

Shropshire Children's Social Care Workforce

Annual Report 2024/25



Author: Julie Duncan – Workforce Manager

Following the launch of the corporate Shropshire Plan (2022 – 2025), the Children’s Social Care Workforce Strategy was drafted and refreshed annually to reflect appropriate strategic objectives. The aim of the plan is to identify developmental opportunities for all staff across the whole safeguarding economy, those working with children, young people and their families to enable them to provide support and interventions that reduce risk and enable children, young people, adults and families to achieve their full potential and enjoy life. This will support us to grow a skilled workforce which is fit for purpose and can respond to the changing needs of families in the future. The context in which we are working is one of growing demand, coupled with growing complexity which means that recruitment, retention and development of the workforce is key.

Furthermore, the need for Social Care and Social Work services is growing. Business growth has provided us with a growing workforce in several areas including Social Work, Independent Review Unit, Residential Services, Early Help and Foster and Connected Carers.

During 2024-25, there has been a growth in posts across Children’s Social Care and Early Help, with 34 new posts created.

The service comprises (March 2025)

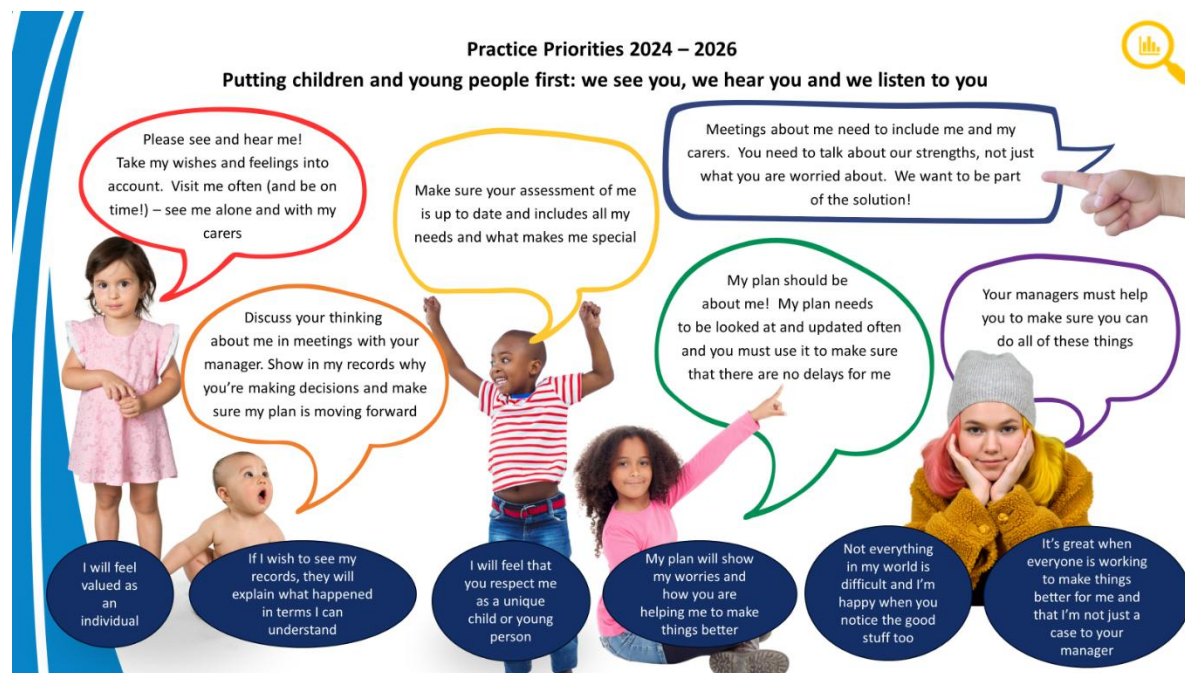
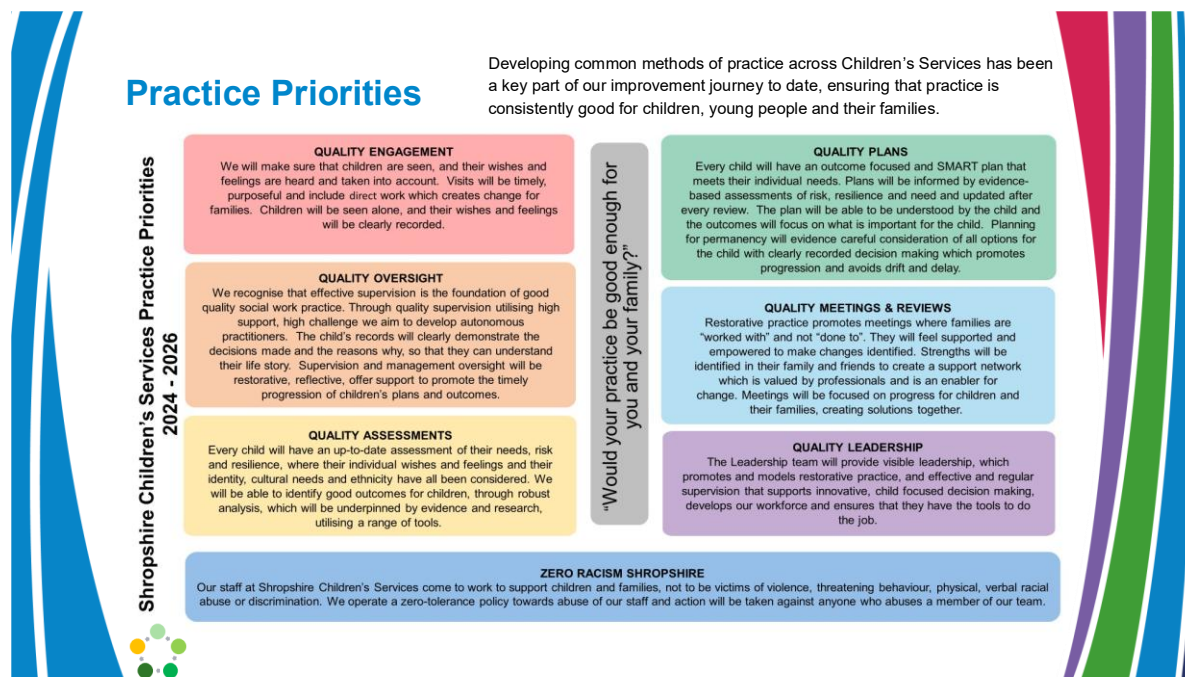
- 2 Assistant Directors
- 8 Service Managers
- 26 Team Managers
- 51 Senior Social Workers
- 67 Social Workers
- 18 ASYEs
- 9 trainee Social Workers
- 6 Registered Mangers
- 87 Residential Care Workers
- 106 foster carer households
- 71 connected carer households
- 13 team leaders
- 4 0-5 Family Support Workers
- 21 Hub based Family Support Workers
- 5 EHAAT workers
- 3 FIS Assistants
- 4 Parenting Practitioners
- 3 Play Practitioners
- 8 Youth Workers

Vacancy rate	8.5%
Sickness rate	3.36%
Turnover rate	6.15%
Agency worker rate	21%

Over 92% of qualified social work staff are female and 80% of them are between 30 – 59 years of age. Twenty-nine percentage of qualified social work staff have less than 2 years’ experience, although 45% have between 5 and 20 years’ experience.

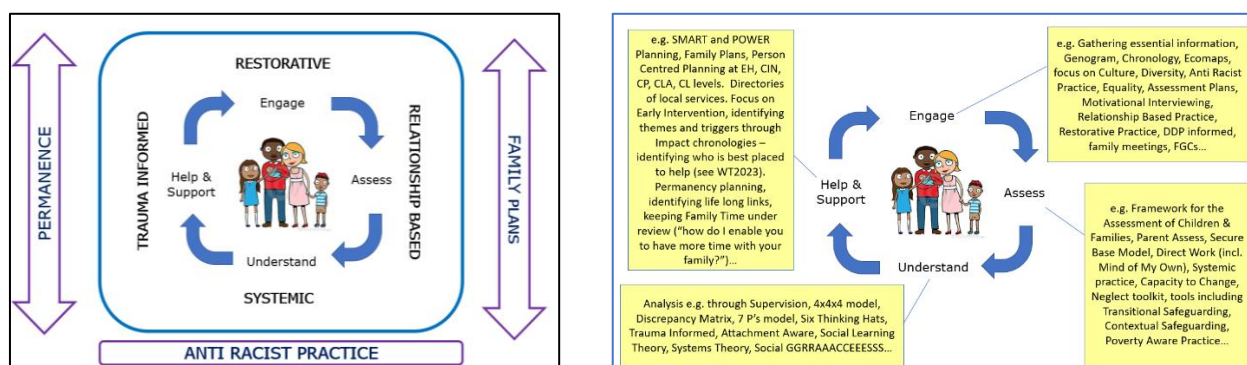
Practice Priorities

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 refreshed our 6 Practice Priorities for the service which has helped focus our workforce and drive improvement, embedding these in all of our strategic work. These will be relaunched and promoted through spring 2025.



Practice Frameworks

In Shropshire, our work is underpinned by 4 key Practice Frameworks; **Restorative, Relationship Based, Systemic** and **Trauma Informed** – each of which complement the others and support creative working, including examples of frameworks and practices in action:



A comprehensive training offer is available to all staff (permanent and agency/temporary), delivered by the People's training team, Train with Us, which enables staff from Children's Social Care access to training opportunities previously open only to Adult Social Care colleagues (and vice versa) and provides opportunities for shared learning and development of relationships. We also encourage staff to consider co-facilitating training as part of their CPD and so have confident, knowledgeable trainers able to deliver evidence-based training sessions. We aim to build on our own pool of trainers, to include staff from across the whole Children's Social Care workforce.

The training offered is flexible, responsive, interactive and practical and "hands on" with a focus on both skills and strategy development, backed up by a theoretical understanding of why approaches work. All training is informed by research and a robust evidence base. The aim is to produce more confident and competent managers and practitioners, who are trauma aware and can deliver positive and effective support to individuals and families. There are several threads which run through all training – the need for a trauma informed and restorative approach, the importance of reflective practice and supervision and the value of peer support.

Induction

All staff are signposted to wide range of induction modules including familiarisation with the scope of Children's Social Care, Early Help and Shropshire Council, Raising Awareness of Child Protection, the role of the Designated Social Care Officer, the role of the Local Authority Designated Officer and an overview of the Supporting Families programme.

Mandatory Training

In addition to corporate training requirements, mandatory training for Children's Social Care staff includes Restorative Practice (2-day full training plus refreshers at regular intervals) and Supervision training for both Supervisors and Supervisees. All front facing practitioners also undertake the 2-day Solihull Foundation training, as well as training around chronologies, genograms and using the LiquidLogic database.

The learning and development needs of all staff, including aspirations for career development and specialisation, are captured within annual Personal Development Planning (PDP) and, through liaison with the Workforce Manager and Operations Manager for Learning and Development, appropriate training programmes and opportunities are identified. The Workforce Manager and Operations Manager for Learning

and Development also ensure that any emerging themes from research and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews are acknowledged in CPD opportunities and that the 4 key practice frameworks can be seen in every CPD opportunity.

The inclusion of Early Help staff within Social Care has brought additional, wider access across both services to training and development opportunities. This reflects the needs of the whole workforce – Social Workers, residential staff and early help colleagues. In addition, the early help training offer is extended to all external partners working with children and families as part of the Supporting Families programme at no charge.

Evidence based training

Evidence based training that staff can access, dependent on their role, includes:

- Brook Traffic Light Training
- Lego Think Bricks
- Reducing Parental Conflict
- Motivational Interviewing
- CPI Verbal Intervention
- STORM Suicide and Self Harm
- Solihull Approach Foundation
- Domestic Abuse including DASH and safety planning
- Parent Assess
- Secure Base Model
- ABE
- Neglect toolkit/GCP2
- Exploitation toolkit

Staff have access to resources and training from Research in Practice (RiP) – 132 staff have attended online sessions delivered by RiP and all front line and service managers have attended a bespoke programme face to face. During 2024 – 25, 77 new accounts have been created with RiP, 79 videos have been watched and 161 resources have been downloaded from the RiP website.

Recruitment



What do we know:

Social work recruitment can be a challenge and this is common across the UK. We often have a larger proportion of applications from Newly Qualified Social Workers than experienced workers.

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 apprenticeships and Fast Track Programmes, like Step Up. All qualifying programmes need employers to support the variety of routes into Social Work that 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 are working with a new HEI, Coventry University, to train our fifth cohort of social work apprentices and exploring other academic routes into social work as we are aware that the traditional university route is no longer as popular with students. This includes exploring postgraduate apprenticeships, as well as continuing to offer undergraduate apprenticeship and places for post graduate Step Up students. Our fourth cohort of apprentices recently graduated, three achieved a first and two a 2:1 degree. All five are remaining with Children's Social Care and have entered their ASYE year.

We would like to 'grow our own', as we know local people who have an apprenticeship or a placement in Shropshire are more likely to seek employment in Shropshire once qualified. Feedback from the Social Work Health Check, completed by 113 respondents from across the service (excluding early help) tells 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 has invested in developing a number of 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 Social Work Apprenticeship Programme. This year, we have also been supported to develop a social recruitment microsite, [Social Care Careers in Shropshire | It's all about the care](#) to reach a wider audience. The onboarding process has been made much smoother with successful candidates often being able to take up their posts within six weeks of interview. We are working closely with our Managed Service Provider (MSP), Opus, to ensure that our agency staff are of high quality and that we are only using agency workers where necessary to cover vacancies, maternity cover and secondments.

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 worked and will continue to work with colleagues with expert knowledge to develop:

- Re-branding of our advertising, including the development of a microsite specifically targeted to encourage people to consider social care as a career
- Targeted recruitment campaigns, including the creation of recruitment videos, including interviews with the DCS and frontline social workers and other practitioners
- Social Media campaigns with links to X, Facebook, LinkedIn

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 (and Retention Payment for frontline Social Workers)
- A robust induction
- Regular reflective supervision
- Excellent professional development opportunities
- Linked Scale Progression
- Honoraria for supporting student placements
- Protected Lieu/TOIL time
- Flexible and agile working
- Free car parking
- Group/peer supervision
- 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 a wide range of wellbeing resources

Attracting the next generation of social workers and social care practitioners

Shropshire Children's Services support career events across further and higher education providers in Shropshire by promoting the profession and talking about social care 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. We have two dedicated Advanced Practitioners to support students, apprentices and ASYEs and have a plan to ensure that our numbers of practice educators will continue to meet need in the future.

Our Workforce Manager, with the support of colleagues, tracks all Social Workers who are qualified to ensure that we offer them the opportunity to progress, e.g., when they meet the criteria for Practice Education Professional Standards or looking at post graduate training opportunities. This includes a Linked Scale Progression pathway for more experienced Social Workers who would like to develop their career in Shropshire.

Shropshire has now invested in a fourth cohort of Step Up to Social Work students. 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. Plans are in place to recruit a further cohort of 4 for 2025 – 2026.

Shropshire have developed a Social Worker Apprenticeship programme, now in its fifth year, in partnership with University Centre Shrewsbury (subsidiary of Chester University) and, latterly, with Coventry University. 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.

We provide an extensive Assessed and Supported Year in Employment Programme for Newly Qualified Social Workers. The programme is coordinated by Advanced Practitioners, who can 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 and the skills and knowledge all family support workers and residential care workers need.

Converting agency staff

Shropshire Social Care also currently offer a £5,000 Retention Payment for frontline social workers and team managers who have been employed by Shropshire for 2+ years (see Retention section below for more details), which is being matched for agency social workers who wish to convert to permanent positions, as a Recruitment Payment. Those converting social workers receive a £5,000 one off payment and, after 2 years of service, will be eligible for the Retention Payment (on the proviso that this scheme is still in place).

Through the combination of competitive pay scales, the Recruitment Payment and the attraction of a stable leadership team, supportive and restorative ethos, we have managed to secure the conversion of a high number (in terms of % of the workforce) of agency social workers to permanent or fixed term contracts. We are now working with Opus, to ensure that where we do need to use agency staff, we can attract the right calibre of staff quickly and wherever possible, convert agency workers to permanent members of our workforce.

What more do we need to do:

Further develop a system wide induction offer for all new staff and those moving to new positions within the service.

Continuous evaluation of the Social Work Apprenticeship Programme to understand what has worked, identifying best practice and understanding barriers to success. Evaluations will seek to produce recommendations to support the development of the programme, scope out future potential providers and secure through the commissioning process.

Grow our Practice Education resource 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 for those workers wishing to progress to evidence their own development in developing others. Our overall aim is to secure 5+ social workers in Practice Educator Professional Standards Awards every year – we will review progress against that target in March 2025.

Continue the focused work to convert agency staff to permanent contracts; those workers who have performed well and whose practice is aligned with our Practice Priorities. This will reduce the overall financial burden of employing high-cost agency workers and increase stability within teams.

Further develop our presence across a number of digital platforms to encourage more local residents to consider social care as a career pathway.

Retention



What do we know:

The retention of social workers and other staff 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. We know that retention is strengthened by keeping caseloads manageable, providing regular reflective supervision, providing support from managers, 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.

In the period April 2024 – January 2025, we have had 9 qualified Social Workers and 9 Family Support Workers leave our employ and 15 qualified Social Workers and 5 Family Support Workers join the teams: this growth in Social Workers comes from an increase in Independent Reviewing Officers and Special Guardianship Social Workers.

What we do:

We have seen the complexity of caseloads increasing across the board. It is therefore essential that we provide a secure base in which staff feel safe and able to carry out their roles. The annual **Social Work Health Check** was distributed to all staff who work with children and their families (or manage teams who do) over summer 2024, to enable us to better understand find out what will better support our practitioners in developing and sustaining resilience and how leaders and managers can help in creating positive environments that support workforce wellbeing. The findings indicate that staff value:

- Their manager
- Their colleagues / team
- Supervision

77% of respondents felt they had job satisfaction most weeks and felt supported to develop relationships with children and families.

We continue to 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. A full review of the supervision policy took place in 2021, and to date, implementation is supported through mandatory training and the quality assurance framework. Further refresher training is made available to Team Managers and Senior Social Workers (where appropriate).

We also offer **Restorative Practice** training to all staff including Assistant Directors and the Senior Leadership team. Additionally, we have provided **therapeutic, clinical supervision** for individuals and teams who have been impacted by direct or vicarious trauma – this resource is not standard, but is available as required.

We provide an extensive **Professional Development Programme** tailored to specific roles across the whole workforce. This is informed by staff Appraisal, the Health Check, National, Regional and Local Learning Reviews, changes to law, research, statutory guidance and evidence-based developments in practice.

The **Linked Scale Progression programme** has been reviewed following feedback from the Senior Social Workers and the wider workforce. Social Workers were clear that they wanted a clear progression route to advance 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 **Retention Payment scheme** is available to all frontline social workers and team managers who have been in continuous employment with Shropshire Council for 2+ years – this has been a successful scheme and there is a commitment to continue this until it is no longer required, i.e., we have a fully permanent, stable workforce who are committed to and invested in Shropshire.

In Shropshire, we are keen to highlight and celebrate our staff's achievements and outstanding work. The Weekly Brief always contains compliments received by staff, published to congratulate the individual and for others to read and be inspired by.

The annual **Staff Conference** opened **Practice Week** and provides an invaluable opportunity for colleagues across the services to meet, network and develop relationships as they are appraised of key issues, developments and are given the opportunity to hear from nationally recognised key note speakers on topical issues.

The service continues to develop in key areas, we have seen business growth acknowledged with increased capacity in key areas. We have several 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 and Social Care Practitioners tell us that we have:

- Positive and supportive access to visible managers both 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 allowing direct relationships between senior managers and frontline staff
- A beautiful locality to work in
- An excellent training programme
- Great opportunities for progression

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.
- Encourage increased attendance at Practitioner Forums with the Principal Social Worker – to discuss concerns and ideas in a restorative environment.
- To re-instate the offer of individual exit interviews to ensure we understand why staff may chose to leave and to determine if there are any discernible patterns that we could address.

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. We offer a range of training and development opportunities flexibly; using digital platforms and face to face opportunities in a creative way, including the use of Microsoft Teams to deliver learning, developing webinars both live and recorded and we continue to engage with partner learning communities in their use of various digital methods and platforms.

How do we know?

- Our ASYE Programme continues to be well received and newly qualified workers tell us they have the learning opportunities and support they require to succeed in Shropshire.
- Scrutiny 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).
- We have reviewed the Linked Scale Progression Panel and experienced Social Workers have access to training to gain their Practice Education Professional Standards Awards – and are encouraged to do so.
- The annual Practice Week took place in early October and was very well received, with high levels of engagement from staff – both those leading sessions and those attending. This is a relatively low-cost endeavour which is of great value to staff, increasing knowledge, skills, confidence and partnership working.
- We have engaged with a new HEI for the delivery of the apprenticeship programme, using a digital delivery model.
- Working with Opus, we are conducting a review of the use of agency staff including team managers and service managers.
- We have reviewed the induction Programme currently in place for all new starters, across the whole workforce and are working with colleagues to ensure this is a flexible digital offer with a greater opportunity for managers to have a closer oversight of their new starters.
- Our Workforce tell us we offer a comprehensive and dynamic learning and development offer, to ensure they have the skills, knowledge and experience to develop and progress.

What more do we need to do?

With the development of the Learning and Development team, our current training offer will be reviewed alongside feedback received from course participants. This means we can ensure that the training offered to staff is useful, meaningful, aligned to wider service development and advertised effectively to ensure high levels of attendance.