



# Shropshire Children's Workforce Strategy 2021-23

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### **What we know:**

The need for Social Care and Social Work services is growing. Business growth has provided us with a growing workforce in a number of areas including Social Work, Residential Services and Foster Carers. To enable us to meet the growing demand, recruitment, retention and development of the workforce is key.

### **What we need to do:**

Recruit, retain and develop a skilled workforce to meet the needs of children, young people, families and carers in Shropshire.

Provide a broad range of learning opportunities to match the needs of children and young people and those who care for and support them.

Ensure the right environment in which the workforce can develop, progress and provide excellent practice for children, families and carers.

Develop services, interventions and support that is innovative, creative and informed by what children, young people, families and carers tell us works.

### **How will we know we have achieved our goals**

**Children, Young People, Families and Carers** will tell us they feel listened to, safe, supported and able to thrive.

**Workforce Stability** data will show us the workforce is stable in a number of ways. Vacancy rates will decrease along with our use of agency staff. Temporary agency cover will be used for short term arrangements; for example sickness. Turnover rates will be low, sickness rates will decrease, and caseloads will be manageable. For children and families, they will have consistency of worker with little change, and this stability will enable them to develop and fulfil their full potential.

**Experienced and skilled Workforce** where each worker is knowledgeable, experienced and able to support children and families to bring about the change required to reduce the need for Children's Services.



#### **1 - Shropshire Children's Services Mission;**

'By treating our children and young people with respect, love and trust and with the right amount of encouragement we can inspire them to dream big, build relationships and connections that matter and together with kindness and a sense of belonging we can do great things'.

*Shropshire Children's Services were recognised to provide services to children, young people and their families that are overall Good in November 2017, by Ofsted. This grading was impacted by the recognition of Senior Leadership's significant investment in the workforce to improve practice.*

*While social work recruitment and retention have been a challenge, senior leaders and elected members have robustly supported building up a strong, trained workforce to meet the high-quality social work practice expected by the local authority. (Ofsted, November 2017)*

*The focus of this Workforce Strategy is to Recruit, Retain and Develop the very best people to support Children and Families in Shropshire. We seek to achieve our mission by implementing a strong Restorative approach to practice. Our approaches, methods and techniques will be informed by research and evidenced based to achieve outstanding success for children, families and communities in Shropshire.*

*The vision for this strategy is to support and develop a skilled permanent workforce by improving recruitment, retention and career pathways and continuing to be a competitive employer in the West Midlands. We will support this by continuing links with Higher Education Institutes, West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership and National and Regional drivers for the Social Work profession, including West Midlands Association of Directors of Children's Services, Local Government Association, Skills for Care and of course Department for Education and Ofsted.*

### **Workforce objectives:**

- \* Safeguard children, young people and their families
- \* Develop a knowledgeable, dedicated professional workforce
- \* Recruit and retain a workforce of proud, skilled, competent professionals
- \* Embed effective partnership working
- \* Strengthen and empower Leadership and Management
- \* Link learning & development to Professional Capabilities Framework and Knowledge and Skills Statements for child and family social work
- \* Develop a learning culture that respects, challenges and supports
- \* Use performance and quality assurance data to measure impact, evaluate and shape the plan
- \* Develop a clear career pathway that offers opportunities for aspirant managers and those that wish to remain in practice
- \* Ensure staff feel valued for their contributions and understand the vital role they play in achieving the best possible outcomes for children, young people and families
- \* Equal access to opportunities for employment, training and development, appropriate to each person's role regardless of age, gender, disability, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation or religion
- \* We will measure the success of our workforce strategy through the Health Check, Practitioner and Senior Social Work Forums and feedback from children, young people, families and carers.
- \* The Leadership team will provide visible leadership, which promotes and models restorative practice, and effective and regular supervision that supports innovative, child focused decision making, develops our workforce and ensures that they have the tools to do the job.



## Practice Frameworks



Developing common methods of practice across Children's Services has been a key part of our improvement journey to date, ensuring that practice is consistently good for children, young people and their families. We have developed 6 Practice Priorities for the service which has helped focus our workforce and drive improvement, embedding these in all of our strategic work.

We know that continuous learning is important to our workforce and in 2021-23 we will continue to invest in our learning and development package, alongside new innovative ways of learning to ensure that our workforce has the right tools, knowledge and skills to deliver good practice.

### Practice Priorities 2020 -2021

01	02	03	04	05	06
Seeing and Hearing the Child	Supervision & Management Oversight	Assessments	Plans and Planning	Meeting and Reviews	Leadership
We will make sure that children are seen and their wishes and feelings are heard and taken into account. Visits will be timely, purposeful and include direct work which creates change for families. Children will be seen alone, and their wishes and feelings will be clearly recorded.	We recognise that effective supervision is the foundation of good quality social work practice. Through quality supervision utilising high support high challenge we aim to develop autonomous practitioners. The child's records will clearly demonstrate the decisions made and the reasons why, so that they can understand their life story. Supervision and management oversight will be restorative, reflective, offer support to promote the timely progression of children's plans and outcomes.	Every child will have an up-to-date assessment of their needs, risk and resilience, where their individual wishes and feelings and their identity, cultural needs and ethnicity have all been taken into account. We will be able to identify good outcomes and progression for children, through robust analysis, which will be underpinned by evidence and research, utilising a range of tools	Every child will have an outcome focused and SMART plan that meets their individual needs. Plans will be informed by evidence based assessments of risk resilience and need and updated after every review. The plan will be able to be understood by the child and the outcomes will focus on what is important for the child. Planning for permanency will evidence careful consideration of all options for the child with clearly recorded decision making which promotes progression and avoids drift and delay.	Restorative practice promotes meetings where families are "worked with" and not "done to". They will feel supported and empowered to make changes identified. Strengths will be identified in their family and friends, to create a support network which is valued by professionals and is an enabler for change. Meetings will be focused on progress for children and their families, creating solutions together.	The Leadership team will provide visible leadership, which promotes and models restorative practice, and effective and regular supervision that supports innovative, child focused decision making, develops our workforce and ensures that they have the tools to do the job.

*2 - The aim of the practice priorities is to ensure the Workforce understands and focuses on what we know are the foundations of excellent practice.*

## Restorative Practice

Restorative and relational based practice describe a way of being, an underpinning ethos which allows carers to build and maintain healthy relationships, resolve difficulties and repair harm when relationships breakdown (M Finnis L30)

Restorative practices are used in a range of ways to facilitate the building of, maintaining, repairing and sustaining of relationships. The tools and methods can be used directly with children and families and is demonstrated through every aspect of practice including the language we use and the way in which we engage with children and families and other agencies. The way in which we do things has been reviewed to reflect a restorative approach including our approach to a range of meetings, both formal within the statutory process and informal meetings such as family meetings. These are held in circles, rather than around tables, to remove physical and psychological barriers between people. Meetings are facilitated by staff, who have received training, to create an environment where those attending can share their thoughts and feelings in a way which is constructive. The focus of these meetings may be to build relationships, solve specific problems or repair harm where there has been conflict. All social care staff are trained at induction and through the rolling programme of training available to staff.

## The Solihull Approach

Parenthood can be extremely rewarding and enjoyable. It can also be demanding, frustrating and exhausting. Parents have the important role of raising the next generation, but most people begin their careers as parents with little preparation, and learn through trial and error. The challenge for all parents is to raise healthy, well-adjusted children in a loving, predictable environment. In Shropshire we offer parenting support through the Solihull Approach to Parenting Programme, Understanding your Child, which provides easy to implement, proven parenting solutions that can help and prevent future problems before they arise. It's about looking at what is already working well and building on that to make it even better.

All social care staff are trained in the Solihull Approach within Induction and the training programme. The model integrates three concepts from separate academic disciplines, each of which are influential theories within their own field; **Containment** draws on Psychoanalytic Theory (Bion, 1959), **Reciprocity**, Child Development Theory (Brazelton et al, 1974), and **Behaviour Management** originates from the traditions of both Social Learning Theory and Behaviourism (e.g. Skinner, 1938).

## Shropshire Risk Assessment Framework (SRAF, Martin Calder 2018)

At all points in a child's life there are identified needs, it is when such needs go unmet, are partially met or inappropriately met, that risks may arise. This may be risk to the on-going health and development of a child or the risk of immediate harm to a child. It is in these circumstances when social work intervention may be requested by professionals or family members. An understanding of risk in relation to individual children, in addition to the understanding of need is the core of all work with children and their families. Indeed, within the context of any assessment undertaken by professionals involved in children's lives, the child's need to be safe should always be the priority. In embedding this framework Shropshire Children's Services aims to support its workforce in focusing intervention on the identification and management of sources of risk to a child, whether this risk be at a low level that impacts minimally on their health and development, or at a high level where immediate protective action is required to prevent significant harm.

Training on the SRAF is mandatory for all social workers however we have recognized that the training programme needs to be aligned more effectively with the model held within Liquid Logic and as such are

working with Martin Calder to develop the tool and the guidance and training which compliments this. A refreshed SRAF with associated training will be launched in March 2022.



*3 - The Workforce use several Theories, Methods and Techniques to work with Children and Families in Shropshire. We provide an extensive learning programme for practitioners to develop the right skills, knowledge and experience to carry out their role.*

## Recruitment



### **What do we know:**

Social work recruitment can be a challenge and this is common across the UK. We will have a larger proportion of applications from Newly Qualified Social Workers, than experienced workers. Part of the problem is that supply doesn't meet demand. The question we, the West Midlands Teaching Partnership and the Department of Education need to understand is are we training enough Social Workers? And if we are how do we retain experienced workers within the profession? And for Shropshire how do we remain an employer of choice, by offering the very best environment and culture to our Workforce to increase retention.

Training enough social workers to meet current demand is a challenge, both nationally, regionally and locally. A number of qualifying programmes have been developed to provide choice for students and to increase the number of social workers being trained, including Fast Track Programmes, like Step Up and Front line. All qualifying programmes need employers to support the variety of routes into Social Work we have on offer in the region, by supplying Practice Placements. This requires resource from the Local Authority by means of Practice Supervisors, Educators and Placements in Teams.

We know local people who have a placement in Shropshire are more likely to seek employment in Shropshire once qualified. Our Exit interviews tell us Shropshire is a supportive place to work, Management Oversight and support is good, and Teams are supportive. The profile of our workforce tells us that staff who live locally stay with us. This is why Shropshire have invested in developing local qualifying routes into Social Work.

Communication with those we wish to recruit is important, where we advertise is key to that. We have found WM Jobs to be a successful vehicle for our vacancies. We have a good relationship with Radio Shropshire and have found them to be an effective tool in our communication plans, when we have vacancies or there are new opportunities, for example our Trainee Social Work Programme.

## **What we do:**

Recruitment remains a priority for Shropshire.

In recognition of the increasing need to recruit permanent experienced social workers, Shropshire Children's Services have committed a significant level of investment in securing the services of TMP, a private recruitment company known for their creative and innovative campaigns. The Shropshire Children's Services recruitment campaign will go live in March 2022.

In addition we have undertaken the following work to strengthen our recruitment campaign:

- Re-branding of advertising
- Creation of recruitment videos, including interviews with the DCS and frontline social workers
- Regular campaigns with Shropshire Radio
- Social Media campaigns with links to Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn
- Community Care Adverts
- Implemented and published the Linked Scale Progression programme – which promotes retention by creating opportunities for social workers to progress to Advanced and Senior Social Worker levels in line with their developmental path, without needing to wait for a more senior post to become vacant (see below in Retention)

This work has resulted in a significant increase in applications although again these are primarily from newly qualified social workers.

Shropshire Children's Services support career events across further education providers in Shropshire by promoting the profession and talking about social work as a positive career choice.

Working with local qualifying programmes, through the West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership, we offer placements to traditional route students. We have worked hard to increase the number of practice educators we have in teams, to ensure we can offer as many placements as possible, but still offer a rich learning experience to all students. Our Practice Learning Manager tracks all Social Workers who are Qualified to ensure we offer them the opportunity to progress when they meet the criteria for Practice Education Professional Standards.

Shropshire have invested in a third cohort of Step Up to Social Work students. We have grown this cohort from 3 students in 2019 to 6 students in 2022. This fast track programme is supported by Department for Education Grant funding and is a regional programme, which runs every 2 years. This has been a valuable route into Social Work for career changers in Shropshire.

Shropshire have developed a trainee social worker programme, in partnership with University Centre Shrewsbury (subsidiary of Chester University). We currently have 8 trainees in their second year and 6 trainees in their first year, with a view to a 3rd cohort in 2022. This trainee programme provides an additional route into social work via the Apprenticeship route. This 3 year qualifying Programme is a valuable route into Social Work for local people with experience of working with children and families. Our first Cohort will qualify in January 2023.

Shropshire's employment package includes;

- High quality, supportive management structure with experienced leaders



- Desirable location with excellent transport links
- A stable and well-supported working environment
- Competitive rates of pay
- Regular reflective supervision
- Excellent Professional Development opportunities
- Linked Scale Progression
- Honoraria's for supporting student placements
- Protected Lieu/TOIL time
- Flexible and agile working
- Free car parking
- Group supervision and Action Learning Sets
- A robust ASYE programme
- 27 days annual leave plus bank holidays, with 5 days extra awarded to those staff with 5 years local government service
- Shropshire Council employee benefits scheme
- Access to the Enterprise Car Club, cars employees can use on businesses journeys to provide them with a more cost-effective, safe and sustainable option for business travel needs
- Access to a wide range of wellbeing resources including Cari Wellbeing toolkit

We provide an extensive Assessed and Supported Year in Employment Programme for Newly Qualified Social Workers. The programme is coordinated by Advanced Practitioners, who are able to provide Group Supervision, learning opportunities, training events, undertake Practice Observations and feedback to the Newly Qualified Workers, on a regular basis, over and above the support provided by the Team Manager, Senior Social Worker and Team.

We provide an extensive Professional Development Programme, mapped to the Knowledge and Skills Statements for Post Qualifying Standards for Social Work.

### **What more do we need to do:**

**Formally evaluate the Trainee Social Work Programme** in order to understand what has worked, identifying best practice and understanding barriers to success. The review will seek to produce recommendations to support the development of the programme.

This review, which began in January 2022 (in line with the start of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cohort) and will conclude in April 2022, includes participation from all stakeholders. Following completion of the review, we will need to scope out future potential providers and secure through the commissioning process.

**Grow Practice Education** in teams to support student placements – this includes promoting the undertaking of the Practice Educator Professional Standards Awards and supporting staff to complete both Level 1 and Level 2. The Linked Scale Progression programme also promotes completion of Practice

Educator work in order for those workers wishing to progress to evidence their own development in developing others. Our overall aim is to secure 8 – 10 social workers in Practice Educator Professional Standards Awards every year – we will review progress against that target in March 2023.

## Retention



### What do we know:

The retention of social workers remains a priority for the Senior Leadership Team. Our aim is to maximise opportunities to recruit to vacant posts, including recruiting agency social workers to permanent positions. We know that a fully recruited staffing assignment, low vacancy, low agency, low sickness, manageable caseloads and high staff satisfaction will create positive retention rates and a stable Workforce. A Stable Workforce will create the best opportunities and outcomes for our Children and Families.

Ensuring Workers feel supported by providing the right environment for them to do the work they need to with children and families to keep them safe is key to retention. In Shropshire retention is strengthened by keeping caseloads manageable, providing regular reflective supervision, providing Manager support, providing structured progression routes for those staff that wish to develop and focusing on all aspects of organisational resilience. Our aim is to ensure staff feel they have the right ingredients to succeed in their work in Shropshire.

### What we do:

This year has been unprecedented, now more than ever we need to provide a secure base in which staff feel safe and able to carry out their roles. To measure this, we are implementing the **Social Work Organisational Resilience Diagnostic (SWORD)** in partnership with Research in Practice. This will enable us to find out what organisational factors can help foster the conditions to better support our practitioners in developing and sustaining resilience and how leaders and managers can help in creating positive environments that support workforce wellbeing.

We provide regular **Reflective Supervision** to all our staff. We understand the benefits of regular reflective supervision, and this remains a practice priority for us. All Managers receive Supervision Training, and regular supervision Action Learning Sets to implement the learning into practice. A full review of the supervision policy took place in 2021, and implementation is supported through training and the quality assurance framework. Further refresher training will be made available to Team Managers and Senior Social Workers (where appropriate) in the summer of 2022.

We provide an extensive **Professional Development Programme** tailored to specific roles across the Workforce. This is informed by staff Appraisal, The Health Check, National, Regional and Local Learning Reviews, changes to Law, Statutory Guidance and developments in practice.

The **Linked Scale Progression programme** has been developed following feedback from the Social Work Health Check and Retention Consultations carried out across the Workforce. Social Workers were clear

that they wanted a clear progression route to progress in their career. This would support them to stay in Shropshire and not look for opportunities elsewhere, as there is now scope to progress from social worker, to Advanced to Senior, to Aspiring Team Manager, receiving relevant and enhanced training opportunities to support their development. Social Workers wishing to evidence their development towards a more senior role will discuss their aspirations with their Team Manager in the first instance, ultimately leading to presenting themselves and evidence of their work at a Linked Scale Progression Panel, which are held on a monthly basis.

The service continues to develop in key areas, we have seen business growth acknowledged with increased capacity in key areas. We have a number of exciting opportunities for future service development as key projects take shape. This should ensure staff feel they have progression opportunities; Shropshire is an innovative and exciting place to work and retention will be strengthened as a result of this.

**Our Social Workers tell us that we have:**

- Positive and supportive access to visible managers in the office, and online
- Good quality supervision which takes place on a regular basis
- A restorative, relationship based practice model with both our children, families and staff
- A warm and nurturing environment to work in
- Mutual respect at all levels
- A small authority where there are direct relationships between senior managers and “frontline” staff
- A beautiful locality to work in
- An excellent training programme
- Great opportunities for progression
- Strong relationships with partner organisations

**What more do we need to do?**

Continue to listen to feedback from the workforce, children, families and carers about how we are doing – learning and growing from challenge and feedback.

Further embed the Linked Scale Progression programme.

Encourage increased attendance at weekly Practitioner Forums with Principal Social Workers – to discuss concerns and ideas in a restorative environment.

## Social Work Health Check 2020



### What do we know?

The social work Health Check explores what staff feel and think about working here in Shropshire. Feedback in 2020 included;

- “We have good staff and managers; effective leadership; supportive colleagues; access to the right resources; support to learn and develop practice”
- “I feel trusted, supported, accepted and valued by all colleagues”
- 88% of workers report the use of frameworks in their practice (a wide range of frameworks, models and tools were identified)
- Restorative practice has “altered the way I directly work with individual children/ young people and families to ensure they have greater contribution and participation”
- The survey results were very positive overall. Staff members like working for Shropshire Council because they feel well supported by managers and members of their teams. Comments highlight how well many people get on with their colleagues. members of staff also find the work rewarding and feel they are making a difference to the lives of children and families
- Where there are concerns, they generally relate to high caseloads and a lack of time to spend with children/families.
- Some staff feel uncomfortable taking any annual leave or TOIL.
- The feedback suggests that some members of staff are feeling under considerable pressure and would like to see additional staff/resources to enable them to manage and further improve.
- The importance of highlighting good practice is well understood and there is also a high level of awareness of the frameworks and practice models available.



- Staff members are positive about the training and development opportunities they have access to.
- The impact of the coronavirus pandemic has been felt but many can see that changes have not all been negative. Improved use of online communications, IT skills, more time with family and greater flexibility are all recognised benefits of new working practices. The future seems uncertain for some but the feedback suggests high levels of resilience and commitment.

### **How do we know?**

We continue to launch the Health Check annually – currently this is part of the national Health Check programme, we are keen to review and consider whether a more local Health Check would also be beneficial.

We engage with practitioners through weekly Practitioner Forums.

We facilitate a monthly Senior Social Worker Forum.

We have regular opportunities to check in with staff at Team Meetings, virtual coffee breaks and team check ins, End to End meetings (monthly), CSC Leadership Catch Ups (weekly); all of these forums create opportunities to raise issues and feedback on practice and service development.

### **What more do we need to do?**

Shropshire have launched the Social Work Organisational Resilience Diagnostic. The findings of this will enable us to plan for further improvements.

*NOTE: Health Check has been completed for 2021; awaiting results.*

## Development



### **What do we know?**

The needs of the workforce in terms of learning and practice development have continued to be met in a variety of ways, despite the worldwide pandemic. We have embraced the challenge of delivering our training and development opportunities more flexibly; using digital platforms in a much more creative way, including the use of Microsoft Teams to deliver learning, developing webinars both live and recorded and we have engaged with partner learning communities in their use of various digital methods and platforms. Where necessary we have continued to deliver face to face learning, in a safe way, led by government guidance. As restrictions ease consideration is given to what we have learnt, what has worked well and how a hybrid learning and development offer can look as we plan for the coming years.

### **How do we know?**

We have a robust induction Programme in place for all new starters, across the whole workforce.

Our Workforce tell us we offer a comprehensive learning and development offer, to ensure they have the skills, knowledge and experience to develop and progress.

Our ASYE Programme is well received and newly qualified workers tell us they have the learning opportunities and support they require to succeed in Shropshire.

Utilisation of quality assurance data ensures there is wider oversight of ASYE's performance and workload; contingency plans can be put in place if it is identified that ASYEs are not receiving the level of support that is expected, and alternative/additional support can be provided.

ASYE Panel acts as a comprehensive feedback loop; individual's work is assessed with consideration of the quality of supervision and mentoring received, plus evaluation of the level of 'protection' offered to the worker (in terms of protected caseloads and protected time for study sessions and peer supervision).

Experienced Social Workers have access to training to gain their Practice Education Professional Standards Awards – and are encouraged to do so.

### **What more do we need to do?**

Following the appointment of the Principal Social Worker & Service Manager for Learning and Workforce Development, a full review of the learning and development offer will be conducted with a new Learning & Development Strategy, which will link to this Workforce Strategy, launching in April 2022.

Our current training offer will be reviewed alongside feedback received from course participants in order to ensure that the training offered to staff is useful, meaningful, aligned to wider service development and advertised effectively to ensure high levels of attendance.