

Oldham Council Adult Social Care

Workforce Strategy 2025-2027

The Adult Social Care workforce is the backbone of the care sector crucial to delivering high-quality care to those who need it. Ensuring that there are appropriate numbers of staff who have the skills and compassion to care for the people that they support is central to the work that we do to support people to live healthy, happy independent lives.

In Oldham, we are proud of our social care workforce and recognise the importance of ensuring that every worker feels valued and supported. With the ever-changing nature of Adult Social Care and the increasing demand for services, Oldham Council seeks to ensure that the social care workforce is appropriately equipped with the knowledge, skills and resources needed to be able to respond to these changes.

Best wishes

Jayne & Barbara

Working together to ensure we...

“Support residents to be independent, healthy, safe and well”



Jayne Ratcliffe
Director of Adult Social
Services (DASS)



Cllr Barbara Brownridge
Cabinet Member for
Health and Social Care



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Foreword

Our Workforce strategy aligns with the overarching principles of the corporate plan - these are:

Healthier, Happier Lives: Ensuring that ASC staff are well-supported in their roles will directly impact the care they provide to vulnerable residents. A workforce that reflects the community will provide more sensitive and effective care, and this aligns with a focus on better health outcomes and social equity.

Great Place to Live: The ASC workforce is integral to improving Oldham's local economy by creating local jobs and career pathways in the social care sector. The workforce strategy could also focus on future-proofing the workforce with the skills needed to adapt to evolving models of care, like digital care tools or community-based services, helping residents live in more vibrant, well-connected spaces.

Green and Growing: Encourage practices that reduce the carbon footprint of the workforce, such as the use of green transport options (e.g. electric vehicles or cycling) for staff in their daily work.

- 1.1 Adult Social Care (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.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 To do this we need to have a workforce at full capacity who feels valued, who are well trained and who want to remain working in Oldham. To do this we have prioritized **Recruitment Support, Training and Being Valued**
- 1.4 **To do this we will ensure:**
 - ✓ *The social care workforce feels valued in their role*
 - ✓ *Care work is seen as a worthwhile and rewarding career, in which people can develop and progress.*
 - ✓ *Pay levels are appropriate to recruit and retain quality staff;*
 - ✓ *Care services are operating with safe and sustainable staffing levels to ensure quality and consistency of care for residents;*
 - ✓ *Increased staff retention in the sector as people choose to stay and develop their careers in care with clear progression pathways.*
 - ✓ *Providers feel supported by the local authority to recruit and develop a sustainable and highly skilled workforce*
 - ✓ *All workers are given high quality training to support them in their role and to develop their potential.*



2. Background

- 2.1 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 across the country.
- 2.2 In 2024, Social Work England reported that 23.5% of the 5,412 social workers who left the register had been continuously registered for less than a year. This is a slight improvement compared to the previous year. However, 29.2% of leavers had been registered for at least 10 years which is a slight increase from 2023. The number of social workers registered for at least 10 years was 52,300, compared to 12,800 registered for less than a year. Overall, while there is a slight improvement in the percentage of social workers leaving within a year, the percentage of long-term registered social workers leaving has increased
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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 with significant competition from other Local Authorities. This then requires specific incentives to recruit and retain staff.
- 2.5 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.



- 3.1 Skills for Care produce an annual data set (ASC-WDS) with the latest information being published on 2023/24 data in October 2024. Some key headlines include:
- 3.2 The infographic (below) illustrates the 2023/24 size and structure of the overall Adult Social Care workforce at a national level.



** This refers to the whole adult social care sector, including filled posts in local authorities, the independent sector, posts working for direct payment recipients and those posts in the NHS in adult social care roles unless otherwise states.*

- 3.3 In addition, from a recruitment and employment perspective, the image below highlights an increase in the total number of jobs available in adult social care and number of filled posts therefore resulting in a reduction in the vacant posts compared to 2022/23.



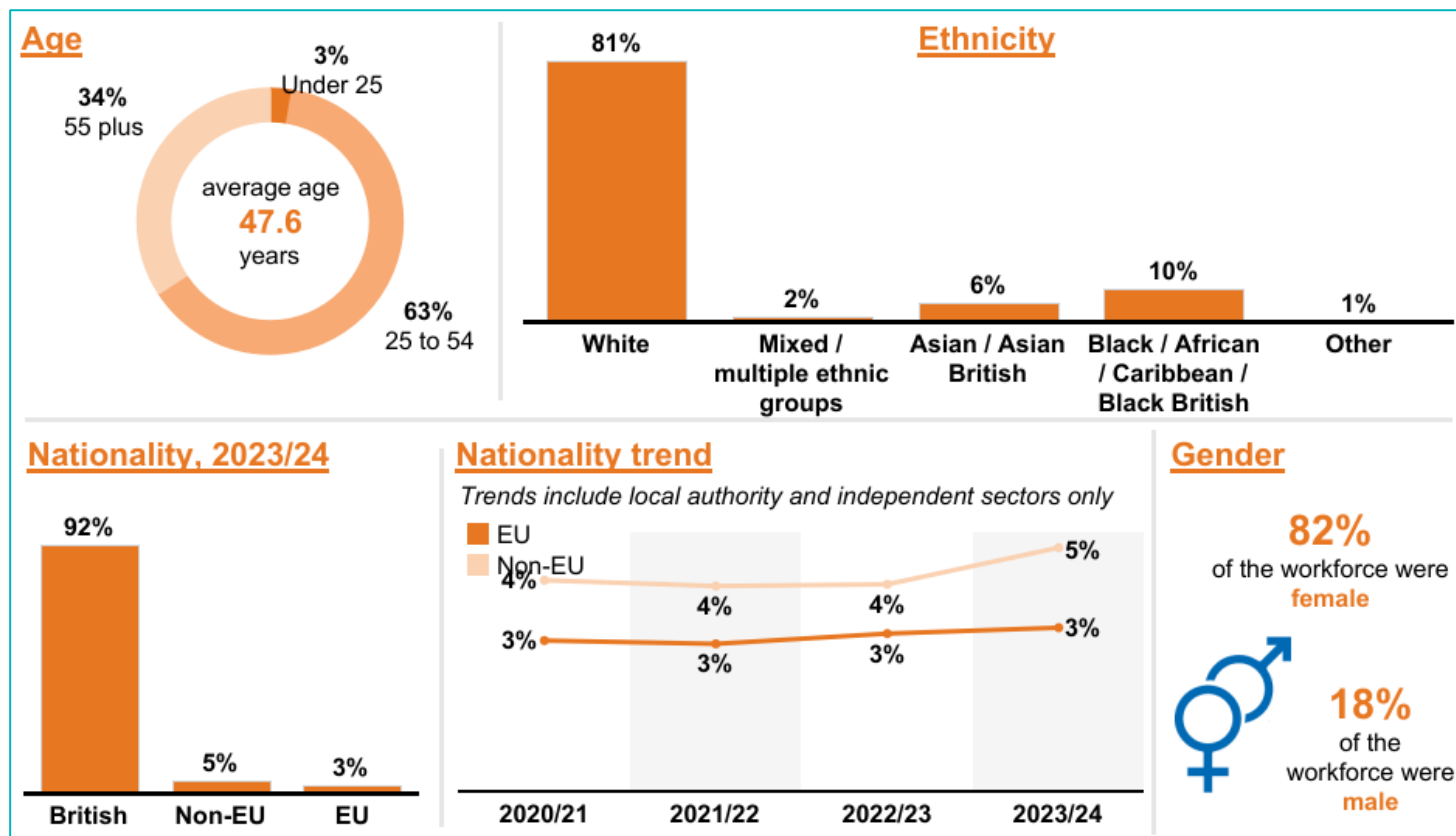
- 3.4 If the workforce grows proportionally to the projected number of people aged 65 and over then the total number of adult social care posts in the North-West region will increase by 21% (from 250,000 to 300,000 posts) between 2022/23 and 2035.

National Workforce Demographics

3.5 The following dashboard provides a national breakdown of the adult social care workforce based on the equality protected characteristics of:

- ✓ Age
- ✓ Ethnicity
- ✓ Gender
- ✓ Nationality

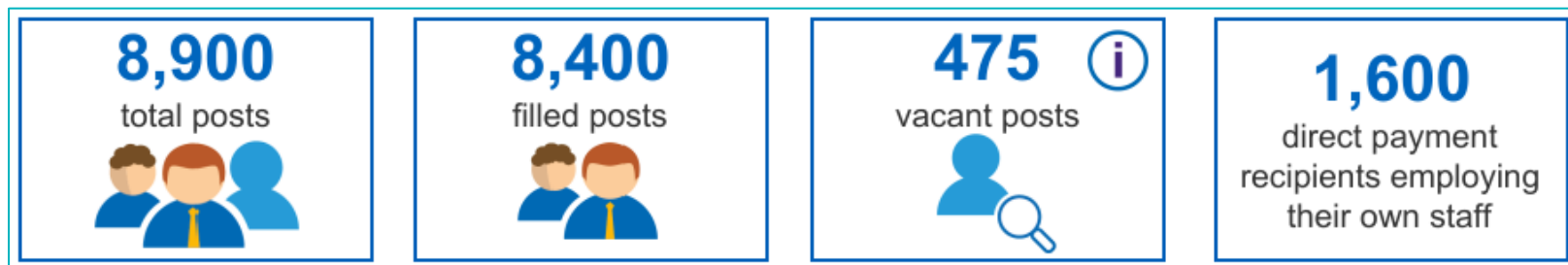
3.6 With a prominent significant number of the workforce being Female, White British with an average of 48 years of age.



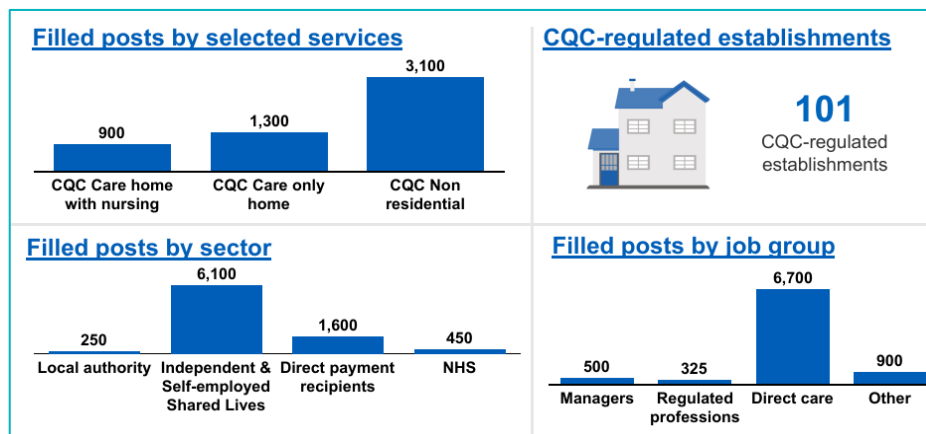
3. ASC Nationally

The current picture continued...

- 4.1 The graphic below illustrates a summary of the adult social care workforce in Oldham which includes data from the whole adult social care sector, including local authorities, the independent sector, posts working for direct payment recipients and those working in the NHS.



- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 The vacancy position above represents where agency staff are used across the whole service, with 36% representing current Social Work staffing via agency staff. This workforce strategy is aimed at reducing the numbers of both vacancies and agency numbers.
- 4.4 The following dashboard provides a summary overview of the filled posts by sector, job type and service.

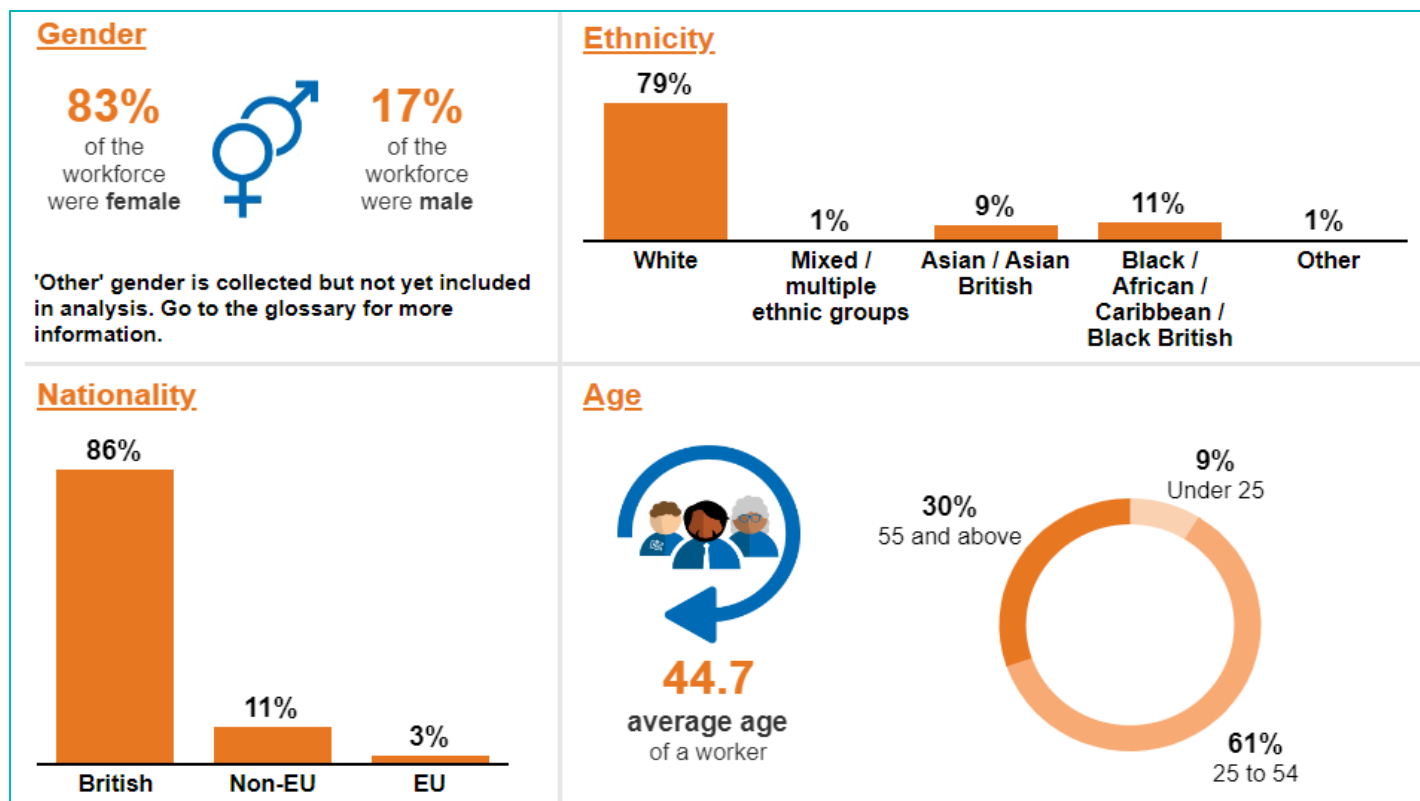


Local Workforce Demographics

4.5 The following dashboard provides an overview summary of the adult social care workforce at a local level in Oldham; based on the equality characteristics of:

- ✓ Age
- ✓ Ethnicity
- ✓ Gender
- ✓ Nationality

4.6 83% of the workforce in Oldham are female, with an average age of 45 years of age. Workers aged under 25 made up 9% of the workforce and workers aged 55+ represented 30%. Given this age profile approximately 1,700 posts will be reaching retirement age in the next 10 years.

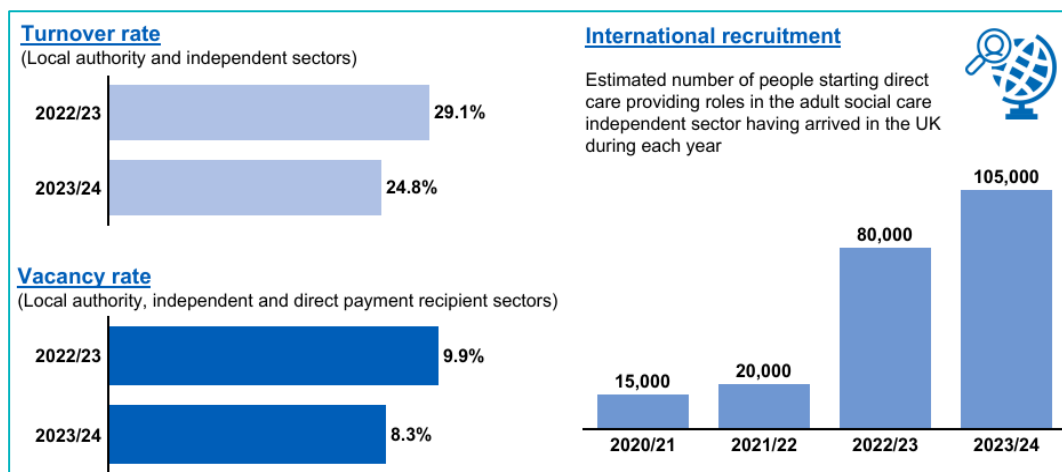


4. ASC in Oldham

The current picture continued...

Local Recruitment

- 5.1 Oldham is committed to 'growing our own' and recruited 2 internal apprentice social workers in 2024. To support the apprentices Oldham were successful in obtaining grant money of £60,000 from the DHSC unfortunately we were unable to recruit a temporary consultant social worker due to challenges within the workforce. Instead, we will utilize the money to put in extra training for the apprentices which will also support existing workers.
- 5.2 Oldham remains committed to having apprentice social workers on an annual basis. Working with Manchester Metropolitan University we will continue to support our apprentices to ensure they are supported throughout their degree apprenticeship and that they remain working within Oldham for many years to come.
- 5.3 Oldham council acquired Chadderton Total care, renamed Oldham Total Care (OTC), in September 2023. OTC is a 137 bedded unit which has a Young disabled unit, Residential, dementia nursing and general nursing which includes working with people with complex health needs. OTC employs 215 staff ranging from carers to nurses to HR. They are able to offer work experience to school leavers from across a broad range of disciplines in the social care sector and encourage staff to train and experience different professions whilst working at OTC.
- 5.4 This will allow a clear career progression from work experience to employment to LA employment for care workers ensuing we retain the best staff within Oldham offering a competitive wage and excellent training opportunities.



6. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)

- 6.1 ASC is paying particular attention to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) to ensure our workforce feels appropriately understood and valued, and reflective of the community we serve. It is important to us that we understand the issues and concerns from our black and global majority workforce.
- 6.2 To support this, we have signed up to Skills for Care Workforce Race Equality (SCWRES) to look at our weaknesses and strengths as an employer. When supported, 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 and people's cultural needs.
- 6.3 To fully address these issues we will be implementing a programme of reciprocal mentoring, our anti-racist and relational supervision policy and use of associated templates has been implemented, and training around anti unconscious bias has been rolled out. Staff are encouraged to attend the Race Equality Assurance Group which feeds directly to the Principal Social Worker (PSW) and the Assistant Director.
- 6.4 A number of staff members attend Diverse by Design and the NW Anti racism network. Training on neurodiversity has been implemented with the aim to roll this out further over the next 12 months so that all staff members have had training.
- 6.5 The consultant social worker has been asked to support the corporate drive to set up further staff groups around LGBTQ+ and neurodiversity and disability. The Adult Social Care workforce strategy is one of equality, diversity, inclusion, and learning and for EDI to be at the forefront of our Adult social care policies. We need to have a strong EDI offer to become attractive to future talent and sustain the current workforce.
- 6.6 We are keen to understand the demographic context for our workforce and to improve the alignment with our local community.



- 6.7 According to the 2021 census, Oldham was predominantly white (68.1%), with Pakistani heritage (13.5%) and Bangladeshi heritage (9.0%) as the largest minorities. The ethnic composition of Oldham changed considerably between the 2011 and the 2021 censuses. The proportion of the population from white backgrounds decreased from 77.5% to 68.1%.
- 6.8 Meanwhile, the South Asian population continued to grow, with residents of Pakistani heritage increasing from 10.1% to 13.5%, and residents of Bangladeshi heritage increasing from 7.3% to 9.0%. Whilst representation from BAME communities is improving across the ASC workforce, there is underrepresentation in our senior management team.
- 6.9 To support the improvement of this, we are working with GM to support relevant employees to access the Moving Up programme which targets training and support to improve opportunities for practitioners to access senior leadership roles.
- 6.10 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.
- 6.11 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.
- 6.12 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 the 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.

7. Wider Provider Market

The current position

- 7.1 As at March 2025, Oldham has 101 CQC registered and regulated services, of these, 45 were residential and 56 were community based services.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 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 above Statutory Sick Pay and therefore staff are now having to take time off unpaid where they would not have to in other sectors.
- 7.4 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 favorable terms and conditions offered by the NHS.
- 7.5 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.
- 7.6 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 refer 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.
- 7.7 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.



- 8.1 The vision for our workforce focusses on development and retention, which includes specific support requirements through employee assistance services, hearing the voice of the workforce, and developing a supportive learning culture in Adult Social Care.
- 8.2 ASC in Oldham wants to attract the best staff, where Social Workers and related roles 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.
- 8.3 Whilst growing our own workforce, it is also important that we attract experienced staff which will support a stable workforce with a culture of continuing professional development and career progression.
- 8.4 Whether for Social Work roles, or wider, our vision is to develop a long-term, sustainable workforce model for Adult Social Care across Oldham. 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 Social Work). This includes exploring work placements, apprenticeships and career progression within internal services and care providers across the borough.
- 8.5 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.

8. Where we want to be?



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9.1 The table below outlines some of the key areas of development and the action we are committed to take to deliver our vision and priorities within this workforce strategy.

Area	Our key priorities
Vision & Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Clearly define our vision, values and priorities of our workforce strategy aligned with the wider organisation's priorities. ✓ Take timely action to implement changes and new developments as part of our workforce strategy.
Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Promote the variety of different roles available across adult social care sector. ✓ Clear define our career development and progression pathways. ✓ Continue to encourage and promote social work apprenticeship opportunities.
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Improve and streamline our recruitment and selection processes to ensure these are effective and easy to navigate. ✓ Explore opportunities for a values-based recruitment model which is aligned to our organisation values and culture.
Training & Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Implement a robust and attractive training programme that encourages and enables the continued professional development of our workforce. ✓ Embed a robust programme of supervision and annual appraisal in line with our professional supervision policy. ✓ Ensure detailed annual Training and Learning Needs Assessments are completed as part of supervisions and appraisals. ✓ Develop and grow our collaborative working arrangements with our partners e.g. education, social care providers, health partners and more. ✓ Continue to work with the GM social work academy and promote the available resources, forums and opportunities to our workforce.
Progression & Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Implement our ASC career development framework and progression policy. ✓ Focus on 'growing our own' talent and supporting our existing workforce to maximise their capabilities and develop their careers with us in Oldham. ✓ Promote and embrace our partnership opportunities for leadership development via the GM Leadership and Moving Up programme

Training

- 10.1 Oldham remains committed to the Greater Manchester Social Work Academy (GMSWA). The academy is supported by the GM Principal Social Worker network and the teaching partnership which is made up of the local universities. GMSWA supports the development of social workers through their ASYE programme bringing social workers from across the area together in their first year of practice.
- 10.2 The GMSWA runs the practice educator forum and workshops to ensuring a consistent approach to social work education across GM. This is supported by our social work consultant who delivers a workshop for PE across GM. The academy runs master classes for experienced social workers and puts on training for safeguarding month and World Social Work week.



Benefits

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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.