

Principal Social Worker Annual Report

September 2024

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Introduction

Adult Social Care Workforce Development

This is my second Principal Social Worker Annual Report since joining West Berkshire Adult Social Care. The past 12 months has been interesting and challenging at times. However, we have been able to make good progress in specific areas which we should be proud of. One thing that is key that I would like to highlight is, within this period we have experienced the advantages of good partnership working both internally and with our external partners. Most importantly the strengths-based approach combined with the three conversations model has enabled us to work in partnership with service users, carers and families to enable them to achieve their desired outcomes.

Another key highlight within the past 12 months has also been the Care Quality Commission's visit to Newbury in February this Year. West Berkshire Council was among the first three Local Authorities to be assessed by the CQC using their new single assessment framework. Despite the panic and worry it created among some of us, I must say we braced ourselves well for this challenge. I am pleased to tell you that West Berkshire Council was rated 'Good' by the Care Quality Commission in May this year.

This report gives me the opportunity to highlight the achievements, to reflect on areas we think we could have done better, what improvements are needed and identify priorities for the coming year.



Background

Care Act 2014 Revised Statutory Guidance – Department of Health and Social Care, October 2023

The role of the Principal Social Worker in care and support

The role of the principal social worker has developed since 2011 when it was first introduced by the Social Work Reform Board, and it was recommended in the Munro report. The Principal Social Worker is now a statutory requirement referenced in the new regulations in the Care Act 2014 revised guidance:

'1.27 The purpose of this section of the guidance is to further clarify arrangements to have in place a designated principal social worker in adult care and support. Local authorities should decide to have a qualified and registered social work professional practice lead in place to:

- lead and oversee excellent social work practice.
- support and develop arrangements for excellent practice.
- lead the development of excellent social workers.
- support effective social work supervision and decision making.
- oversee quality assurance and improvement of social work practice.
- advise the director of adult social services (DASS) and/or wider council in complex or controversial cases and on developing case or other law relating to social work practice.
- function at the strategic level of the Professional Capabilities Framework'

Employer Standards Health Check 2024

The Employer Standards Health Check survey this year was prepared by Work in Confidence Limited for the Local Government Association. The survey was open to all adult registered social workers, adult social care workers and occupational therapists from 16th February 2024 to 22nd March 2024. The health check is a temperature check designed to understand the work experience of social workers, social care workers and occupational therapists. The survey questions were linked to the 8 employer standards with additional questions relating to bullying, harassment and discrimination in the survey for social workers and occupational therapists.

I am pleased to say West Berkshire participated in the survey again this year and the results showed very good performances for social workers and occupational therapists. Registered Social Workers and Occupational Therapists benchmark above the national and regional average in 7 of the 8 standards.

For social workers our strongest performances were in the following areas:

Standard 1	Strong and Clear Social Work Framework	78
Standard 2	Effective workforce planning systems	76
Standard 4	Wellbeing	77
Standard 5	Supervision	78
Standard 7	Professional Registration	76
Standard 8	Strategic Partnerships	79

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We had very strong performances for Occupational Therapists among all the 8 standards and one of the additional question areas.

Standard 1	Strong and clear Occupational Therapy Framework	90
Standard 2	Effective workforce planning systems	75
Standard 3	Safe workloads and case allocation	81
Standard 4	Wellbeing	86
Standard 5	Supervision	86
Standard 6	CPD Continuous Professional Development	83
Standard 7	Professional Registration	90
Standard 8	Strategic Partnerships	77
Additional survey questions	Engagement with my job and my organisation	80

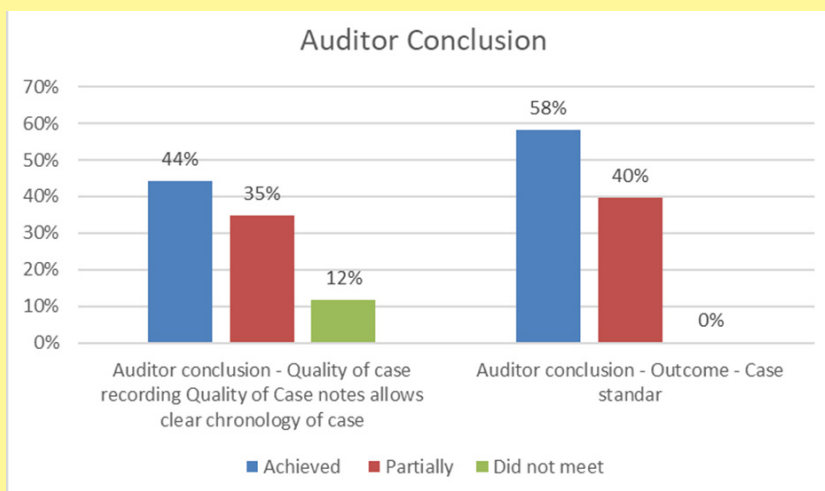
Key

- **75+** Good score/outcome. To be celebrated.
- **51-74** Moderate score/outcome. Capable of improvement.
- **50 or less** Relatively poor score/outcome. A clear signal to take steps to improve.

The standards we were unable to achieve the required scores for both social workers and social care workers will be addressed in the Action plan that will be co-produced with all staff following the results of the survey.

Case File Audits

I am pleased to report Case File Audits is now fully implemented. In my last report I did state that we were in the process of starting this. We conducted pilot in November 2023, 43 cases (Care Act Assessment and Reviews) were audited. 58% achieved the required standard and 40% were rated as 'partially achieved' (see diagram right).



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Following the successful pilot, the first batch of cases to be audited were allocated in December 2023. We now have Team Managers and Team Leaders auditing cases. The audit results are analysed. The audits gave us the opportunity to see which areas we are performing well and is worth celebrating. These areas are:

- Person centred approach: the views and wishes of the service user recorded and their involvement in the assessment,
- Good proportional strength-based work
- Involvement of an advocate
- Ensuring there is a risk and contingency plan in place /risk considered throughout and plans to mitigate this.
- Clear evidence mental capacity has been considered and recorded.

The areas we believe improvement is required based on the audit results have been addressed in our Action plan.

Supervision Survey

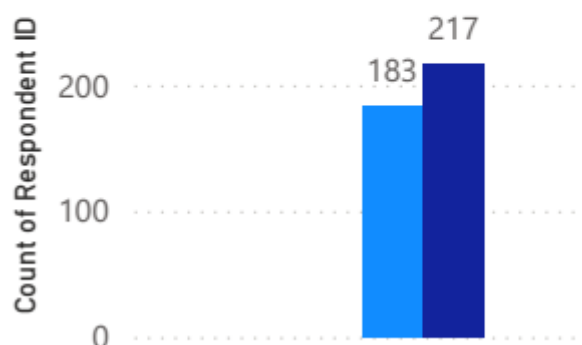
The survey was completed in December 2023 and the results were quite encouraging. The overall response rate was 52% which is an improvement compared with the response rate in the previous year which was 47%. Response rate among residential and care home staff improved from 7% to 29%. Similarly, there was an improvement in the frequency of supervision with over 91% of respondents stated they had supervision every 7 weeks. This is an improvement from 83% the previous year. In terms of ratings across the standards or questions, the highest ratings were among the statement 'I can use supervision always to express concerns to managers in an open and honest manner' with 83.42%. There were positive comments made by staff about supervision: 'supportive supervisor', 'protected time for staff to discuss their concerns, and work with supervisors to solve problems together'. Other comments were that 'supervision created the opportunity to reflect and measure performance so far and recognising good practice'.

Supervision when done well not only benefits the employees but the service users, carers and family, external partners and the community. The 4x4x4 model of supervision developed by Morrison 2005 reflects the key principles of good supervision. It recognises that supervision makes a difference to adults and carers, relationships are central and critical reflection is seen as crucial. Staff referred to how they discussed cases with their supervisors with a view to explore ways to help service users.

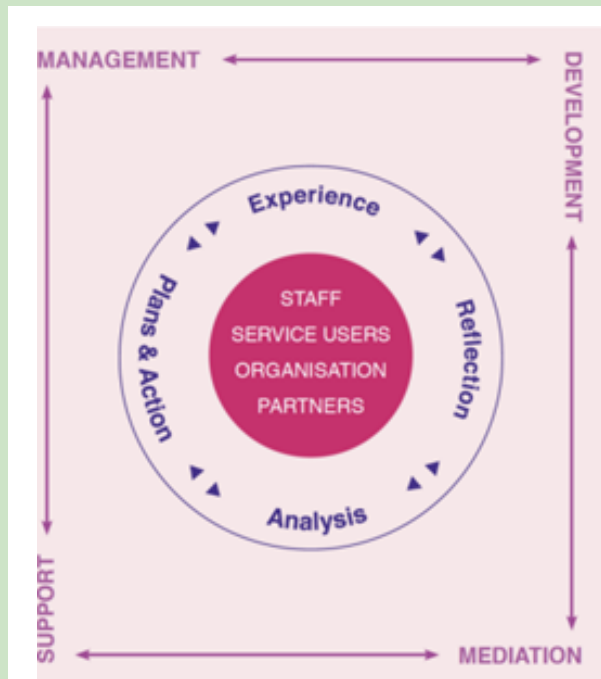
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Supervision Survey - Overall responses by year

Year ● 2022-2023 ● 2023-2024



4x4x4 Supervision Model (Morrison 2005)



The 4x4x4 Model is an integrated framework that brings the above elements into a single model (left). The model defines supervision as a process that involves a professional relationship and involves all staff. It recognises that the needs of the supervisee, service users, and other stakeholders may be aligned, or they may conflict at times. The model enables the process of supervision to account for the different needs, stakeholders, and stages involved in supervision.

The 4x4x4 Model can be used during supervision meetings to guide the conversation by focusing on different aspects of a staff member's role depending on functions, stakeholders, or experience. This can help to identify some of the tensions in service delivery that may arise when, for example, the expectations of a stakeholder conflict with the purpose/scope of a staff member's role.

Adult Social Care Workforce Plan 2024-2027

The Principal Social Worker chairs the Workforce Development Board quarterly meetings. We have revised the previous workforce plan and now have a plan for 2024-2027. The plan will address issues such as making sure we have the right staff composition in the various roles across Adult Social Care, with the right skills, commitment, and shared values. The key themes that run through the current plan are:

- Modernise Adult Social Care, innovation with data, a digital workforce including the use of AI and Technology
- Attract and retain
- Training and career development: we need a skilled and motivated workforce
- Career progression -opportunities for growth in the job. Succession planning.
- Staff wellbeing
- Leadership and Management
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Adult Social Care Workforce Action Plan will be monitored and updated at the Adult Social Care Workforce Development Board meetings. Care Quality Commission impression of the Adult Social Care workforce during their inspection visit is that 'staff liked working for the local authority and described leaders as approachable and supportive' (CQC LA Assessment Report WBC dated 17.05.24).

Learning and Development

In July 2023 we had the launching for four Newly Qualified Social Workers who undertook their Assessed and Support Year in Employment. Two of the four newly qualified social workers completed the social work degree apprenticeship programme from Winchester University and had been employed in Adult Social Care for several years working as Social Care Practitioners prior to embarking on the course. The ASYE Internal Moderation Panel received four good portfolios from all four NQSW's. It was amazing to see the gradual progression among the NQSW's over the 12 months period. The portfolio showed evidence of good reflective and evaluative skills, person centred approach using a strengths- based work, implementing theory into practice, drawing on relevant research, polices, guidance, procedures and legislation. During the NQSW's journey each person's confidence had developed.

Skills for Care introduced an additional requirement to the portfolio's last year as ASYE's now have to do a presentation during the 9th month. All four NQSW's delivered very good presentations. I am pleased to report that one of the four portfolio was selected for the External Moderation Panel and came back with very good comments from the Assessor.

The success of the NQSW's I believe is down to the well-structured programme designed to support them throughout the year.

We currently have four ASYE's who are in the ninth month aiming to submit their portfolio's in October this year.

Table of NQSW's undertaking ASYE

Year	Number of NQSW's
2022	4
2023	4

The number of NQSW's remains stable and we are hoping that it will increase bringing more social workers into the system with the intention of retaining them.

Social Work Degree Apprenticeship Programme

The Social Work Degree Apprenticeship Programme is delivered at Winchester University (Apprenticeship provider). The number of staff who have been selected to undertake the programme has increased since 2021.

Year	Number of Adult Social Work Apprentices
2021	3
2022	2
2023	3
2024	4

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Winchester University reported very good performances from the West Berkshire Apprentices on the programme for the End Point Assessment.

West Berkshire applied for grant funding from Department of Health and Social Care in March this year for Social Work Degree Apprentices. The grant funding is expected to cover costs associated with training and supervision of the new adult social work apprentices; the extra support provided by an independent practice educator, managing and co-ordinating the social work degree apprenticeship programme. We were successful in our bid and awarded grant funding for four apprentices. The funding will cover the period 2023-2024. Unfortunately, only three of the four apprentices will be starting the degree programme in September this year. To support the Apprentices during the academic year, the funding will be used for payments for monthly tutorials delivered by an Independent Practice Educator.

We currently have three social work apprentices at Winchester University. Two of the three apprentices are about to start Level 6 in September this year and one apprentice is due to start Level 5. The total number of apprentices at Winchester University this September is six.

Training completed by staff from 01.09.2023 to 31.08.2024:

Number of courses delivered which Adult Social Care Staff can attend..... **139 courses**

Short Term Professional Courses:

Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS 1) – **one** Social Worker completed with Buckinghamshire New University

Best Interests Assessors training in the past 12 months- **three** Social Workers completed with Bournemouth University.

ILM Leadership and Management training: - Level 3, **two** people successfully completed.

Other Training Courses:

Oliver McGowan Training – number of staff that have completed eLearning:

238 people have completed Part 1 (e-learning) : this is 53% of the current ASC workforce of 450 ; **50 people** have completed Tier 1 Part 2 (11%) ; **124** have completed Tier 2 Part 2 (28%) ; therefore **174** people have completed their relevant Part 1 and Part 2 (39%)

Race Awareness Training for Staff : 'Anti-Racist Practice, Whiteness and Allyship' delivered in May 2023. Feedback from attendees at the social workers forum was that this training should be done on a regular basis.

Work with Unpaid Carers

I am pleased to report we have revised our current Carers Strategy 2019 to 2021. The Carers Strategy 2024-2027 (draft) is an All-Age Carers Strategy. The draft strategy will go out for public consultation this autumn for 6 weeks.

The Carers Strategy Group meets quarterly. We celebrated Carers Rights Day in November last year. The theme for the day was 'Caring for the future'. Thirty-nine carers attended the information and advice event at Newbury Rugby Club. There was a good turnout among carers. Among the speakers was representative from Gardner Leader (Solicitors) explaining about the types of Lasting Power of Attorney's, Wills, and Trusts. We also had Sally Carey a Social Care Practitioner deliver a presentation on how Adult Social Care supports unpaid carers. Eleven charities attended the event. I am pleased to report 6 new carers attended the event.



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We also celebrated Carers Week from the 10th - 16th June this year. We had various events throughout the week starting with 'Greece Comes to Newbury' lunch for unpaid carers which was held at Fairclose Centre on Monday 10th June. There was a good turnout as 43 carers attended.

An Information and Advice Event took place on Thursday the 13th June at Newbury Rugby Club in Thatcham. There was good representation from charities that support unpaid carers. What was new this year, is that the Berkshire Health Foundation Trust Carers Lead organised a Health Bus which was on site at the information and advice event. The aim was to get carers to think about their physical health and overall wellbeing.

There were health professionals on site to take carers blood pressure and give advice on physical health issues. Unfortunately, we did not have a good turnout at this event for number of reasons.

The week ended with an event at Shaw House on Friday 14th June. The event was about making a natural bird feeder and a garden walk. 15 carers attended which was the maximum number of attendees.



Inside Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust Health Bus for Unpaid Carers

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Information and Advice Event – Thatcham Rugby Club

The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) launched £42.6 million Accelerating Reform Fund (ARF) to boost the quality and accessibility of adult social care by supporting innovation and scaling, and kickstarting a change in services to support unpaid carers. West Berkshire Adult Social Care has been part of a consortium to bid for grant funding from DHSC. Our proposal involves working with our Digital Team to create a self-assessment tool for unpaid carers to complete online which will be on the council's digital platform. The completed assessment will be monitored by a social care practitioner who will work mainly with unpaid carers assessments and reviews. The second project within the ARF is to improve identification of unpaid carers which is a joint project with four other local authorities within Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System (BOB ICS).

The important role that carers play was identified by CQC during their assessment of the Local Authority. They requested the LA facilitate contact to enable them to speak with minimum 10 and maximum 30 carers. We were able to submit names of 20 carers with their consent. The CQC wanted to gain an in depth understanding of carers experiences and journey. The Care Quality Commission stated in their report that 'carers said support provided by the local authority was good although some feedback that initially accessing support was not always clearsome also said they did not immediately identify themselves as a carer'. Although this will be addressed in our Action Plan following the CQC Report, it is also one of the key priority areas in the PSW work plan for the coming year.

Autism Partnership Board

The Board continues to meet quarterly, and the PSW chairs the meetings. We have been working on revising the exiting Autism strategy 2019 to 2022. As I mentioned in my previous PSW Report we intend to have an All-Age Autism Strategy which will align with the priorities in the National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults 2021-2026. To enable us to produce an All-Age Autism Strategy, we felt it is important to get the views of autistic people and incorporate this in the strategy. We conducted a survey last July which was open for 6 weeks. We had a good response with 144 respondents (autistic people and carers). We also organised a Focus group meeting for professionals who work with autistic people last November. Similarly, the questions put to professionals were aligned to the 6 priority areas in the national strategy for autistic children, young people and adults 2021-26. We formed a sub-group which will focus on revising the existing strategy. We now have an autistic mother to three autistic children who is an active member of the Autism Partnership Board and sub-group. It is our intention that the strategy is co-produced. We are hoping the draft strategy will start to go through the corporate process beginning of November this year.



We celebrated World Autism Day on the 2nd April 2024. The Autism Partnership Board members wanted us to acknowledge the day by hanging posters around the council buildings and schools to help raise awareness of autism. The poster was designed by group members.

Safeguarding Adults Audits

I have been involved in auditing closed safeguarding cases. The Service Manager for Safeguarding Adults and myself are expected to audit 10% of closed safeguarding s42 enquiries annually. I continue to see evidence of good practice in safeguarding adults work among staff. Our strengths lie in the following areas:

- Establishing whether the adult at risk has mental capacity in relation to the safeguarding allegation
- Involvement of Advocates
- Risk Management Plan

The Social Workers Forum continues to take place quarterly. We now include a SAR on the agenda that can be discussed during the Forum. At the last Forum we discussed the BREE SAR (see references). This was shared with all staff (including social workers) prior to the meeting, creating the opportunity to reflect on their current practice and identify learning points from the SAR.

Key Priorities for the PSW's work plan for 2024/25

1. Work with Carers -identification, carers from diverse communities, work with voluntary sector for more involvement and better understanding.
2. To co-produce the All-Age Autism Strategy 2024-2027
3. Employer Standards Health Check Survey Results 2024 - Action plan.
4. To continue to focus on practice quality, learning and improvement for staff.
5. Autism Awareness Refresher Training for Adult Social Care Staff

References

1. Care Act 2014 Revised Statutory Guidance -Department of Health and Social Care, October 2023

2. Models for Supervision

[Guide to Supervision Models for Supervision.pdf](https://volunteeringhub.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Guide%20to%20Supervision:%20Models%20for%20Supervision.pdf)

<https://volunteeringhub.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Guide%20to%20Supervision:%20Models%20for%20Supervision.pdf>

3. CQC LA Assessment Report- West Berkshire Council

<https://www.cqc.org.uk/care-services/local-authority-assessment-reports/WBerkshire1>

4. Bree SAR Learning Brief

<https://sabberkshirewest.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/West-of-Berkshire-SAR-Bree-final-report-23.01.2024-V.2.0.pdf>