

REPORT TO: Health & Wellbeing Board

DATE: 12 March 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director, Adult Social Care

PORTFOLIO: Adult Social Care

SUBJECT: Adults Principal Social Worker - Annual Report (October 2024)

WARD(S): Borough wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an annual progress report from the Adults Principal Social Worker, (APSW), to discuss how the role of social work, supports Halton Borough Council to meet its priorities and objectives.

2.0 **RECOMMENDED: That the Board note the contents of the report.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 **Background**

3.1.1 The APSW is a statutory requirement under The Care Act 2014. The national guidance on the role and responsibilities has evolved and been updated and clarified over recent years. The Principal Social Workers, has a key role in representing and promoting the social work profession. Principal Social Workers should in brief:

- Lead and oversee excellent social work practice
- Oversee quality assurance and improvement of social work practice
- Support the development of creative and person centred support to Halton residents
- Link in with the monthly regional and National ADASS PSW Networks
- Advise the Director of Adult Social Services (DASS), SMT, Management Team and/or wider Council in complex or controversial cases and on case or other law relating to social work practice.

3.2 **Strengths Based Approaches and Practice**

3.2.1 Halton Borough Council Social Workers in ASC are skilled and committed to their personal development, as well as ensuring we provide an excellent service to people who are in receipt of support and their carers. Over the past twelve months, Halton has commissioned Helen Sanderson Associates to provide Strengths based training across adult social care, initially gaining feedback from people with lived experience on the new social care documentation. We have completed 2 Cohort's for 250 staff and 2 Train the Trainers as part of the on-going roll out of Strengths based Training

for staff in the future as well as recent dedicated management training. This has aided staff in supporting an individual to identify their strengths and abilities, wishes, feelings, hopes and aspirations.

3.3 **Specialist Training**

3.3.1 As part of the national roll out of the Oliver McGowan training, Halton now has the eLearning available to all staff , with 390 staff , having accessed it this year . We are working in partnership with the Clinical Advisor for Learning Disability and Autism Programme, NHS England North West, Training for Tier 1 webinars with 12 people completing and tier two , 'Train the trainer ' have been trained here from in-house/external care provider 's in Halton . We are now promoting opportunities for potential local experts with Learning Disabilities and Autism to train as trainers. We have met with our colleagues in HR and we are looking at how we can best support and recruit expert trainers in order to roll out the training in house.

3.4 **Workforce**

3.4.1 As part of HBC commitment to our present and future workforce development, we are supporting Community Care Workers, (Unqualified Social Work Practitioners) in accessing the Social Work degree programme, via the Apprenticeship Scheme across LJMU & Chester University . We currently have a total of eight staff training on the SWDA We have also utilised funding from HCPC to explore the new MA Social Work Degree Apprenticeship offered by UCLAN and have a successful candidate who started on that course in September 2024. In 2024 we also created the opportunity to offer an Occupational Therapy apprenticeship and have recruited an existing unqualified OT worker onto the course ran at University of Huddersfield. The APSW is working alongside social care and corporate colleagues in order to maximise the use of the apprenticeship levy for our future workforce.

3.5 **Mental Health: Think Ahead Programme**

3.5.1 This year Halton successfully partnered up with the national 'Think Ahead' programme and Mersey Care to offer the opportunity for graduates to experience both community and secure mental health services while fast tracking to a social work master's degree. This will benefit Halton's workforce plans by having the opportunity to recruit from the participants and has presented development opportunities for current Social Workers to experience the role of Consultant Social Worker and complete Practice Educator training.

3.6 **Standards For Employers**

3.6.1 In supporting our social work staff, we are using "The Standards for Employers of Social Workers in England", which states, "*Good social work can transform people's lives and protect them from harm*"

3.6.2 The Standards for Employers of Social Workers, published by the Local Government Association (LGA), set out the shared core expectations of employers which will enable social workers in all employment settings to work effectively and safely. Under the umbrella of the standards, there is a range of work taking place locally to ensure

that the social work profession is supported, including:

3.7 **The Organisational Health Check**

3.7.1 One of the requirements under Standard 1 is for employers to “ensure that mechanisms are in place to listen to and respond to the views of social work practitioners on a regular basis, in Halton we regularly undertake an annual “Organisational Health Check” to ensure the organisation remains a place where the right environment and conditions exist to support best social work practice”.

3.7.2 An annual **Health Check Survey** is conducted by the LGA at a national level. Halton Social Workers have taken part in the survey in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. The purpose of the health check survey is to better understand the experiences of Social Workers. It is intended to help support and deliver effective social work and means that issues can be identified and addressed and allows social workers to feel listened to.

3.7.3 Some key points to note from the attached summary of results from the 2024 survey are:

- Our average overall responses to standard 1 to 8 is higher at a score of 80, to the Northwest at 77 and nationally at 76.
- Our average overall responses workplace experiences is also higher at a score of 75, to the Northwest at 69 and nationally at 67.
- When looking at Adult social workers, there are no standards in the amber zone, they are all in the green zone, whereas last year there was one standard in the amber zone, which was CPD
- 7 of the standards have increased from last year. There is only standard 2, Effective workforce planning systems which has remained the same as last year with a score of 83. The national average response to this standard is 78.
- Standard 6, Continuing professional development (CPD) has had the biggest increase from a score of 66 last year to a score of 85 this year. This is then followed by Standard 3, Safe workloads and case allocation with a score of 70 last year to a score of 82 this year. This is then closely followed by Standard 5, Supervision with a score of 74 last year to a score of 85 this year.
- When looking more closely at the individual questions under the safe workloads and case allocation standard, last year, of particular concern was the responses to the statement “I am usually able to balance the demands of case work and the resources needed to fulfil my responsibilities.” This was a score of 50 last year and this has increased to a score of 71 this year.
- Last year, in relation to the supervision standard, the lowest scoring statement was “I have uninterrupted, scheduled supervision at a suitable frequency with an appropriately skilled social work supervisor.” It fell in the amber zone but it is green this year with a score of 78.
- In previous years, CPD has scored low, in particular the following statements – “My organisation provides regular/annual appraisals (or performance reviews) that are relevant for social workers” and “Within my organisation, I have an up to date plan of my professional development needs and how I and my employer will contribute to them.” These were red scoring statements. There has been an increase this year for both statements. “My organisation provides regular/annual appraisals (or performance reviews) that are relevant for social

workers” has increased from a score of 47 last year to a score of 67 this year. “Within my organisation, I have an up to date plan of my professional development needs and how I and my employer will contribute to them” has increased from a score of 43 last year to a score of 68 this year.

3.8 Quality Assurance

3.8.1 Peer Review; Skills for Care

3.8.1.1 In February 2024, Skills for Care completed a Peer Review of Halton’s ASYE Programme. This included the requirement that Halton have a robust Quality Assurance (QA) process in place and a continuous improvement cycle. The aim was to improve ASYE consistency and standards across the country. They also provide feedback to the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education. The APSW & ASYE Coordinator prepared for the visit by sending through a comprehensive overview of the programme and this was acknowledged by the lead reviewer on behalf of Skills for Care. The Director for Care management, the Principal Social Worker and the ASYE coordinator, six of Halton’s Newly Qualified Social Workers and three of the ASYE assessors were interviewed separately. The feedback was very positive. There was acknowledgement of the positive impact of the Practice Manager post for Adult Social Care training and development had, enabling Adult Social Care to provide a structured ASYE programme, with strong involvement from the APSW and senior management. The feedback was that the interviews with the NQSWs and the Assessors feedback on the programme was positive, with Halton placing a strong commitment to the recruitment, retention and development of social workers in Halton.

3.9 Case File Audits

3.9.1 The APSW worked with Managers to recently update The Case File Audits policy, following 12 months of dedicated Case file audits sessions, supporting managers to ringfence time to allow team managers time away from the teams to enable case file audits to take place. There has been a steady improvement in the quality of the audits and an understanding of the themes, which have fed into Social Work Matters agenda and Service Planning events. The themes arising recently have been, Documents were person centred, Evidence of effective partnership working, Excellent documentation of person wishes, Excellent use of MCA, Evidence of independence being focused on within the intervention, Clear outcomes set, One case highlighted a case where a person challenged the support plan. This showed good feedback mechanisms within the team and management oversight. Evidenced the Prevention & Wellbeing Service (PWS), impact at the front door of social care.

3.10 Culture & Practice

3.10.1 Since the appointment of the Practice Manager for Training & Social Work Professional Development, back in February 2022, who has supported the APSW supporting overall training and development and recruitment and retention of Social Work Staff and students in a number of areas:

- Forging a positive working relationship with the Cheshire and Merseyside Social Work Teaching Partnership (CMSWTP),

- Social Work Degree Apprenticeship Programme has expanded
- A relationship with the FEI providers has been strengthened and a presentation on Social Work as a career choice has taken place with more to follow. This work has strengthened the pipeline of Social Work training, development and recruitment in Halton.
- Regular monthly support sessions have been set up for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs).
- The Continued Professional Development (CPD) of Social Workers has continued to be supported by the Social Work Matters (SWM) forums. Particular themes that have been covered are support to carers, Prevention & Wellbeing, hoarding, working with people who have complex needs.
- A monthly Social Work Matters roundup newsletter goes out, highlighting, new Government guidance, Legislation updates, and articles of interest from Social Work England, BASW, SCIE, NICE, RIPFA etc., with CPD opportunities for Adult Social Care staff
- Staff Action Learning sets, Journal clubs and dedicated time to
- uphold their CPD requirements to uphold their registration for social work England.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 None identified.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 None identified.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence
The activity outlined in this report contributes to the attainment of this Council priority.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy
None identified.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families
None identified.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need
The activity outlined in this report contributes to the attainment of this Council priority.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future
None.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community
None identified.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 None identified.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 None identified.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None identified.

10.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

10.1 None under the meaning of the Act.