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# Briefing to Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee

Date: 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2024

## Subject:

Adult Social Care – Workforce update and strategy

## For Discussion

## Report of:

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## Portfolio holder:

Councillor Barbara Brownridge  
Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care

## Sign-off:

Jayne Ratcliffe  
Director of Adult Social Care (DASS)

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## Summary

Workforce has been highlighted as a significant risk by a recent peer review, the Adult Social Care (ASC) Management Team, and the Skills for Care report, 'The State of Adult Social Care sector & workforce in England' in reference to the wider workforce pressures in the care provider market. Recruitment and retention of staff is proving increasingly difficult in Adult Social Care (ASC) as increased case complexity, increased volume of referrals post-Covid 19, and front-line staff leaving to work for agencies or other localities with better salaries, terms, and conditions, means an increased workload for staff at all levels.

The delivery of the new Target Operating Model and associated savings, improvements in quality in the ASC directorate, and sustainable staffing across the provider market and ability to deliver statutory Care Act duties are directly affected by challenges in recruitment and retention.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) are expected to undertake the formal assurance process in the next two years; however, it could be as soon as a matter of weeks. An inability to deliver the statutory duties of Adult Social Care owing to staffing issues, creates significant risk for the department and the Council itself.

In response to these concerns, a whole service workforce strategy, and related programme plan, have been drafted and will be described within this report.

## Background

- 1.1 It is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit and retain qualified and unqualified staff in the Adult Social Care sector. Universities in the region are reporting reducing numbers of applicants to train as Social Workers. Social Work in England reported 24.1% of the 5,335 social workers who left the register in the year to 30 November 2023 had been continuously registered for less than a year. This is only

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just short of the 28.7% of leavers who left after being registered for at least 10 years, despite there being more than four times as many in the latter group as the former on the register – 51,184 compared with 12,464 – as of 30 November 2022. At the same time care providers are reporting increasing challenges to attract staff. The cost-of-living crisis, in addition to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, mean fewer people are choosing to work in challenging people-facing and often low-paid roles.

- 1.2 Working in social care, regardless of the context, can be high-pressure and requires personal resilience and dedication. Whilst many people come into the sector as a vocation, it is increasingly less attractive and significantly competitive with other local authorities, which require specific incentives are needed to recruit and retain staff.
- 1.3 The ASC Workforce Strategy forms a specific workstream of the ASC improvement plan, capturing specific issues and areas for focus across the directorate, and wider into the care provider market. It is important to note that efforts have been made to ensure that due consideration is given to both Social Work roles (students, apprenticeships, progression routes and leadership) and roles both in the wider service, and the care provider market.

## **2 Current position – Summary of the Adult Social Care sector**

- 2.1 Skills for Care is the strategic workforce development and planning body for adult social care in England. Skills for Care work with employers, Government, and partners to ensure social care has the right people, skills, and support required to deliver the highest quality care and support, now and in the future. Their role is to respond and adapt to the emerging trends and needs within social care, using data and evidence to drive forward widescale change.
- 2.2 Skills for Care produce an annual data set (ASC-WDS) with the latest information being published on 2022/23 data in October 2023. Some key headlines include:
  - In 2022/23 the adult social care sector in England has an estimated 18,000 organisations with 39,000 care providing locations and a workforce of around 1.79 million posts.
  - The total number of posts in Oldham was around 8,500 in 2022/23. This was comprised of 7,900 filled posts and 500 vacancies.
  - Since the previous year, the total number of posts has increased by 50 (less than 1%), the number of filled posts has increased by 225 (3%) and the number of vacancies has decreased by 175.
  - There were an estimated 7,900 filled posts in adult social care, split by local authorities (3%), independent sector providers (71%), posts working for direct payment recipients (21%) and other sectors (5%).
  - As at March 2023, Oldham contained 91 CQC regulated services, of these, 45 were residential and 46 were non-residential.
  - If the workforce grows proportionally to the projected number of people aged 65 and over then the total number of adult social care posts in the North West region will increase by 21% (from 250,000 to 300,000 posts) between 2022/23 and 2035.
  - It is estimated that Oldham had 5,900 adult social care filled posts in the local authority and independent sectors. These included 475 managerial roles, 200 regulated professionals, 4,300 direct care (including 3,700 care workers), and 850 other non-care providing roles.

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### Workforce demographics

- The majority (83%) of the workforce in Oldham were female, and the average age was 45 years old.
- Workers aged under 25 made up 9% of the workforce and workers aged 55 and above represented 30%. Given the age profile approximately 1,700 posts will be reaching retirement age in the next 10 years.
- An estimated 88% of the workforce in Oldham identified as British, 3% identified as of an EU nationality and 9% a non-EU nationality, therefore there is a reported higher reliance on non-EU than EU workers.

This information can be viewed as an interactive visualisation for local authority areas by visiting [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/lasummaries](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/lasummaries)

### **ASC Directorate specific**

- 2.3 Current vacancies are **68** and agency numbers are **approximately 25** (across the directorate) **dependent on the need at the time**. Adult Social Care as a department use agency staff only when business critical to minimise risks for our residents, and/ or when a specific project is needed to work at pace. The vacancy position above represents where agency staff are used across the whole service, with **36%** representing current Social Work staffing via agency staff.
- 2.4 It is intended that a Social Care Academy approach will be taken, with further scoping discussion in process at present. Similar to the Social Work Academy in Children's Services, the academy will be a central hub for all matters relating to training, recruitment, retention, and career progression. However, it is intended that the scope for ASC will be wider, as the ASC sector has many more career options than purely Social Work. The relationship with the care providers, underpinned by requirements of the Care Act, in addition to the varied and multiple roles across the different functions of ASC mean there are significant opportunities for work and careers.
- 2.5 ASC in Oldham has recently launched its vision to, 'Support residents to be independent, healthy, safe and well', a vision which is underpinned by the also recently released Adult Social Care Strategy. The focus of the strategy is to enable residents to live as independently as possible, with minimal reliance on the Council, through early intervention, preventative services, and strengths-based ways of working. The service is reversing its approach to assessment and intervention by working with residents to focus on what they can do, rather than the previous prescriptive model which focused on what the person needed help with. Whilst services will still enable formal support where relevant, it will not be the immediate default position. This approach aims to reduce the demand on specialist services by deflecting residents from longer term care unless it is necessary, and offering support through services which enable them to return to independence and providing advice and information much earlier in their journey with the service.

### **Current Position- wider provider market context**

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- 2.6 The challenges for the adult social care workforce remain around recruitment and retention which has been consistently reported national, regionally, and locally in the recent years.
  - 2.7 Care staff are still required to self-isolate when covid positive which other sectors of the economy are not required to do. Whilst protecting the vulnerable, this practice does pose challenges in terms of covering rotas, but also in retaining staff as many providers do not pay about Statutory Sick Pay and therefore staff are now having to take that time off unpaid where they would not have to in other sectors.
  - 2.8 Due to challenges in recruiting health and social care staff, agency costs are an issue for several providers and particularly for providers who require nursing staff due to less favourable terms and conditions offered by the NHS.
  - 2.9 Providers have also advised that they are struggling with the pay differentials between junior and senior staff as the Real Living Wage has been implemented providers have struggled to pay increases to staff in more senior roles. Some providers have told us this causes an issue in retaining senior care staff, who may prefer to take a demotion as they feel that the level of responsibility is not reflected in the pay differential.
  - 2.10 'Blended Roles' is an area which we have been working with health colleagues on for the last couple of years due to receiving additional funding to support the pilot. Blended roles refers to working across health and social care settings where the aim is to reduce potential duplication across services thus enhancing the recipient of care/support's experience. From the pilots we have been involved with in Oldham the benefits to the care workers are career progression, learning and development. Unfortunately, the sustainability of this work continues to be considered, as the pilots have only been enabled due to time limited additional funding we have received. We continue to work across the health and social care system to consider how this can be further embedded in usual practice.

### **3 Where we want to be**

- 3.1 ASC in Oldham wants to attract the best staff, where Social Workers come to Oldham and stay. Building on the work completed to date, we want to improve the learning environment to attract students and apprenticeships, leading to employment opportunities within the borough.
- 3.2 Whether for Social Work roles, or wider, our vision is to develop a long-term, sustainable workforce model for Adult Social Care across Oldham.
- 3.2 We want to establish clear career pathways from school and college onwards, in all roles across adult social care, including qualified practitioners through to leadership and blended roles for care workers (to include progression policy options for SW).
- 3.3 We intend to embed efficient recruitment, onboarding, and induction processes to ensure ASC remains fully staffed, without reliance on agency resources, thus improving retention and stability in the workforce.

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- 3.4 ASC is paying particular attention to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) to ensure our workforce feels appropriately understood and valued. When supported in this way, our workforce is more likely to work to their optimum, remain committed and stay with the organisation throughout change and shifting demands. However, to achieve this, we cannot assume to know the experience of our staff, whether in work or indeed life. In order to fully address these issues, a programme of reverse mentoring, our anti-racist supervision policy and use of associated templates, and training in unconscious bias are being developed and rolled out.
- 3.5 The ASC directorate currently spends 26.46% of the Council's overall budget, supporting the most vulnerable residents of Oldham to be supported through packages of care at home, residential care provision, supported living, and through several commissioned services which deliver the statutory functions of the Care Act. We work with people who are subject to serious abuse, have experienced trauma, have multiple physical and mental health needs, and who live in extremely complex situations. Work in Adult Social Care, whether as registered Social Workers, wider service functions, or direct care provision requires skill, training and should be respected as a series of specialist roles. Part of the work being completed through the strategy is to understand difference between similar functions in the Council, where parity of esteem and benefits may not be balanced, and what options the directorate has in addressing these issues.

#### **4 Benefits**

- 4.1 A fully staffed workforce results in improved staff morale and reduced sickness. Staff have clear career pathways and options to progress across the system. Capacity to respond to demands in the service improves, and consequentially we see a reduction in waiting lists and overdue work. Reduced staffing costs linked to agency, and a clear pathway for career options through to leadership are of benefit to budget and retention.
- 4.2 A stable workforce results in service stability, better outcomes for our residents through safe and appropriate care. For the care providers, staffing challenges can result in a direct risk to the financial viability of their business, which in turn creates further risk for the most vulnerable residents of the borough.

#### **5 Programme plan and next steps**

##### **5.1 Milestones and clear timescales have been set over the next 6 months as below:**

By end of March 2024:

- ASC Workforce strategy developed and signed off (ASCCIB 28th March)
- Workforce dataset in place with confirmed, recurrent sources
- Retention comms package developed
- Scope of Social Care Academy developed and signed off

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By end of June 2024:

- Recruitment comms package developed and commenced
- Workforce dataset / dashboard reported monthly (forum tbc)
- Retention comms package delivered & embedded

By end of December 2024: • Social Care Academy live

## **6 Next steps**

- 6.1 Formal approval of the ASC Workforce Strategy, programme plan and timeframe for delivery to be approved at the ASC Change and Improvement Board by the end of March, 2024.
- 6.2 Activity to achieve the milestones will be tracked through Change Board.