

Principal Social Worker Annual Report

November 2025

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Introduction

I am pleased to present my annual **Principal Social Worker Report** for West Berkshire Adult Social Care for 2025. As in previous years, this report offers a valuable opportunity to reflect on the past twelve months, celebrate our achievements, and highlight key areas such as professional development and practice quality.



Our commitment remains to ensuring that the work we do is of the highest standard, providing meaningful social care and support to people with lived experience, as well as to their carers and families. The report also enables us to identify any gaps in learning and set out our plans, ensuring that we continue to strengthen and improve the services we deliver.

I want to take this moment to express my sincere appreciation to our entire workforce for the exceptional contributions you make across every area of Adult Social Care. From Residential Homes and Resource Centres to Locality Teams, Specialist Mental Health Team, Reablement Team, Maximising Independence Team, Continuing Health Care Specialist Manager, S117 Specialist Care Manager, your dedication is invaluable. The commitment each of you shows plays a vital role in improving lives and strengthening the support we provide every day.

The fantastic results we achieve are never the product of one team or one individual alone. They are the outcome of a collective effort, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that come together seamlessly. It is this spirit of collaboration and shared commitment that enables us to deliver the very best support to the people we serve.



Background

What is the role of the principal social worker?

The Care and Support Revised Statutory Guidance issued by the Department of Health and Social Care in October 2023 provided further clarification on the role of the Principal Social Worker for adults. Section 1.27 of the guidance states that its purpose is to set out clear arrangements for ensuring a designated Principal Social Worker is in place within adult care and support. Local authorities are expected to appoint a qualified and registered social work professional practice lead 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

The Principal Social Worker provides professional leadership across the organisation, serving as a vital bridge between senior management and frontline practitioners. They champion and represent the voice of social workers, ensuring it is heard and valued at every level.

World Social Workday celebrations 2025

The theme for World Social Work Day 2025 was “Strengthening Intergenerational Solidarity for Enduring Wellbeing.” This theme highlighted the importance of partnership working and mutual respect across generations, fostering stronger communities and promoting a sustainable future. To mark the occasion, we held an information and celebration sharing event on 19th March in the Council Chamber.

I am delighted to share that, for the first time, people who draw on care and support joined us, not only to deliver the event but also to actively participate and share their personal stories. Representatives from the Phoenix Resource Centre spoke movingly about the positive impact of attending the centre, the sense of relief it provides to their carers by offering respite, the benefits they themselves gain from the service, and the meaningful relationships they have built with staff. Their contributions brought the event to life and reminded us of the real difference that social care makes in people’s everyday lives.

During the event, we also launched Care Knowledge, an online platform available to all staff working in Adult Social Care. This resource provides access to:

- Expert, evidence-based content
- A virtual library of social care books
- Online communities of practice
- An integrated CPD log

Care Knowledge ensures that staff have up-to-date, evidence-based information at their fingertips, supporting continuous professional development and enhancing the quality of practice across our services.

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We were also pleased to have a contribution from the Community Furniture Project in Newbury, who delivered a presentation showcasing the valuable work they do. Their session explored how person-centred services can be enhanced using a community approach highlighting innovative ways to connect people, strengthen support networks, and ensure services are tailored to individual needs.



Employer Standards Health Check Survey for Registered Social Workers, Occupational Therapists and Social Care Workers.

I am pleased we once again participated in the Employer Standards Health Check this year. The Health Check is designed for registered social workers, occupational therapists, and social care workers, and it provides valuable insight into how we are performing against national standards.

Three areas particularly stood out for us:

- **Standard 3:** Safe workloads and case allocation. We achieved a score of 79, an improvement from 73 in 2024, and above the national average of 73.
- **Standard 4:** Wellbeing. We scored 80, up from 77 last year, again exceeding the national average of 78.
- **Standard 5:** Supervision. We achieved 81, an increase from 78 in 2024, and well above the national average of 73.

While these results are encouraging, there are areas where improvement is needed:

- **Workplace experiences:** Our score was 59, down from 64 last year, and below the national average of 61.
- **Standard 6:** Continuing Professional Development. We scored 68, a decrease from 74 last year, though still above the national average of 66.

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I am particularly pleased that we now have a Principal Occupational Therapist in post. Together, we are developing an action plan informed by the Health Check survey results for registered social workers, occupational therapists, and social care workers. This plan is being co-produced with staff to ensure that it not only addresses the areas requiring improvement but also builds on the strengths and successes we have achieved.

Below is a breakdown of the survey results:

Strongest performances for social workers

Standards	Scores 2025	National average 2025	Scores 2024
Standard 3: Safe workloads and case allocation	79	73	73
Standard 4: Wellbeing	80	78	77
Standard 5: Supervision	81	73	78

Areas for improvement

Standards	Scores 2025	National average 2025	Scores 2024
Workplace experiences	59	61	64
Standard 6: CPD Continuing Professional Development	68	66	74

Learning and Development

The Assisted and Supported Year of Employment, Internal Moderation Panel met at the beginning of October this year and reviewed three portfolios, all of which were of a good standard. It was inspiring to see the gradual progression of the Newly Qualified Social Workers over the 12 months period. Each portfolio demonstrated:

- Strong reflective and evaluative skills
- A person centred approach, underpinned by strengths based practice
- Effective application of theory into practice
- Use of relevant research, policies, guidance, procedures, and legislation

Throughout their ASYE journey, each NQSW showed clear growth in confidence. One newly qualified social worker with a background in children's social work produced an excellent portfolio in adults, highlighting how skills and knowledge can be successfully transferred across different practice settings.

As PSW, I have introduced a six month portfolio review this year. This additional checkpoint ensures that we maintain oversight of progress and can confirm the portfolio is moving in the right direction. It also allows us to identify and address any gaps or issues much earlier, rather than waiting until the end of the programme.

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Training completed by staff from 01.09.24 to 31st October 2025

Number of courses delivered which Adult Social Care Staff can attend: 153.

Short Term Professional Courses:

Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS 1): 2

Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPE 2): 2

Best Interests Assessors training in the past 12 months: 3

ILM Leadership and Management: 5

Other training courses:

Oliver McGowan - compliance rate as at 31st October for Tier 1: 77.5% (352 out of 454 people)

Mental Capacity Act 2005 and Executive Dysfunction Training. It was well attended by social workers, occupational therapists and social care workers.

Unpacking Bias, Awareness, Impact and Change training. The aim of this training was to familiarise social work professionals with hidden biases by raising awareness, exploring their implications, and providing practical strategies to support inclusive practice.

There are plans to deliver training on Alcohol-Related Brain Damage (ARBD) and Dysexecutive Syndrome in December this year. Staff have identified this as an area where they would benefit from enhanced knowledge and skills, as well as improved opportunities for joint working with other services.

Trauma informed practice will now be extended to adult social care. This important training will be provided by the Safeguarding Adults Board, with delivery planned for January next year. We are hopeful that this will strengthen practice across adult services and further embed a trauma aware approach in our work.

Social work degree apprentices:

We currently have five social work degree apprentices studying at Winchester University, following our successful re tender with the institution. Of these apprentices:

- One is in her final year (Level 6) and is undertaking a 100 day placement with the Safeguarding Adults Team.
- One is at Level 4.
- Three are at Level 5.

I am pleased to inform you that two apprentices who completed their degree in July this year graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Social Work, both achieving Second Class Honours. Both will remain in adult social care, further reinforcing the programme's role in strengthening the sector's workforce capacity.

Work with Unpaid Carers

Our work with unpaid carers continues to progress positively.

- All-Age Carers Strategy – The draft strategy was formally approved in May this year, providing a clear framework for supporting carers across all age groups.
- Carers Online Self-Assessment – We went live with the self-assessment service on the 12th August 2025. Unpaid carers can now complete an assessment online, which is processed promptly by the dedicated Social Care Practitioner for Carers Assessments, who came into post in July this year.

The self-assessment was co-produced with carers. It was shared with them for consultation, and they were given a month to provide feedback and raise any issues. All feedback received was acted upon, and amendments were made to strengthen the assessment. In addition, we held three open sessions at Newbury Library, where unpaid carers could sit with staff and test the assessment directly.

- The key outcome is that assessments are now processed in a timely manner, reducing delays. To date, 40 assessments have been submitted: 30 carers were found eligible for support
- The remaining carers were signposted to appropriate services

We are also building strong networks with our partners, including the Carers Partnership for Reading and West Berkshire, social prescribers, the voluntary sector, and the NHS, ensuring joined-up support for unpaid carers.

For carers who do not have digital access, support is still available. The Social Care Practitioner can contact them by phone to complete an assessment, arrange a home visit, or meet at a suitable location, such as the council offices, to ensure the assessment is carried out. This approach ensures that carers without online access are not excluded and can receive the support they need.



New Carer Leaflets

We have developed new carer leaflets aimed at reaching hidden carers, those who are caring for a loved one or family member but may not identify themselves as carers. These leaflets were produced through a joint initiative between West Berkshire Adult Social Care and our partners in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Reading, and Wokingham, funded by the Accelerating Reform Grant from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).

The goal of this project is to encourage hidden carers to register with us, even if they do not currently need support. By registering, carers can:

- Stay connected with us
- Receive information about upcoming events
- Be made aware of services available through our commissioned partners, including the Reading and West Berkshire Carers Partnership
- Access resources listed on the West Berkshire Directory

This initiative strengthens our ability to identify and support carers earlier, ensuring they feel recognised and connected to the help available.

The carers' leaflets are also available in Polish, Romanian, and Portuguese, reflecting the three languages identified by West Berkshire through the 2021 Census as having the highest numbers of speakers locally. One of the key benefits of being part of the consortium is that we also have access to additional languages selected by other local authorities, further extending our reach and ensuring that information is accessible to a wider and more diverse group of carers.

The carer leaflets have been produced in two versions to ensure they reach the widest possible audience:

- **'Your Care Counts'** – designed specifically for carers themselves, providing information, guidance, and support.
- **'Their Care Counts'** – aimed at supporters, friends, or community members who may know someone in a caring role and want to help them access support.

Carers Week (9th to 15th June 2025)

Carers Week is a national annual campaign that shines a spotlight on caring. It raises awareness of the vital role unpaid carers play, highlights the challenges they face, and recognises the invaluable contribution they make to families and communities across the United Kingdom. The campaign also helps individuals who may not see themselves as carers to identify their caring responsibilities and access the support available to them.

As part of Carers Week, we organised a series of events to celebrate and support carers. These included:

- A meal at Fair close Centre for unpaid carers on Tuesday 10th June
- An exclusive swimming session for unpaid carers on Wednesday 11th June
- An indoor bowls activity on Friday 12th June

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Our work in the carers' space continues to grow. We are currently in the process of subscribing to the Digital Resource for Carers, available through the Carers UK platform, as a bespoke one year package.

The Digital Resource for Carers is an online platform designed to give unpaid carers access to the right information at the right time, something that can make all the difference both for carers and for those they support. It provides practical guidance, information, and resources to help carers manage their responsibilities and access support when they need it most.

By subscribing, we aim to ensure carers in West Berkshire have timely access to high quality information and tools that strengthen their ability to care, while also supporting their own wellbeing.



Celebrating unpaid carers in West Berkshire
Free events for Carers Week 2021!

West Berkshire Council and Age UK have teamed up to provide free fun events for our unpaid carers

France Comes to Newbury
Tuesday 10 June, 11:30-3:00pm (Food: 12-1)
Fair Close Centre, Newbury RG14 7BH
Enjoy a fun, holiday-style experience with a 2-course meal and entertainment!
Booking required with Age UK Berkshire.

Exclusive Carers Swimming Session
Wednesday 11 June, 2:15-3:15pm
Northcroft Lido, Newbury RG14 1RS
Free, exclusive pool use for carers. Booking required with Age UK Berkshire.

Unpaid Carers Q&A-Work & Employment
Wednesday 11 June, 6-7pm
Join professionals for a discussion, including a Principal Social Worker, Age UK Berkshire CEO & a Solicitor at our online round table discussion. Please contact Age UK Berkshire for Zoom log in details.

Try Indoor Bowls!
Friday 13 June, 12:00-2:00pm
West Berks Indoor Bowls Club, Newbury RG14 7SW
A great way to socialise, stay active & have fun!
Refreshments available.
Booking required with Age UK Berkshire.

For details and to book. Email: info@ageukberkshire.org.uk
or Telephone: 0118 959 4242

   

Regional and National Networks

I regularly attend the Chief Social Worker's fortnightly meetings which are consistently informative and valuable. They offer timely updates on national policy and guidance, highlight emerging challenges, and shed light on ongoing work that might otherwise go unnoticed. Being part of these sessions provides a broader understanding of the national landscape and helps connect local practice to wider developments. I am also part of the South East Principal Social Worker group and participated in practice learning as a guest PSW, auditing five cases for the Isle of Wight. This was a valuable experience, providing me with the opportunity to reflect on different approaches to practice. The audit focused on the theme of strengths based work, which offered important insights into how this approach is being applied and the impact it has on outcomes for individuals.

As a member of the PSW network, information received from Research in Practice, the Local Government Association, Partners in Care and Health, and both the national and regional, is disseminated across the network to ensure regular knowledge updates. This process helps maintain a shared understanding of emerging research, policy developments, and best practice guidance.

Visit by the Chief Social Worker for Adults to West Berkshire Council

On the 6th October this year, we were delighted to welcome Sarah McClinton, Chief Social Worker for Adults, to West Berkshire. She was joined by Jess McGregor, the newly appointed ADASS President, and Sally Burlington, Chief Executive of ADASS.

Together, they attended an event at Shaw House, where we presented a packed agenda showcasing the breadth of our work in West Berkshire.

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Highlights included:

- Technology-enabled care initiatives
- A powerful presentation from Shared Lives, sharing the experiences of people who draw on care and support
- The implementation of Magic Notes across Adult Social Care

In addition, our social work degree apprentices spoke about how they have benefited from the monthly tutorials held between August 2024 and July 2025, facilitated by an independent practice educator.



Practice Quality

Case file audits

We continue to carry out case audits, which are now firmly embedded into our system. These audits are conducted quarterly. As always, they provide a clear picture of both the areas where we are performing well and those where improvement is needed. Staff receive individual feedback on the cases they have audited, highlighting examples of good practice as well as opportunities for development.

We are now progressing towards the introduction of themed audits. This approach will allow us to focus more deeply on specific areas of practice, enabling richer insights and more targeted improvements. By concentrating on themes, we can highlight strengths, identify recurring challenges, and provide staff with feedback that is both detailed and relevant to the chosen focus.

Safeguarding adults case audits

The Safeguarding Adults Service Manager and I audit 10% of closed safeguarding cases. I also serve as co-chair of the multi-agency risk management meetings.

From the cases reviewed, we continue to see that staff are consistently applying the principles of Making Safeguarding Personal in their work. Section 42 enquiries are undertaken appropriately, and the Mental Capacity Act 2005 is applied. Staff are also implementing safeguards such as referring individuals to an advocate and ensuring that adults at risk can express their desired outcomes. In addition, risk management plans are in place to support ongoing safety and wellbeing.

Key priorities for the PSW 2026

1. Employer Standards Health Check Action Plan 2025.
2. Maintain a strong focus on practice quality to ensure that people who draw on care and support achieve better and more meaningful outcomes.
3. Review and monitor the ASC Workforce Plan 2024-2027 to ensure it remains aligned with service priorities, supports staff development, and addresses emerging needs across the organisation.
4. Work collaboratively with the Learning and Development Lead to maximise our learning and development offer.
5. Strengthen our oversight by adding supervision audits to our process.
6. To publish the All Age Autism Strategy 2026-2029.