

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PRINCIPAL SOCIAL WORKER 2023/2024

To: Director of Adult Social Services
From: Principal Social Worker
Subject: Annual Report of the Principal Social Worker (Adults)

PURPOSE

To provide a progress report on the work of the Principal Social Worker (Adults) to promote and improve the quality of social work practice, highlight the achievements for this year and identify priorities for the coming year.

PRINCIPAL SOCIAL WORKER ROLE

Principal Social Workers take a professional leadership role across the organisation and act as a bridge for better communication and understanding between Senior Management and Social Workers.

The Care and Support Statutory Guidance 1.27 describes the role of the Principal Social Worker (PSW) :-

Local authorities should make arrangements to have a qualified and registered social work professional practice lead in place to:

- lead and oversee excellent social work practice
- support and develop arrangements for excellent practice
- lead the development of excellent social workers
- support effective social work supervision and decision making
- oversee quality assurance and improvement of social work practice
- advise the director of adult social services (DASS) and/or wider council in complex or controversial cases and on developing case or other law relating to social work practice
- function at the strategic level of the Professional Capabilities Framework

I was appointed as the Principal Social Work (Adults) in Walsall in April 2018, and I report to the Director of Adult Social Care and have regular meetings with the Executive Director Adult Social Care who is the statutory Director of Adult Social Services (DASS).

PROGRESS

During 2023 and 2024 I have continued to support and develop social work practice across the teams as we have supported increasing numbers of learners through our well established ASYE programme and social work degree apprenticeship. The introduction and development of the CQC assurance framework has highlighted the key role that the PSW has in evidencing safe and effective practice. This has led to establishing a more robust approach to quality assurance of practice. The refreshed audit tools and audit schedule commenced in October 2023 seeking assurance from team managers and practice leads who oversee decision making every day. It is important that managers understand what good looks like and undertake this quality assurance activity across the teams to support consistency of approach and expectations.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Our approach to quality assurance is informed by the regional PSW practice reviews, and we invited 2 visiting PSWs supported by a WM-ADASS associate to focus on practice in the learning disability team in July 2023.

Key strengths included: -

- Committed and passionate practitioners supported by good quality, reflective, regular supervision and are encouraged to progress and develop.
- Very cohesive experienced Learning Disability Team holding regular meetings and peer sessions to support one another, which supports staff retention.
- Strong and good practice demonstrated regarding the application and recording of mental capacity act assessments.

Recommendations for practice improvement included: -

- Reviewing the processes and documentation to better support working in an outcome-focused way, reducing the levels of scrutiny, giving practitioners more professional autonomy and developing mechanisms to better hear the voice of people with lived experience and carers.
- Developing practice around professional curiosity and ensuring a person's identity is understood and fully explored.
- Undertaking a market shaping exercise and developing a specialist outcome focused commissioning strategy, which is co-produced by people with lived experience and carers.

The introduction of the lived experience tool based on feedback from the WM-ADASS Coproduction Advisory Group has been well received across the region and was introduced in Walsall in October 2023. This gives a more holistic view of quality, ensuring that we do not lose sight of people's experience of adult social care. In addition, a feedback mechanism has been built into the assessment and review tools and this is being further refined to ensure that the data we receive can inform continuous improvement activity. The performance dashboard is supported by sentiment analysis so that the meaning of quantitative data can be captured. Commissioning colleagues are developing a strategy and appointing a coproduction lead to ensure that people with lived experience and carers inform market shaping.

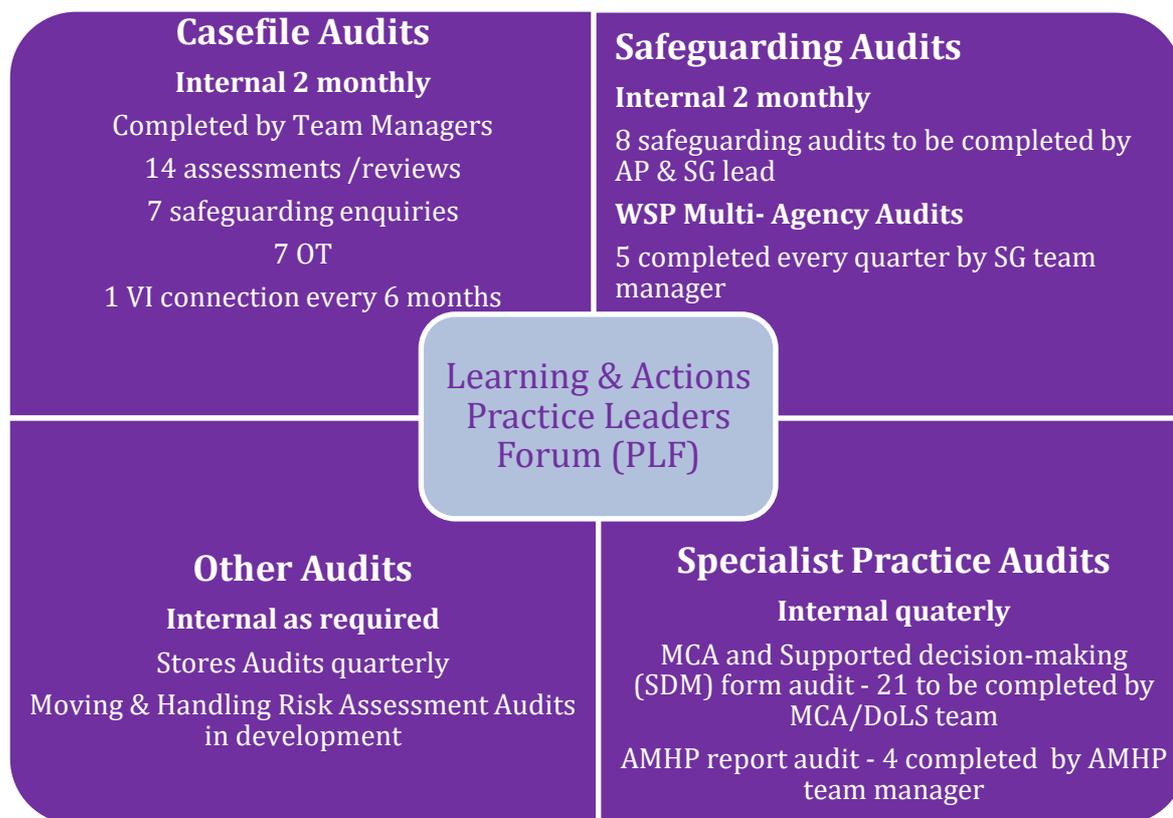
It is good to learn from other local authorities and undertaking a further WM-ADASS CQC readiness review in May 2023 in preparation for our own visit in September 2023 provided valuable insight. Support is available built on a strong foundation of sector led improvement activity across the region which I will continue to actively engage in. In September 2023 I had the opportunity to support colleagues from the WM-ADASS at the Leading in Care Summit in London delivering a session entitled 'Co-producing local leadership with lived experience'.

The Walsall approach to QA has been developed with the Principal Occupational Therapist to ensure that all aspects of adult social care practice are covered. We collate the findings from the casefile and safeguarding audits to inform an action plan that is delivered by and overseen by the Practice Leaders Forum. All audit findings are brought to this forum along with other learning from SARs, LeDeR, DHRs, complaints and compliments. The terms of reference have been recently updated and give practice leads a clear mechanism for communication with all the operational teams and an opportunity to hear what is working well and what are the areas for improvement. These conversations inform the learning and development plan to ensure that the workforce have the knowledge and skills they need to deliver better outcomes for the people of Walsall.

Supervision continues to underpin our approach to quality monitoring and was reviewed and relaunched in January 2024 with a reminder that all practitioners need a direct observation annually. Reflective tools support practice improvement and build on what works well with social work students and those on the ASYE

programme. The post-qualifying standards for social work supervisors linked to the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) are incorporated.

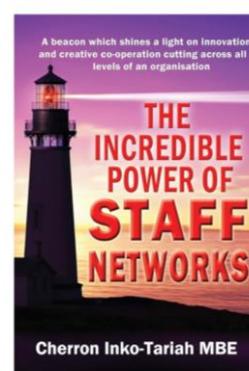
Walsall Adult Social Care Quality Assurance of Practice Audit Schedule 2024



WORKFORCE, RECRUITMENT, RETENTION

I developed a workforce strategy with the Principal Occupational Therapist that was introduced in January 2023 and a positive impact has been seen in 23/24. This introduced the payment of professional fees and a specific post for newly qualified social workers and newly qualified occupational therapists. We had 17 social work vacancies in May 2023 and 15 of these were recruited to which included those who had successfully completed their final student social work placement. There was a more joined-up approach across the teams that supported with the recruitment process and engaged the skills of the ASYE coordinator. I have enjoyed supporting the successful recruitment of a mental health team manager; safeguarding lead and carers lead which will bring the knowledge and expertise to drive these important agendas forward. I am pleased to have also recruited permanently to the Senior Practitioner / Practice Educator (PE) Social Work post to lead the PEs, students, apprentices and ASYE programme. One of our SW degree apprentices this year achieved a first-class degree, and we are extending our programme thanks to a successful bid for £120,000 grant to recruit external SW degree apprentices in 2024. This PE post enables us to effectively support all learners including 15 on the ASYE programme the students pictured below on their 100-day placement reaching out to the community with donations of coats to celebrate world social work week in March 2024.

As an ASC representative on the Corporate Equality Group, I am committed to ensuring that ASC has a workforce that represents the community it serves. Staff networks are important to identify barriers and I participated in an inspiring workshop in October 2023 facilitated by Cherron Inko-Tariah which is informing our approach in Walsall.





In February 2024, for the second year in a row, we celebrated an annual Adult Social Care event which brought together adult social care employees across the directorate to celebrate the incredible contributions of our dedicated staff and recognise their outstanding achievements in 2023. Our commitment to social work post-qualifying awards continues and were celebrated at this event.



PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT

The **Strengths Based Practice** practitioner handbook was updated in March 24 to reflect several changes that have been made to improve the customer journey. Occupational therapists now have a separate workflow to capture their work and the introduction of an OTA clinic to support access to aids and equipment has been well received. In person workshops were delivered to all the operational teams with the Principal Occupational Therapist in November and December 2023 to discuss updates to the handbook including learning from peer support, audit findings and focus on outcome-based care and support planning. Practitioners were encouraged to use the assessment tools to evidence professional curiosity and ensure a person's identity is understood and fully explored. It was good to meet with all the teams in person and take on board their feedback. In 2023 we introduced a monthly virtual practice forum for all practitioners (managers excluded) to listen to any areas of concern we can support with addressing as practice leads. Following successful recruitment in May 2023, we have been able to complete 100% of our statutory annual reviews in 2023/2024 across the locality teams with significantly reduced waiting lists for assessments and reviews across all of the teams.

A new **Policy & Procedures** platform called Tri-X was launched in October 2023 giving everyone access to up-to-date information. [Welcome to our Procedures for](#)

[Adult Social Care \(trixonline.co.uk\)](http://trixonline.co.uk) In addition to this work has started to review all policy, procedure and guidance on the intranet to ensure that the workforce has access to the tools it needs to support best practice.

Social Work with Older People Research

In 2023 I led the involvement in some pioneering research about social work with older people which engaged experts by experience, hearing the voice of older people and carers in Walsall. Five social workers from across our teams worked with a researcher from the University of Birmingham for six months, the researcher, research leads, and expert advisory group presented some of the findings at our celebration event in February 2024. Please see [SWOP Research](#) for more information. There was also an article in Community Care '[Hectic is the life of a social worker': what research reveals about practice with older people - Community Care](#)'. The research comprehensively demonstrates that it can make a huge difference to the lives of older people and their families when a social worker is the right person in the right place at the right time.

The follow up to this is a successful bid to [IMPACT - UK Centre to Improve Adult Social Care - IMPACT \(bham.ac.uk\)](#) to have 2 IMPACT demonstrators join us in September 2024 to embed some of the learning from this research. The research shows what a difference social workers who are skilled at supporting older people can make and suggests ways to better organise teams and practice to free social workers up to do what they do best. This project will implement insights from this research, seeking to improve outcomes and help people do what they came into the job to do in the first place.



Safeguarding

As PSW I continue to engage with and contribute to the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership (WSP) alongside colleagues and agencies across the partnership. Please see [Home | Walsall Safeguarding Partnership](#) for further information. There was a great opportunity to contribute to the delivery of a Self- Neglect & Hoarding Conference in October 2023 to over 200 people and support a SAR learning event in November 2023. As a member of the Practice Learning & Development subgroup we are developing multi-agency learning opportunities in line with WSP priorities. Annually I contribute to the Walsall Council completion of the Regional Audit Tool Section 11 and Care Act Compliance Assurance, and this helps identify areas for improvement across the partnership. The annual report published by WSP gives a summary of activity and assurance.

Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards Team

This team reports to me as the PSW and has undertaken comprehensive updates to the DoLS scheme and workflows. This included the introduction of updated West Midlands ADASS Forms, including the report style, Form 3, a more proportionate

approach and streamlined Form 5. Process improvements implemented in the past year ensure that all new referrals are screened, and assessments authorised within 24 hours during the working week, facilitated by a duty authoriser rota. Data comparing 2022/23 with 2023/24 demonstrates the positive impact of these changes:

- A 13.4% increase in DoLS referrals received during Q1-3 of 2023 compared to the equivalent period in 2022/23.
- A 22.8% increase in the number of DoLS applications completed between April and December 2023 compared to the same period in 2022/23.
- A reduction in outstanding DoLS applications from 335 at the end of 2022/23 to 258 by December 2023, further reduced to 172 as of March 20th, 2024, with 60 referrals currently in the assessment process. With the average waiting time down from 106 days in Mar 23 to 46 in Mar 24.

REGIONAL AND NATIONAL ROLE

During 2023 and 2024 I have continued to effectively contribute to regional and national opportunities to raise the profile of social work. It was an honor and a privilege to represent WM-ADASS yet again at the [national social work awards](#). I had the opportunity to present an award at a ceremony in November and celebrate at a parliamentary reception in February. It was also a privilege to represent the PSWs in the region at Lyn Romeo's retirement do in February and thank her for her service as Chief Social Worker over the last decade. Speaking to Helen Whately, Minister of State for Social Care gave me the opportunity to highlight the PSW role and hopes for the appointment of a new Chief Social Worker soon.



Regionally I have now completed 3 years as the co-chair of the regional PSW network which gives me the opportunity to engage in the national chairs meetings to hear first-hand some of the key developments in adult social care. The 14 local authorities are well represented at the regional PSW network, and a work plan informs our priorities, and we are well supported by WM-ADASS. We are all engaged in the [West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership](#) but as a co-chair I am on the executive board leading and driving this partnership. We are grateful that due to partner financial contributions being established the partnership is sustainable following withdrawal of DfE funding. Our practice educators in Walsall Adult Social Care have benefited from the CPD offers and this has developed our approach to supporting students.

Key achievements

- Developed Quality Assurance approach incorporating people's lived experience.

- Revised job descriptions, introduction of NQSW post and updated advert resulted in successful recruitment.
- Engagement in Social Work with Older People Research

Key priorities for the next year

- Development of new carers workflow to promote increased uptake of carers assessments and support.
- Lead and oversee IMPACT demonstrators in ASC to improve social work practice with older people.
- Contribute to CQC readiness activity to evidence safe and effective practice.

Seanna Lassetter
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Walsall Council
30th April 2024