failure to provide an annual statement, Regulation 10 requires that the local authority may not take any steps to suspend, terminate or seek to recover financial support until they have sent a written reminder to the person who entered into the agreement of the

need to provide an annual statement; and that 28 days have expired since the date on which the reminder was sent.

9. Principles of support provided by Telford & Wrekin Council.

- There is an expectation that any carer will claim the benefits that they are entitled to. On-going financial support (or that for an agreed period) cannot duplicate any other payments available to a Special Guardian(s) and, therefore, any other available grants, benefits, allowances or resource available as a result of becoming a Special Guardian for a child will be taken into account when assessing the financial support payable. Financial support to assist with specific issues such as therapeutic services or set up costs are not subject to a financial assessment.
- Regulation 9 of Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 provides that financial support ceases to be payable to a Special Guardian if the child ceases to have a home with them, the child ceases full time education or training and begins employment or if the child qualifies in their own right for income related benefits. It is the Special Guardian's responsibility to notify the local authority immediately of any change to their own or the child's address or circumstances.
- Allowances, which have been agreed without a time limit (and continue to be eligible for an allowance at each review), will cease on the child's 18th birthday, unless the local authority is notified in advance that the child is continuing in full time further education or training. In that case, the financial support may continue until the end of the course providing that the course of study commenced prior to the child turning 18.
- The local authority where the Special Guardian lives is responsible for undertaking an assessment of need and provision of any support services in response to that assessment. However, if a child is looked after by another local authority, it is that local authority's responsibility to complete the Special Guardianship assessment and develop the support plan. After a period of three years, responsibility for support transfers to the local authority where the Special Guardian resides although the responsibility to provide financial support remains with the local authority where the child was previously looked after.

10. Leaving Care Provision

Children who were looked after immediately prior to becoming subject to a Special Guardianship Order will also still be eligible for leaving care services in that they will qualify for advice and assistance under section 24(1) of the Children Act 1989, as

amended by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Adoption & Children Act 2002. This is providing that the child:

- a) Has reached the age of 16 but not the age of 21;
- b) If less than eighteen years old, has a Special Guardianship Order in force;
- c) If eighteen years old or above, had a Special Guardianship Order in force when they reached that age;, and
- d) Had been looked after by a local authority immediately before the making of the Special Guardianship Order.

The young person should contact Telford and Wrekin Children in Care and Leaving Care Team at the age of 16 years should they wish to receive further advice and guidance from the authority.

In addition, where the child is, or will be, aged 11 years (i.e. usually in secondary education) at the time the Special Guardianship Order is granted, the young person will be able to request a setting up home grant at a rate commensurate with that which a young person remaining in looked after care would receive (at age 18). The young person will also receive additional financial support if they continue to university, as per the leaving care allowances. However, this does not include university accommodation costs.

This will also apply to any younger siblings in the same household as the young person for whom this applies, where an SGO is granted within the same set of proceedings.

Telford & Wrekin Council operates a Higher Education Grant (which includes some funding from the government's Higher Education Bursary, which is to provide support of up to £2000 for tuition fees. This can be accessed once only (for up to 4 years) at any point between a young person's 18th and 25th birthday. This grant will be payable in equal annual instalments across the duration of the course but will cease when the young person leaves or completes the course.

For further information please contact the Leaving Care Team on 01952 382298 or email cicbso@telford.gov.uk

11. Other support available

Telford and Wrekin is committed to supporting Special Guardians with the following:

- Bi-monthly support groups arranged by the Family and Friends Team to provide an opportunity to meet with other Special Guardians. A guest speaker often attends;
- A referral to the Adoption Support Fund (if the child has previously been Looked After – see below) by the Family and Friends Team where a specific need has been identified for therapeutic support. Further information can be found at: adoptionsupportfund.co.uk
- Advice and additional support from the Family and Friends Team during normal office hours.

Adoption Support Fund (available until March 2025) The ASF is available for children and young people up to and including the age of 21, or 25 with an education, health and care plan, who:

- are living (placed) with a family in England while waiting for adoption
- were adopted from local authority care in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland and live in England
- were adopted from abroad and live in England with a recognised adoption status
- were in care before an SGO was made
- left care under a Special Guardianship Order that was subsequently changed to an adoption order, or vice versa
- are under a residency order or child arrangement order (CAO) and were previously looked after
- were previously looked after but where the adoption, Special Guardianship, residency or CAO placement has broken down, irrespective of any reconciliation plans

The child is still eligible if they were previously looked after by the local authority and any of the arrangements above have broken down, regardless of any reconciliation plans.

The local authority is responsible for applying to the Adoption Support Fund within three months of assessing the family's needs. This assessment will be undertaken by the Family and Friends Team.

The Government has agreed it will continue to offer support to eligible families until March 2025. More information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/adoption-support-fund-asf> or for further information and support call the Family and Friends Team on 01952 387387



For further information about Special Guardianship please contact the Family and Friends Team at Telford and Wrekin Council on 01952 387387.

In preparing this policy, the Council had had regard to the following relevant legislative requirements and statutory guidance:-.

- **Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 (Children Act 1989)**
- **The Special Guardianship Guidance 2017**
- **Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000**
- **Adoption & Children Act 2002**

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Telford & Wrekin
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest
to create a better borough

Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

Thursday 21 September 2023

Findings of the 2023 Employee Survey

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Nathan England - Cabinet Member: Finance, Customer Services & Governance
Lead Director:	Anthea Lowe - Director: Policy & Governance
Service Area:	Policy & Governance
Report Author:	Jon Power - Organisational Delivery & Development Service Delivery Manager
Officer Contact Details:	Tel: 01952 380141 Email: jon.power@telford.gov.uk
Wards Affected:	Not applicable
Key Decision:	Not Key Decision
Forward Plan:	Not Applicable
Report considered by:	SMT – 23 September 2023 Business Briefing – 7 September 2023 Cabinet – 21 September 2023

1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting:

It is recommended that Cabinet :-

- 1.1 Notes the results from the 2023 Employee Survey;
- 1.2 Endorses the progress made on addressing issues raised in the survey.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To provide an overview of the results of the 2023 Employee Survey and set out progress in response to issues identified from the survey.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 In 2020, the Council undertook an Employee Survey to understand views and experiences of working for the Council. Despite the challenges of working in the pandemic, the results of this survey were overall very positive and demonstrated that the Council benefited from a dedicated and committed workforce who understood how their work contributes to the delivery of the organisation's priorities.
- 3.2 Informed by the results of the survey, the Council developed and adopted a new Workforce Strategy to support the continued development of the workforce. Central to this strategy was the need to address specific challenges relating to an aging workforce, recruitment and retention, and financial reward when compared to private sector employers. The overarching objective of the strategy is for the Council to be recognised as an "employer of choice" through the development of employment policies and practices across four themes:
- Our workforce will have the skills and abilities to deliver our priorities and will have the opportunity to further develop.
 - Our managers will be leaders and will empower staff to deliver our priorities.
 - Our organisation will be more diverse and inclusive offering a voice and fair treatment for all.
 - Our workplace will be healthy and we will support our employees' wellbeing.
- 3.3 To deliver these priorities a programme of work was implemented, examples of which included the:
- launch a new Employee Awards scheme to celebrate the hard work and commitment of our workforce;
 - roll-out of a new management and leadership programme; and,
 - implementation of a new Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion policy that is focussed on ensuring we become a more diverse and inclusive employer.
- 3.4 To understand the impact of this work and to understand whether there had been any changes as to how employees view and experience working for the Council, with particular reference to the introduction of hybrid working, an Employee Survey was undertaken early this year.
- 3.5 The survey targeted all employees on a permanent or temporary contract and was administered through an online questionnaire, with a paper option for those that could not access the questionnaire online.

4.0 Headline Results

- 4.1 At close of the survey period, the response rate to the 2023 survey was 61% with a total of 1,748 surveys being completed. This represented an increase from the 2020 survey response rate of 56%. The 2023 response rate once again demonstrates our workforce is committed to the organisation and understands that their views and feedback are valued in making the Council an "employer of choice". However, recognising that not all employees responded to the survey, the

organisation is committed to ensuring that effective engagement mechanisms exist for all employees wherever they work and through a mechanism that meets their needs, for example earlier this year a new Armed Forces Community Staff Network was established.

- 4.2 Overall, results from the 2023 survey remained very positive and results held up from the previous survey. The headline results from the key sections of the survey are set out below. For each of these questions, respondents could choose to “agree”, “neither agree or disagree” or “disagree”. The results presented here are the percentage of respondents that chose “agree”. For the other responses to each of these questions, these were a mix of “disagree” and “neither agree nor disagree”. However, the percentage of of respondents that answered “neither agree nor disagree” was greater than the percentage that answered “disagree”.
- 4.3 ‘My work’:
- 91% understand how their work contributes to the Council’s priorities
 - 90% feel sufficiently challenged by their work
 - 94% are interested in their work
- 4.4 ‘My team and line manager’:
- 90% feel informed about what is happening in the Council
 - 90% can rely on colleagues to pull together
 - 88% feel their team work together to find ways to improve the service
- 4.5 ‘Inclusion and fair treatment’:
- 93% feel respected by the people they work with
 - 90% feel that the Council is committed to equality, diversity & inclusion
 - 90% feel that the Council respects employees regardless of their ethnicity, sexuality, religion or disabilities.
- 4.6 ‘Wellbeing’:
- 87% have some say over the way they work
 - 86% feel confident raising issues of bullying or harassment with their manager
 - 82% feel trusted to deliver and work when they want to
 - 80% feel that their manager deals with wellbeing issues appropriately
- 4.7 ‘Hybrid working’:
- 88% are positive about hybrid working
 - 96% feel trusted by their line manager to get on with their job
 - 88% have the equipment they need to work at home/office
- 4.9 A robust analytical tool when summarising survey results are net agreement scores. The score is calculated by subtracting the percentage of disagree/strongly disagree responses from the percentage of agree/strongly agree. The maximum net score is 100 and the minimum -100). Net agreement scores have been used to compare the results of the 2020 Employee Survey with the 2023 survey and the greatest improvements were for the following questions:
- I am given opportunities to learn and develop (+7 points)

- I feel valued for my work (+6 points)
- I am trusted to deliver and work when I want to (+6 points)
- My manager helps me to manage my workload (+6 points)

- 4.10 Continuous improvement is a core ethos of this organisation and to support our drive to be an “employer of choice”, respondents were asked, ‘if you had a magic wand, what one thing would you do to change the organisation’. Comments were received from 785 (44.9%) respondents. Key themes from this question were:
- For all work to be recognised and valued
 - More collaborative working across services and the wider organisation
 - More opportunities to progress
 - Consistency in management practice

5.0 Responding to the employee survey

- 5.1 Directors have been provided with detailed survey results for their services which highlight where results are significantly better or worse than the Council average and are identifying service specific actions to address concerns. Organisational Development will support Directors to include these actions in refreshed service-level workforce plans. In addition to this, a corporate response to the survey has commenced and has included the actions set out below.

- 5.2 In response to feeling recognised and valued, the Council has:
- Become a “Real Living Wage” employer.
 - Increased the rate of pay for all Level 2 and Level 3 apprentices.
 - Developed and delivered cost of living sessions that were available to all employees to attend, showcasing the huge amount of support, both locally and internally, available to them.
 - Held our popular annual awards recognising the work of our employees. Over 300 submissions have been received for the awards this year alone.
 - Continued to offer and promote training to support the wellbeing and resilience of employees.
 - Continued to advertise and offer our employee Counselling service and Employee Assistance Programme – a platform of useful advice and guidance to support individuals’ wellbeing.
 - Updated the new starter induction to provide face to face sessions which include meeting the Leader and Chief Executive attend.

- 5.3 In response to more collaborative working across services and the wider organisation, more opportunities to progress and consistency in management practice, the Council has:
- Developed and launched a new leadership and management programme for approx. 250 managers and team leaders with line management responsibilities with the objective of ensuring that all employees have the same experience of working for the Council whichever service they work in.
 - Continued to deliver leadership and management programmes for senior managers.
 - Provided quarterly “Annual Personal Performance Discussion” (APPD) training sessions for both managers and employees.

- Introduced a new Learning and Development newsletter advertising upcoming training courses available to employees.

5.4 Further consultation on how the organisation should respond to the Employee Survey findings has been undertaken with managers through the Leadership Forum and with the Employee Panel. The Panel is made up of officers from across the organisation and provides a forum for employees to feedback on issue of concern and policy development. Feedback is being used to inform the development of the refreshed Workforce Strategy. In terms of next steps, the revised Workforce Strategy will be presented to Cabinet in November for review and approval.

6.0 Alternative Options

6.1 Whilst the organisation could choose not to undertake activity in response to the employee survey, this would not support the recruitment and retention of staff.

7.0 Key Risks

7.1 It is essential that the Council continues to develop its employment policies and practices and the support provided to employees in response to the Employee Survey findings to ensure that the organisation is viewed as an employer of choice. Recruitment of staff within the local government environment is challenging, particularly in some professional roles. Without taking steps to develop the Council's employee offer, there is a direct risk that the Council will not be able to recruit and retain staff to drive delivery of the Council's priorities.

8.0 Council Priorities

8.1 The development of the Council's workforce is essential to the delivery of each of the organisation's priorities. Responding to the findings of the Employee Survey and refreshing the Council's workforce strategy is essential to this objective.

9.0 Financial Implications

9.1 The costs of administering the employee survey were mainly from officer time which was met from existing budgets. The costs of the actions outlined in section 5 of this report in responding to the survey will be met from existing budgets and resources.

10.0 Legal and HR Implications

10.1 There are no direct legal implications arising out of this report. Whenever the Council introduces or updates its policies and procedures, it needs to ensure that it does so in a way which treats all staff equally and does not, inadvertently, discriminate against those staff with protected characteristics. Legal advice is provided in respect of such policies and procedures to ensure that they are implemented fairly and equally across the organisation.

10.2 This report goes to the heart of the relationship between the Council and its workforce. Over the last few years, and particularly since the pandemic, the organisation has faced challenges in recruitment, particularly in certain sectors. This has been due, in part, to the increase in the availability of home-working posts which has opened up the job market nationally in a way that has not been seen previously. The Council has responded to these pressures by reviewing and updating its offer to employee so that it can be seen as an employer of choice.

11.0 Ward Implications

11.1 There are no direct ward implications arising from this report

12.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

12.1 There are no direct health, social and economic implications arising from this report

13.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

13.1 The Employee Survey findings will inform the development of the organisation's workforce strategy which sets the framework for all employee policies and practices and shapes the organisation's ambition to be an "employer of choice" to both existing and future employees. This is a key driver of our ability to meet the organisation's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objective of "working proactively to ensure that our workforce reflects the communities we serve, and that all employees are supported to achieve their full potential". The areas of focus of the plan are:

- Becoming a more diverse and inclusive employer
- Ensuring all our employees have opportunities to be heard and inform what we do as an organisation
- Ensuring our learning and development offer supports our workforce to have the awareness, knowledge and understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion.

14.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

14.1 There are no direct climate change and environmental implications from this report

15.0 Background Papers

15.1 None

16.0 Appendices

None

17.0 Report Sign Off

2023 Employee Survey

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Finance	16/08/2023	16/08/2023	MLB
Legal	16/08/2023	17/08/2023	ACL

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Telford & Wrekin
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Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

Thursday 21 September 2023

Volunteering in Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Rajash Mehta - Cabinet Member: Inclusion, Engagement, Equalities & Civic Pride	
Lead Director:	Felicity Mercer - Director: Communities, Customer & Commercial Services	
Service Area:	Communities, Customer & Commercial Services	
Report Author:	Sonya Jassal - Team Leader: Community Engagement Louise Stanway - Interim Service Delivery Manager: Community Services	
Officer Contact Details:	Tel:	Email:
	01952 380189	sonya.jassal@telford.gov.uk
	01952 381106	louise.stanway@telford.gov.uk
Wards Affected:	All Wards	
Key Decision:	Not Key Decision	
Forward Plan:	Not Applicable	
Report considered by:	SMT - 29 August 2023 Business Briefing - 7 September 2023 Cabinet – 21 September 2023	

1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1.1 Notes the updates to the Corporate Volunteer Policy (Appendix A) and the progress being made with recruiting and supporting Council volunteers;
- 1.2 Approves the development of a new Volunteer Telford system to improve the way organisations can promote volunteer opportunities across the borough

and connect local voluntary organisations with businesses, please refer to paragraph 5.1;

- 1.3 Approves the project approach and funding to recruit more Street Champions (with a target to reach 2,000 by 2026/27) as set out in paragraph 5.2;
- 1.4 Approves the introduction of a new volunteer satisfaction survey as set out in paragraph 5.3;
- 1.5 Endorses the development of a new partnership volunteering group as part of the delivery of Vision 2032, to share best practice and explore opportunities to join up activity to recruit and support volunteers.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To provide an update on the progress being made with volunteering for the Council as well as the support we provide to external organisations and our plans for further development.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Volunteering is what binds communities together and is a big part of community life here in Telford and Wrekin. According to the Residents Survey conducted in 2020, 30.5% of respondents said that they had been involved in volunteering over the last 2 years. Whether as individuals, organisations, businesses, or schools, we recognise the need to work together to help people and make a positive difference.

- 3.2 We find that people choose to volunteer for a variety of reasons:

- For some it offers **the chance to give something back or make a difference** to the people around them. Very often we find it is the people that have been in need themselves and have received help from others that want to give something back as a way of saying 'thank you'.
- For others, it provides an **opportunity to develop new skills or build on existing experience and knowledge**, improving employment prospects. Volunteering is looked at favourably by many educational establishments and employers.
- **Giving back and acts of kindness also benefit people's health** and form one of the components of the '5 Ways to Wellbeing' model which are: connect, get active, take notice, learn, and give. Many volunteers have reported improvements in mental and physical health including reduced stress and symptoms of depression, increased confidence, and more social interaction which has helped them to feel less isolated.
- Regardless of the motivation, what unites all volunteers is that **their roles give them purpose and an increased level of satisfaction and reward.**

- 3.3 Volunteers are an extremely valuable asset for the Council. They make important contributions, bring a diverse range of skills, experience and knowledge and add unique value to service provisions across our borough by providing additional support in areas that matter the most to our residents - things like cleanliness, health and wellbeing for example.
- 3.4 Whilst it is not possible to exactly quantify the monetary value of the contributions made by volunteers throughout the borough, it is clear that it is significant. To help put this into context, according to the National Heritage Lottery Fund, the value of a volunteer carrying out a role similar to that of our Street Champion scheme per day is approximately £50.
- 3.5 Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic we had a total of 1,545 Council volunteers. With a 35% increase from these figures, we now have almost 2,400 volunteers supporting 17 Council services which is nearly the same amount as our own workforce (2,826). Examples of volunteer roles include Street Champions, Health Champions, Climate Change Champions, Summer Reading Challenge volunteers (libraries), the GEMS (Golden Event Makers) who help at Council-run events, My Options volunteers, Child and Family Ambassadors working within Children and Young People's Services and Adult Social Care, Making It Real Board volunteers and Mystery Customers. In addition to this, we also recruit emergency volunteers to help out in times of need such as during floods, heavy snow over the winter period or during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3.6 Alongside the schemes aimed at adults, we also have some young volunteers supporting their local communities. The Junior Street Champion scheme, predominantly aimed at primary aged children, runs in conjunction with the Community Services team and our partners Veolia. This involves school-based workshops around recycling and a class litter pick. Information is given to children enabling families to litter pick together.

Below are some case studies highlighting the breadth of Council services supported by volunteers and the diversity in people's skills and experiences as a result of participating in these roles:

Street Champions - Meet Matt:



Matt is a 21-year-old student with severe learning disabilities and autism. He joined Street Champions to help with litter picking in his local area and in addition to this, he has helped clean fences and pathways in the Town Park. Matt also volunteers at a community grocery store, a community cafe, and our local plant centre. He has support to carry out all these activities.

Matt enjoys volunteering because he likes to be busy, meeting people and helping out in the community. He gains many personal benefits from his volunteering roles such as a sense of self-worth and fulfilment and the feeling of belonging to a team. These activities have also increased his self-confidence and communication skills.

Child and Family Ambassador - Meet Claire:



Alongside this role, Claire also volunteers for Children's Services in other capacities including as a Peer Parent Advocate and Leaving Care Mentor. Claire says:

"I volunteer in these roles because I want to make a difference to the families struggling in our community. Volunteering has been a godsend to me, particularly in relation to my own self confidence and mental health. When I had my first child nearly 14 years ago it quickly became apparent he had additional needs which presented as very challenging..."

I went from having a career I loved to being at home all day every day... For the longest time I felt I had lost my identity, and depression and anxiety loomed large in my life. I was frustrated because I had all this experience and qualifications but could do nothing with them. I saw an advert for volunteers... and I can honestly say I have never looked back. I can now employ my qualifications and experience that I had gained before having children and my lived experience of raising a child with challenging behaviour...

Volunteering has done wonders for my own self confidence and has had a real positive impact on my mental health. I now feel useful again and the experience I have gained is going to be invaluable on my CV when I am in a position to look for paid employment again."

Member of Youth Parliament (MYP) for Telford and Wrekin – Meet Rae:



Alongside this role, Rae is also the Social Action Group Lead for the Midlands and a Mental Health Foundation Young Leader. Rae says:

"As MYP, I've been able to do some of the most incredible things such as debating at the House of Commons and attending several meetings with key decision makers. But, I think the most impactful things I've done have been on a local basis.

Alongside the Young People's Forum, I'm helping shape the Youth Mental Health summit and the Year of Well-being for young people in Telford. It's difficult to articulate the thing I'm the most proud of, but if I had to, I'd say it's just my involvement. I think it is very easy for young people to feel powerless in our current political climate, but Youth Parliament and the Young People's Forum have given me a way to change that."

Volunteering in Telford and Wrekin

- 3.7 We have a duty of care for our volunteers, just as we do for our employees, and it is important we provide adequate support for them, show our appreciation, and make them feel valued for all the amazing work they do to support us.
- 3.8 However, there are many other people in the borough also volunteering with other organisations. The importance of volunteering in Telford and Wrekin has recently been recognised in the Vision 2032 which sets an ambition where 'Volunteer groups play a key role...' and 'communities are strong and resilient - the borough is a place where local activism and community groups thrive.' The partnership delivering Vision 2032 have identified volunteering as a key priority for future collaboration.
- 3.9 Volunteering is also a priority for the Council, and we will continue supporting volunteers, finding more ways for them to get involved, helping to shape and influence community life in the future.

This includes the role that volunteers play to support the local voluntary and community sector where there is strong partnership working in place. We work with a wide range of partners, using a preventative approach to support individuals and families to live as independently and healthy as possible, without having to gain support from Adults and Children's Services. For example, the Wellbeing Independence Partnership (WIP) is a collaboration between Telford and Wrekin, CVS Age UK, Carers Centre and Taking Part. Collectively they provide information and advice for adults with care and support needs who are not known to statutory services.

4.0 Summary of main proposals

- 4.1 The Community Services team lead on volunteering for the Council. They provide advice and guidance to services setting up a volunteer scheme and have developed a range of toolkits to guide officers through the process.
- 4.2 They are also responsible for managing several volunteer schemes themselves including:
- Street Champions - volunteers who play an active role in taking pride in their community. They care about their local area and want a clean, safe place to live. Their role usually involves litter picking and reporting any environmental hazards in their local community such as fly tipping and dog fouling, and they also take part in environmental projects from time to time.
 - Snow Wardens - this is a seasonal role playing an important part during the winter period. Volunteers receive guidance and the necessary equipment to clear snow and ice safely. The Council notifies them regularly when snow or freezing conditions are anticipated, and they help clear pavements and pathways of any snow or ice in their local area. This not only helps nearby neighbours but also our more vulnerable residents who can't help themselves.

- Health Champions – volunteers who care about the health and wellbeing of those around them. They bring a mixture of their own life experiences, skills, and training to make positive changes within their communities and help others to enjoy healthier lives. The role adds value by supporting Public Health with their early intervention work. As well as sharing health related messages via their own networks and social media, some have trained to do regular blood pressure checks out in the community, some run their own activity groups (like walking or running groups or outdoor gyms for example), some have supported Betty the Vaccination Bus with clinics around the borough and others provide regular support at Council run events. Most recently the scheme co-ordinator organised a health information event specifically for the deaf community. This included information on topics such as healthy eating, mental health, physical activity, and the importance of getting your blood pressure checked.
- Feed the Birds (Telford) – a project set up in collaboration with Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Telford & Wrekin Council, using the love of birds and nature to tackle social isolation. The team of dedicated volunteers regularly visit adult clients who are housebound, isolated, or lonely to help them clean and fill bird feeders and keep them company by chatting about the birds and wildlife they have seen visiting their gardens.

Feed the Birds - Meet Laura and Olwen:

Volunteer Laura has been matched with Olwen for three years and visits on a weekly basis to help fill her bird feeders, and to have a chat about the birds and more.



Olwen says “I have really appreciated Laura coming weekly. I enjoy the visits and I have learnt from her. Every year, we do the Great Big Bird Watch. We wait in the conservatory for the birds to come. Sometimes they are shy that day but they do normally visit!”

Laura says “I’ve visited Olwen for three years and I really enjoy it. I have learnt so much from her and I think it’s good for inter-generations to mix- you learn more that way. We put the world to rights. We both get something out of it and I think everyone should volunteer!”

4.3 Corporate Volunteer Policy

Services need guidance on how best to support their volunteers, so the team are responsible for managing the Corporate Volunteer Policy. This sets out a consistent approach for supporting volunteers, ensuring they are all treated fairly and feel valued.

- 4.3.1 Originally developed in October 2012, with an ever-increasing number of volunteers, the policy has recently been updated to reflect the learning we have taken from our experiences over the years, particularly from emergency situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, the Council was required to recruit volunteers very quickly and immediate action was taken to remove some of the more time-consuming aspects of our usual recruitment practices to be able to react quickly under these circumstances.
- 4.3.2 It is important to note that when reviewing the policy, the team looked at best practice elsewhere including guidance from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and engaged with a range of internal services including Human Resources (HR), Health & Safety, Enforcement, Insurance and Information Governance to make sure everything is joined up appropriately. An engagement session also took place with the Volunteer Managers' Forum to make sure all services that manage volunteers at the Council had the opportunity to provide feedback as well.
- 4.3.3 A summary of the key updates to the policy include:
- **A 'being inclusive' section** - setting out our commitment to treat people with fairness, respect and dignity, considering individual needs, taking into account any protected characteristics and making reasonable adjustments where required.
 - **Special considerations for young volunteers** – what to be aware of when creating roles for young people under the age of 18 years.
 - **Updated guidance on references and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks** – conducting checks on young people aged 16-18 years and overseas criminal history-taking.
 - **A clearer explanation around reimbursements**
 - **Recognition and voice** – this new section provides guidance on the various ways volunteer managers can celebrate, give recognition to and collect feedback from volunteers.
 - **Managing concerns and reporting incidents** – includes the additional support the Corporate Communications and Enforcement Teams can provide where concerns are raised and information on the Council's incident reporting processes, including near misses and links to further Health and Safety guidance.
 - **Making complaints** – details a process for volunteers to raise complaints via their volunteer manager, their line manager or if they do not feel comfortable doing so, they can contact the Community Services team to assist with this.

4.4 Our commitment to employee volunteering

- 4.4.1 As well as championing volunteering across the borough, we are also committed to supporting our own employees to volunteer.

Volunteering in Telford and Wrekin

As part of the update to the Corporate Volunteer Policy, information relating to Council employee volunteering has now been removed to make way for a standalone Employee Volunteering Policy.

- 4.4.2 Employee volunteering is now led by Human Resources as a separate provision to corporate volunteering, to further support our employees to access internal and external volunteering opportunities in line with our vision, values, and priorities. The annual entitlement for employee volunteering hours has also now been increased to two working days (pro rata for part-time employees). Following Cabinet's approval of the Corporate Volunteer Policy, both policies will be launched and promoted across the organisation.
- 4.4.3 A number of our employees already volunteer for good causes such as GEMS (Golden Event Makers) who support Council events and Christmas Smile, a project run by the community for the community, ensuring that no child or adult goes without at least one special gift from Santa. Additional volunteers are key to wrapping thousands of gifts each year and since 2017, the Council have worked with the project to offer special corporate wrapping sessions so that Council staff can volunteer to help wrap gifts in the run up to Christmas. Staff have also generously donated at various collection points across Council buildings. Practitioners using the project for residents have said:

Employee Volunteering - Christmas Smile Feedback



“Christmas Smile is an absolute life saver for so many families who struggle to survive either on benefits or a low income. At Christmas everyone wants to see the joy on their children’s faces as they open their gifts from Santa, Christmas Smile gives this gift to parents. Relieving the burden and worry from parents so they can enjoy a special Christmas Day. The joy of Christmas Smile is that the parents are not left out either, and with added sweet treats, it ensures the family experience that bit of Christmas magic everyone should enjoy. They all work incredibly hard to ensure no one is left out, sometimes even magic-ing gifts out of thin air. They are worth their weight in gold and are very much appreciated by staff and parents alike.”

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4.4.4 Another great example of employee volunteering includes the Corporate Communications Team's volunteering away day, where the team built raised planters for Telford Mind to enable them to grow produce, which will then be distributed to the community via Telford Crisis Support:



4.5 Supporting external organisations

4.5.1 As well as supporting Council services, the Community Services team also provide support to local voluntary and community sector groups and organisations. They have developed toolkits that provide a useful reference to help organisations plan and deliver effective volunteer schemes. These include information on planning, recruiting, managing, and retaining volunteers. Further information can be found on the Council's website, please refer to paragraph 15.1.

4.5.2 A total of 57 organisations have been supported by the team over the last 12 months, and guidance provided can vary dependent on where the organisation is in their volunteering project. Some are at the very beginning and need help with policies and procedures, recruitment and how to manage volunteers. Others need ongoing support as their projects grow and develop.

One example of an organisation we have supported is Wellington Orbit – a 63 seat community cinema in the heart of Wellington town centre.

They have received ongoing support from us with their volunteering programme since first setting up. This included help with developing role descriptions, risk assessments, putting policies and procedures in place – all leading to the recruitment of a variety of roles. Initially these ranged from painters, carpenters and builders to help with the initial refurbishment, but as the project has progressed, they have also recruited for other roles.



Volunteering in Telford and Wrekin

In fact, they have been so successful that at present they have 60 volunteers supporting their organisation in roles such as kitchen assistants, café assistants and cinema stewards.

- 4.5.3 A key challenge for many organisations is recruiting trustees with the right skills to lead and run their organisations, and work is currently underway to identify how we can do more to support them. One example of this is support for Community Centres who are a vital part of community life. We will be bringing Community Centre Managers together to take stock, share common issues and best practice, and discuss recruitment of volunteers and trustees.
- 4.5.4 The Council also works with over 20 'Friends of' groups supported by volunteers who look after our green and open spaces including Telford Town Park, Dawley Park, Apley Woods Local Nature Reserve (LNR), Dothill LNR, Holmer Lake & Madebrook, and Granville Country Park. The 'Friends of' groups assist with promotion of the parks and green spaces through events and conduct a wide variety of voluntary activities to help enhance our green spaces for people and wildlife. Their support has complimented the Council's £2.7m investment which has contributed to the increase in the number of Green Flag parks we have across the borough to 6.



As part of the 2022 Platinum Jubilee campaign the 'Queen's Green Canopy', the Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire, Anna Turner, presented a rowan tree to Friends of Dothill LNR in recognition of the valuable and tireless work that the volunteers undertake for the benefit of their community.

- 4.5.5 In addition to this, through our partnering contracts with Veolia, idverde and Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP), our communities also have access to annual social value investment funding. Whether this is via the Envirogrant (Veolia), Community Fund (idverde) or Community Investment Fund (BBLP), this further enhances our volunteering offer locally. A recent example delivered by BBLP includes improvements to the community garden at Sutton Hill where 8 employees spent a day improving the area to leave a useable space for the community. Other examples include improvements to a community car park in Wellington and improvements to the access to Donnington Boxing Club.



4.6 **Volunteer Telford website**

To help with promoting volunteer opportunities across Telford and Wrekin, we manage the Volunteer Telford website, which is the platform available for advertising these opportunities on behalf of the Council and other local voluntary organisations in the borough. At present we have 86 organisations registered on the site and there are currently around 170 volunteer opportunities advertised, ranging from environmental projects, sports, recreation, catering and culture to supporting children and young people and older people. Please refer to paragraph 15.2 for the website link.

- 4.6.1 It is worth noting that this site is well used – we have on average 500 visits a month and this continues to rise. However, the platform this site currently sits on is being phased out, so we are working with the Information and Digital Technology (IDT) team to deliver an improved in-house version that will provide additional/enhanced functionality. The intention is to also develop a new matching site between local community groups and businesses. We know there are a lot of organisations out there needing more volunteers, but at the same time there are also several local businesses that want to engage more with their communities and offer up staff time to support organisations as part of their corporate social responsibility. This will provide a single reference point for people to connect with one another.

4.7 **Celebrating volunteers**

- 4.7.1 **National Volunteers' Week** is very important as it recognises the contribution of volunteers each year. It shows that we recognise their input, make them feel valued and appreciated, and they are more likely to stay with an organisation who takes the time to show their gratitude. There are many different ways we do this – through our actions, how we support volunteers, how we communicate and involve them but the central focus for us each year is National Volunteers' Week which is a national campaign and always takes place during the first week of June.

It is something the Council has been celebrating for many years now – and this year's theme was 'a time to celebrate and inspire'. A week-long promotional campaign took place that included service areas and some of our partners in the voluntary sector, highlighting the diverse range of volunteering opportunities available across the borough. We also distributed 'thank you' cards in hard copy and electronic formats to Council volunteers, sharing with councillors and partners so they could distribute them too. This year's social media campaign proved very engaging with a reach of over 68,000 across the borough.

4.7.2 Street Champions Thank You Event.

As we have over 1,400 Street Champion volunteers it is not possible to bring them all together regularly for shared supervisions and support meetings in the way we do for our other volunteer schemes. However, it is important to recognise their achievements and give them the opportunity to



network with one another and provide us with some valuable feedback. So last October the Community Services Team organised a 'thank you' event. It was a night of celebration recognising the Street Champions recent Cabinet Award at the 2022 Telford Community Pride Awards and their contributions towards Telford being named 'second cleanest city' in the UK. A great night was had by all and the feedback has been considered and used to help inform the development of the scheme in future.

5.0 Next Steps

Moving forward there are a number of things the Community Services team would like to do to build on the foundations already in place:

- 5.1 Develop an improved in-house version of Volunteer Telford** – as mentioned in paragraph 4.6 there is a need to develop an improved in-house version of the site which we are currently working on with IDT. We will ensure we engage with the new partnership volunteering group in future to support with ongoing development.
- 5.2 Recruitment of 600 additional Street Champions** – one of the Council's key priorities is to increase the number of Street Champions we have to 2,000 by the end of March 2027. The current total stands at just over 1,400 and an action plan has been put in place for recruiting additional champions. This includes a 'thank you' and recruitment event in 2024 to coincide with the Great British Spring Clean campaign, targeted recruitment to increase family sign-ups, work-based champions and supporting more local businesses to fulfil their corporate social responsibility as well as improving under-representation. All of this will be supported by focused communications through a variety of channels such as local community noticeboards, schools, colleges, business forums, youth organisations, and faith and cultural groups, to name a few.
- 5.3 Distribution of a Council-wide volunteer satisfaction survey** – to make sure we are supporting all Council volunteers in the best way we can it is important we ask for their feedback, in a similar way to how we gain feedback from employees. We are currently working on a volunteer survey that we aim to launch immediately after Cabinet's approval of the Corporate Volunteer Policy and therefore alongside volunteering related communications during

October. The survey will ask volunteers how satisfied they are with their overall experiences volunteering for the Council, the results of which we will use as a baseline measurement of success.

6.0 Alternative Options

6.1 Consideration has been given to the option of doing nothing. In doing so it will mean we will not have adequate governance arrangements in place to appropriately support and manage Council volunteers. We will not be taking into account the lessons learnt from the pandemic period and beyond and are less likely to meet our duty of care commitments.

6.2 By doing nothing we will also not be treating prospective and existing volunteers with fairness and dignity, or ensuring that opportunities are as inclusive, flexible and accessible as possible to encourage more people to apply.

7.0 Key Risks

7.1 The recommendations mitigate against the risks of:

- Reputation - fewer people coming forward to volunteer for the Council based on poor experience or word of mouth
- Loss of existing volunteers based on poor support
- Individuals not being able to find out about or access the variety of volunteering roles available at the Council or across the borough
- Volunteers potentially seeking employment rights due to roles being inadequately particularised and seen as akin to paid roles
- Legal claims – especially where risk assessments are not carried out effectively, or where roles are not correctly particularised or defined
- Other organisations not being able to adequately recruit volunteers to meet service demand and needs amongst the communities they serve

8.0 Council Priorities

8.1 As part of the Council's Manifesto Pledge to be delivered over the next 4 years and 100 Day Plan, we have given a commitment to protect, care and invest in Telford and Wrekin and to create a cleaner, greener and safer borough for all. Volunteering has and always will be an important part of the Council's business and we are very proud of the fact we have over 2,400 volunteers. Due to the wide range of volunteer roles and breadth of support provided across the organisation, the report and its recommendations actively support all of the Council's objectives:

- Every child, young person and adult lives well in their community
- Everyone benefits from a thriving economy
- All neighbourhoods are a great place to live

- Our natural environment is protected, and the Council is taking a leading role in tackling the climate emergency
- A community-focussed, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services.

9.0 Financial Implications

9.1 Whilst it is not possible to place a precise figure on the contributions made by volunteers throughout the borough, both to Council services but also through the vast range of other voluntary activities undertaken by other groups, it is clear that the financial value of volunteering is immense. Given the extremely challenging financial position faced by the Council there is no way that the contributions made by the thousands of volunteers that support our work could be replaced by direct provision. With regard to specific proposals within the report:

9.2 **Street Champions** – it is important to note the costs associated with the recruitment of an additional 600 Street Champions. For every Street Champion recruited, this amounts to £35 approximately to cover the costs of their equipment including a high visibility vest, litter picker, hoop, gloves and bags. There are also additional ongoing running costs including some for hosting another ‘thank you’ event which is being planned for the spring to coincide with the Great British Spring Clean campaign. An ongoing annual budget of £15k has been identified to cover these costs over the next 4 years.

9.3 **Volunteer Telford website** – an estimation of £7-10,000 has been quoted for the associated implementation costs, due to the complex nature of the matching functionality, plus an additional annual support and maintenance cost estimated at around £1,200. The implementation costs will be met from the current capital programme and the ongoing costs from existing budgets.

9.4 **Partnership volunteer group** – this group is currently being explored and not yet established, therefore costs associated with the partnership are yet to be realised. However, since a partnership group is proposed with the aim of recruiting and supporting more volunteers as a collective, this will inevitably incur costs. These will need to be managed within existing resources.

10.0 Legal and HR Implications

10.1 These are as referred to above at 7.1. It is particularly important that there are adequate risk assessments prepared at volunteer events where the use of power tools is involved.

11.0 Ward Implications

11.1 This report has a borough-wide impact.

12.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

- 12.1 The Corporate Volunteering Policy references understanding the demographics of volunteer schemes and ensuring inclusive practices. Some schemes within the Council focus on reducing health and social inequalities, and all services supported by volunteers are doing so to serve our communities to ensure they are healthier, experience greater levels of wellbeing and have the resources they require to flourish socially and economically.

13.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 13.1 Serving a mixed rural and urban geographical area with an increasingly diverse and ageing population, as the latest Census 2021 data shows, we recognise the importance of ensuring all sections of our community are well represented across all services provided by the Council.

As an organisation committed to the advancement of opportunity and treating people with fairness, dignity and respect, we are morally obliged to expand our existing responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty to the benefit of our volunteers. While volunteers are not given the same protections under the Equality Act 2010 as paid employees, through the implementation of the Council's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy, we have shown commitment to ensuring all residents across our borough are treated equitably when accessing our services – this includes volunteer provision.

Mirroring the Council's actions in embedding inclusion into the recruitment and selection processes to ensure that the make-up of employees reflects the demographics of the borough, the Corporate Volunteer Policy also gives specific guidance around being more inclusive and understanding our communities. Targeted recruitment to address under-representation within volunteer schemes is an important part of building a successful volunteer scheme that serves its purpose well. The policy emphasises this message and encourages volunteer managers to take this into consideration as part of the planning process.

14.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

- 14.1 Whilst not all our volunteer schemes have climate change or environmental implications, we have two schemes that are being delivered to support this agenda:
- **Street Champions** – this scheme responsibly sources equipment and materials and has a direct positive impact on the environment as volunteers conduct litter picks and report environmental issues all year-round to keep their local areas clear of rubbish and hazards such as fly-tipping and dog fouling. This has an impact on their neighbours, local businesses, visitors to the area and the local wildlife, contributing towards a cleaner Telford and Wrekin for all to enjoy.

- **Climate Change Champions** – this scheme involves volunteers encouraging borough residents to start talking about climate change and to take action. A big part of the role is the champions making changes to their own lifestyles to reduce their carbon footprint and plastic and sharing their experiences of this. They also advocate in their local communities, schools and connect with local community organisations to help them to become more sustainable and to reach out to others, write blogs and articles to raise awareness, conduct litter picks, and have recently taken part in a behaviour change pilot focusing on introducing more sustainable daily habits.

15.0 Background Papers

- 1 [Telford & Wrekin Council Volunteering Toolkits](#)
- 2 [Volunteer Telford website](#)

16.0 Appendices

- A Updated Corporate Volunteer Policy

17.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Finance	16/08/2023	24/08/2023	MLB
Legal	16/08/2023	24/08/2023	JB



Corporate Volunteer Policy

Introduced: October 2012

Revised: September 2023

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This policy and guidance is provided by the Community Services Team. It will be amended as necessary to ensure it aligns with the Council's priorities and will be reviewed periodically to ensure it is kept up to date.

Introduction

Volunteering is what binds communities together and it plays a big part in community life here in Telford and Wrekin. Whether as individuals, organisations, businesses, or schools, we recognise a need and work together to help people and make a positive difference.

We find that people choose to volunteer for a variety of reasons:

- **For some it offers the chance to give something back or make a difference to the people around them.** Very often we find it is the people that have been in need themselves and have been helped by others that want to give something back as a way of saying ‘thank you’.
- **For others it provides an opportunity to develop new skills or build on existing experience and knowledge.** Volunteering is looked at favourably by many educational establishments and employers.
- **Giving back and acts of kindness also benefit people’s health** and form one of the components of the ‘5 Ways to Wellbeing’ model which are to: connect, get active, take notice, learn, and give. Many volunteers have reported improvements in mental and physical health including reduced stress and symptoms of depression, increased confidence, and more social interaction which has helped them to feel less isolated.
- Regardless of the motivation, **what unites all volunteers is that it gives them a purpose and it is rewarding for them.**

Volunteering is a great way to make new friends, access additional training/qualifications and support people’s personal or career development.

Our Approach

The Council works to **‘protect, care and invest to create a better borough’** and working with community groups and volunteers is a key part of this, helping them become more active in their local area and working in partnership with council services. This helps build on the resources we already have and supports us in achieving our priorities for the borough and addressing particular needs.

Volunteers are highly valued by the Council and the number supporting our services is increasing on a regular basis. We have nearly as many volunteers supporting Council services as we do employees, making a difference in a variety of ways: In care services, libraries, environmental projects, at events and supporting health and wellbeing for example.

Just like employees, we have a duty of care for our volunteers and it is important we provide adequate support for them, show our appreciation and make them feel valued for all the amazing work they do to support us.

The Community Services Team leads on volunteering across the Council by:

- Working with residents and community organisations to build their skills and confidence to become active participants and develop schemes within their communities
- Supporting the Council to identify opportunities for volunteering to help us deliver services for our residents
- Delivering some Council volunteer schemes themselves (such as Street Champions, Health Champions and Snow Wardens)

The Community Services Team can provide advice and guidance if you are looking to set up or implement a volunteering scheme to support your service. There is also a range of [volunteer toolkits](#) available on the intranet providing guidance on planning through to recruiting and the ongoing management of volunteers. These should be read in conjunction with this policy and supporting guidance notes to provide clarification on key areas of importance.

[Guidance Note 1](#) provides a summary checklist to support you through the whole process.

Section 1: Planning Your Volunteer Role

There are a number of things you will need to consider before developing your role description. These are set out below:

1.1 Are you sure this is a volunteer role?

In the first instance it is important to understand what role a volunteer can play in your team and what value they can add to your service. Volunteers should not be seen as a replacement for employees but rather, they are there to complement and enhance a Council service.

However, if services are looking at how communities can take more ownership of something in a voluntary capacity, the Council can provide support with that as well. Please contact cpt@telford.gov.uk for more information.

Questions to consider when creating a volunteer role:

- **Does this look like a job that someone should be paid to do?**
- **Look at the expectations and level of responsibility involved. Is this a reasonable expectation of a volunteer?**
- **Are you being clear that this is a voluntary role and that it is managed as such?**
The Council's relationship with a volunteer is different to the relationship with an employee i.e., the volunteer can leave at any time and is under no obligation at all to achieve a certain number of hours or to achieve given targets. Managing a volunteer role like a staff role could result in inadvertently creating an employment contract. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has more information on how to avoid this in their information sheet entitled '[Making sure you don't create an employment contract](#)'.

- **Are you being clear about expectations?** The role description, interview/informal discussion and induction should identify what volunteers can expect from the Council e.g., training and support for their role, and they should also be clear on what your expectations are of them. See the [Volunteer Handbook](#) for more information on this.

1.2 Being inclusive

We want to support as many people as possible to volunteer for the Council. To ensure fair treatment for all we should consider volunteers' needs and make reasonable adjustments where we can, so they feel valued, have the right skills and knowledge to aid them in their role.

When completing the role description, Telford & Wrekin Council gives an undertaking that all applicants for volunteering roles, will be treated with fairness, respect and dignity, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, gender reassignment, age, disability, religious or political beliefs, pregnancy or maternity, unrelated criminal conviction, care experience and armed forces community status.

We incorporate equality into our core objectives, making every effort to eliminate discrimination, create equal opportunities and develop good working relationships between different people. Further information is available on the Council's [equality webpages](#), including the [Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy](#).

1.3 Special considerations for young volunteers

If you are considering a volunteer role for a young person under the age of 18, please note that they are legally classed as a child and therefore additional safeguards need to be put in place to protect them:

- When putting a role description together, managers should assess the risk to determine whether the role is suitable for a young person and whether it puts them or the people they are volunteering with at risk. When assessing this managers need to consider the [Young Person's Risk Assessment](#) which can be found on the [Health & Safety sharepoint page](#).
- Written consent must be sought from the young person's parents or guardians prior to them starting a volunteer role, and information should be provided on what the role will involve and when and where the young person will be volunteering.

1.4 References and DBS checks

Before signing someone up as a Council volunteer we have a duty of care to ensure new applicants do not pose a threat in any way. As a minimum you should always check applicant details on the Council's Personal Safety Precautions (PSP) register.

Dependent on the type of volunteer role, there may also be a requirement for you to carry out references and DBS checks prior to appointing someone to their role.

See [Guidance Note 2](#) for more information on this. Further information on criminal record checks is also available on the [Council's Recruitment, Selection & Induction SharePoint](#) pages.

Information regarding convictions, cautions and contact details for references should be collected from volunteers as part of the application process, detailed in section 2.1. The template [Volunteer Reference Request Form](#) should be used to collect references.

1.5 Insurance & travel expenses

The main insurance covers held by the Council comprises of public liability, employers' liability and officials' indemnity which extends to indemnify volunteers whilst acting on behalf of the Council.

It is important that volunteers are clear on what they should and shouldn't be doing in their volunteer role as if they act outside this scope the insurance will not be valid.

Thinking about the nature of a volunteer role, responsible officers must also explain the necessity for volunteers to have an adequate level of motor vehicle insurance cover and which expenses they may claim.

If a volunteer is required to use their car to commute or travel as part of their role, they must ensure their motor vehicle insurance company are aware of their voluntary role and extend their cover to include business use. This is because they are carrying out Council business on our behalf. Confirmation of this cover should be provided by the volunteer and checked by the responsible officer/volunteer manager before the volunteer embarks on any journeys as part of their role.

Please note:

The addition of 'business use' does not normally incur extra charges but each case needs to be treated individually as there may be some insurance companies that do charge a fee. Services need to be prepared to cover these costs of as part of the running costs of delivering their volunteer scheme.

1.6 Funding and reimbursements

Before setting up a new volunteer scheme, services need to ensure that they have sufficient funding and resources available to support the scheme. Resources to consider include officer time to co-ordinate the volunteer(s), ongoing running costs of the scheme, e.g., any equipment, promotional materials, training, reimbursements or motor vehicle business insurance.

Although volunteers are not paid for their time given, they should be reimbursed for any reasonable expenses they incur as a result of volunteering for the Council. These should be genuine out of pocket expenses that cover things like travel or car parking when required, however, services should seek to match volunteers to a local area to keep travel costs to a minimum. We ask that volunteers provide their own food and drink.

Mileage reimbursements for volunteers is a rate of 33p per mile and should be claimed in accordance with the Council's [Car User Policy](#).

As far as possible, ask for and keep receipts from each volunteer. Volunteers are required to complete a [Volunteer Expenses Claim Form](#) and submit to their volunteer manager for payment.

Reimbursements can be made in the following ways:

- For one off claims – through Petty Cash
- For regular claims by an individual volunteer – electronically via Agresso. Volunteers will need to be set up with a supplier ID and claims can be made by completing [payment vouchers](#). Once processed volunteers will receive payments direct to their bank accounts.

Please note:

It is important that volunteers do not benefit financially from their voluntary role. Managers must not offer any payment, reward or benefit in kind (e.g. money, discounts, vouchers, tokens or gifts of appreciable value) or make any promises of a contract or paid work in the future, as this will result in the volunteer accruing employment rights. In addition, any payments or rewards offered (other than reimbursements as stated above) could be liable for taxation and affect any state benefits being claimed by the volunteer.

1.7 Risk assessments

Managers will need to create a risk assessment for volunteer roles. Volunteers will need to be given a copy of the associated risk assessment prior to starting their role and as part of their induction.

You should provide the same level of protection to volunteers where they carry out similar activities and are exposed to the same level of risk as employees.

Good health and safety management is not a barrier to volunteering. It should help enable volunteering roles to be carried out safely and effectively. Risk assessment is not about eliminating all risk or generating a lot of paperwork, it is about taking practical steps to protect people from real harm.

Risk assessments should be sensible and proportionate to the level of risk involved in the activity. A sensible approach means focusing on significant risks with potential to cause real harm and suffering. Visit the [Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\) volunteering pages](#) for further information on completing risk assessments for volunteers.

1.8 Training and development

Managers should consider what support and training they will offer to their volunteers and arrange for an account to be set up on OLLIE by logging a call via the [IDT Self Service desk](#). Volunteers can then complete their [mandatory OLLIE training modules](#) along with any other training required for their role which should be decided by the service area.

1.9 Putting together your role description

Once you are clear on all the above you will need to put together an appropriate [role description](#) so it is clear what will be required of individuals whilst volunteering for the Council.

Section 2: Advertising and Recruiting

2.1 Advertising your role

We recognise the value of having a group of volunteers that reflects the rich diversity of our community in Telford and Wrekin. To achieve this, it is important to ensure that processes, including advertising and recruitment, positively support and encourage volunteers from all walks of life to apply for opportunities.

The latest local demographic data for the borough is accessible from the Council's [Telford and Wrekin Insight webpage](#).

All advertising should state that we are committed to equality and diversity and adverts should be written in plain English, using language that is inclusive and clear. All recruitment information should be accurate, relevant, and up to date to allow potential applicants to make informed decisions about their suitability and desire to submit an application. As per the Equality Act 2010 we have a responsibility to ensure that we are fair and accessible to all. This includes people who share one, or more of the 9 protected characteristics. It is best practice for services to monitor relevant information about their volunteers.

Unlike the Council's recruitment process, volunteers do not need to apply via WM Jobs or submit a personal statement. Instead, services should provide a suitable application form for potential volunteers to complete. **The [Volunteer Registration Form template](#) gives a minimum standard of information that must be collected by each Council volunteer scheme.** This includes basic monitoring information to help us to understand and improve diversity and inclusion and address under-representation across the Council volunteer demographic, and a section on reference details (if required for the role). Service areas should only amend the sections in the form where it is indicated that editing may be required but can add sections to suit the needs of the service.

Where possible application forms should be made available online as well as having paper-based forms available if required. If requested, managers should also make time to discuss opportunities with potential volunteers prior to them submitting an application.

We recommend advertising your volunteer role on [Volunteer Telford](#). Please complete our [online form](#) to submit details of the opportunity for publication on the website. For help and support with this form, contact get.involved@telford.gov.uk. Advertising on social media platforms and/or in professional journals, where appropriate, should also be arranged directly by the recruiting service area.

The Community Services Team can also help promote opportunities via the [Volunteer Telford Facebook page](#). Please email get.involved@telford.gov.uk.

2.2 Informal meetings

Having considered the appropriate level of references and DBS checks required (see Section 1), services should arrange an informal meeting with applicants to make a final decision on whether they are suitable for the position.

The responsible officer should give prospective volunteers a clear understanding of what will be expected of them, ask them about their reasons for applying and determine their suitability for the position. [Guidance Note 3](#) provides further information about conducting informal meetings with volunteers.

When recruiting volunteers to work with children or vulnerable adults, ascertain their motivation for working with the vulnerable client group and assess their ability to form and maintain appropriate relationships and personal boundaries with the clients. Explain any background checks that will need to be completed prior to starting the role.

If during the discussion you have any concerns or suspicions about an applicant based on what has been said or where evidence has been provided (where you think they could pose a risk to members of the community or the activity they have volunteered for), then further checks will need to be carried out before proceeding any further. Remember that volunteers act on the Council's behalf, and we have a duty to safeguard them and any members of the public they may engage with.

Please note:

It is important to have a plan of action before meeting a volunteer (face to face or virtually) in case any suspicions arise during the appointment. If any concerning information comes to light during the discussion **do not continue with the recruitment process**. Your safety and wellbeing are extremely important so make your excuses and leave (have a plan of what to say beforehand or buddy up if it is appropriate to do so). Do not hand over any kit or paperwork to the volunteer and explain that you will get back to them as soon as you can.

2.3 Induction

All volunteers will need an introduction to their role. They should also be advised of what they can expect from the Council in return and the support available including a named person (i.e., the volunteer manager) they will remain in contact with and meet at mutually agreed times for regular guidance and support.

As part of this discussion, volunteers should be talked through the [Volunteer Handbook](#) and relevant role-specific risk assessment to ensure they have fully understood these and have the opportunity to ask questions. Once they have read and understood this, they should sign the [Volunteer Agreement](#). One copy of the agreement should be kept by the responsible officer, and another should be given to the volunteer along with the handbook and risk assessment.

Access to OLLIE should be provided so that volunteers can complete any [mandatory OLLIE training courses](#) relevant to their role.

As part of the induction process all volunteers should receive a 'welcome pack' folder, which includes a corporate [welcome letter](#) from the council, a copy of their role description, the risk assessment, Volunteer Handbook and a photo permission form (which is retained by the service). To request copies of the 'welcome pack' folders please contact the Community Services Team or email get.involved@telford.gov.uk.

Whilst there is no formal requirement, consideration should be given as to whether services want volunteers to wear ID badges whilst carrying out their role. Service areas will be responsible for organising and funding these.

Section 3: Managing Your Volunteers

3.1 Recording of volunteering information

Services have the responsibility of recording and storing their volunteer data safely and securely in line with [Information Security Policy](#).

Volunteers should be provided with a privacy notice if we are collecting their personal data, this can be included within the application form or another similarly appropriate document. Only the minimum amount of personal data should be collected and consideration should be given to the following before any data is collected:

- Where this information will be stored
- Who will need access – only those who need to use the data should have access
- How long the data will be held for

[Additional guidance on privacy notices](#) can be found on the [Information Governance](#) intranet page.

3.2 Support and supervision

The type and amount of support offered will depend on the nature of the volunteering opportunity and the individual's needs. It is recommended that regular contact and supervision is arranged to support volunteers and encourage ongoing engagement.

It may be appropriate to offer opportunities for informal day-to-day support, for example by checking in with the volunteer at the end of each session and expressing thanks for their input.

If you have a group of volunteers, it is recommended to arrange regular shared supervision sessions for them. This provides an opportunity for them to meet and share ideas and contribute to the development of the role, provide experiences for peer support and feedback and offer some training or invite guest speakers.

Regular communication is also important – some ways to keep your volunteers informed could include:

- A regular newsletter
- Group emails
- Social media accounts – for volunteers to follow
- Chat groups – for volunteers to connect with one another and share experiences. See the Council's [Social Media Policy](#). You can also complete a [Social Media Account request form](#) and email Corporate Communications to alert them to your request.

Volunteers should also be kept informed of any changes to their role or the people they are engaging with and consulted on how these changes may affect them.

A volunteer's support needs may change during their involvement with the service so responsible officers should regularly review and adapt the support they are providing. Responsible officers must also be prepared to give volunteers a reference based on their volunteer role as required.

3.3 Recognition and voice

Recognising the contribution of volunteers is very important. It shows that we recognise their input, makes them feel valued/appreciated and they are more likely to stay with us.

There are many ways we can do this:

- Provide references
- Say thank you (verbally or with greeting cards)
- Provide regular reviews and support (shared supervision for example)
- Keep volunteers up to date with changes in the organisation so they feel informed
- Provide clothing, badges etc. so volunteers are instantly recognisable and appreciated
- Arrange fun social/thank you events
- Offer training and personal development
- Nominate volunteers for local and national recognition awards
- Be as flexible and accommodating as you can of individual needs
- Highlight your volunteers in your communications – National Volunteers' Week is the most prominent time of the year to do this. This can be done in a variety of ways - on social media, in press releases, newsletters, reports and other publications (with their permission)
- Case studies (with their permission)
- Provide certificates
- Offer and pay reimbursements
- Share feedback from service users on the impact their volunteering is making to others

Gaining feedback from volunteers is another important way for them to feel valued and involved. You can do this in a variety of ways – during shared supervision sessions, in focus groups or via surveys for example. Feedback is extremely important, it will help you better understand what is working well, what may need improving and how your volunteers feel in terms of the support they are receiving from you. You can establish what volunteers are getting out of their volunteering role and the difference it is making, and it could also be an opportunity for volunteers to put forward ideas of their own which may help influence how you choose to do things in the future.

3.4 Managing concerns

If the responsible officer has any concerns about the conduct of the volunteer, these should be explored and addressed immediately. Advice should be sought from Human Resources on individual cases and may involve referral to a Vetting Panel if the volunteer is working with children or vulnerable groups and/or is working in the community.

If the outcome of the Vetting Panel determines that the volunteer cannot continue to work with children or vulnerable adults, they should be informed of this. Checks should be made as to whether the individual is volunteering in other areas of the authority.

Human Resources should also be notified in order that other agencies can be informed if necessary.

Please note: if a volunteer is asked to step down it is important that any Council equipment, ID badges, uniform etc. are returned. If it is safe to do so, make arrangements for these items to be returned as soon as possible. However, if the volunteer is deemed to pose a threat of either physical or verbal harm **do not make contact again**.

In these circumstances, please contact the Enforcement Team on enfo-asb@telford.gov.uk so that alternative arrangements can be made to reclaim Council property in a safe manner. If this has followed an incident this must be reported on the Councils incident reporting system. If you wish to seek advice on a Health and Safety concern regarding a volunteer, please contact the internal Health & Safety Team at HealthSafetyAdmin@telford.gov.uk.

You may also need to submit information for the purposes of the [Personal Safety and Precautions \(PSP\) register](#).

If there are concerns around a volunteer's conduct while using Council-run social media pages or chat groups, please refer to the Social Media Policy as mentioned in section 3.2 and familiarise yourself with the Councils [terms and disclaimer](#). Further advice can also be sought from the Corporate Communications Team.

3.5 Reporting incidents

If a volunteer is involved or injured in an incident or near miss, they must report this to the responsible officer for information and consideration of further mitigations. Contact details of responsible officers must be shared with volunteers before they commence their role. Risk assessments may need to be updated to reflect changes or to record new hazards.

Responsible officers must also follow the Council's Health & Safety Policy and procedures around reporting incidents via My View. The system allows employees to record accidents, near misses and violent incidents. Further information can be found on the [Health & Safety SharePoint](#) pages.

Consideration must also be made to incidents that are required to be reported to the HSE under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 2013. Further guidance is available on the [HSE](#) website, including [when to report incidents involving volunteers](#).

3.6 Complaints

In the unfortunate event that a volunteer needs to make a complaint, in the first instance they should talk to the responsible officer/volunteer manager who should investigate on the volunteer's behalf.

However, if a volunteer doesn't feel comfortable doing this (maybe because the issue is in relation to the volunteer manager) they should report it to the volunteer manager's line manager. The line manager should then investigate and if HR support is required, they should liaise with the HR helpdesk in the usual way. Where appropriate, and if more formal action should be taken, the normal HR processes would need to be followed.

If the volunteer does not know who the volunteer manager's line manager is they should email get.involved@telford.gov.uk to assist with this – as set out in the [Volunteer Handbook](#).

The [Council's Speak Up \(Whistleblowing\) policy](#) also applies to volunteers and provides guidance on where and when to raise concerns.

3.7 Ending voluntary activity

A volunteer can decide not to volunteer at any point and does not have to resign from their position nor does the council need to give notice to the volunteer if his or her services are no longer required.

It is recommended that an exit interview is held to gather useful information that might assist volunteers in the future and promote continued improvement. As part of the exit interview, services should also provide volunteers with a 'leavers letter' to show appreciation for all they have done during their time as a Council volunteer.

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