

NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL

Children's Services

# Workforce Development Strategy



## Open

We will provide strong community leadership and work transparently with our residents, businesses and partners to deliver our ambition for North Somerset.

## Fair

We aim to reduce inequalities and promote fairness and opportunity for everyone.

## Green

We will lead our communities to protect and enhance our environment, tackle the climate emergency and drive sustainable development.

North Somerset council is a high performing council and a great place to work. We have a value driven, engaged, agile and motivated workforce.

### Why we need a Strategy:

Working with children, young people and their families is one of the most important and rewarding jobs - the right person can make the biggest difference to their lives. That is why North Somerset has set itself a standard to attract and retain high calibre social care professionals to support our children, young people and their families.

### Purpose of the Strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to tell our story of who we are and what we want to be - we need to be fit for the future ahead. Staying still is not an option. The current skills we have may not be the ones we need in future. The increasing demand for Children's Services and greater financial constraints means we need to continue to change, adapt and innovate. Staying ahead will require us to transform and be on the front

We act with  
INTEGRITY

We  
RESPECT  
each other

We  
INNOVATE

We  
CARE

We  
COLLABORATE



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foot in relation to workforce development. We will create a culture, from pre-hire to retire that creates the right conditions for success for all of our staff in the children's directorate.

Our approach to workforce development in Children, Young People and Family Services is to ensure recruitment and retention are at the forefront of our action planning. We recognise that if we don't have the right skills and committed and supported practitioners, we cannot provide excellent support to children, young people and Families.

We will forecast the future capacity needs so that we can resource our priorities and develop strong succession planning arrangements. We are a council and a directorate with a broad range of skills, experience and professions. We need to harness these talents and support staff to realise their potential to sustain our performance and to encourage fulfilling career development.

The major determinant of the quality of Children's Services Directorate is the capability, compassion and confidence of its workforce. Evolving as a learning organisation is one of our Directorate's priorities and we need to be able to encourage learning from all that we do together.

One of our key challenges is the recruitment of experienced workers, especially children's

social care workers. This strategy aims to address this challenge and others noted across children's services to ensure we can deliver the key recommendations detailed in the children's improvement plan. We aim to make North Somerset Council an employer of choice.

In North Somerset we have a clear vision for Children, Young People and Family Service; "to make North Somerset a truly great place for children and young people to thrive; where all have the best possible life and opportunities, including those who are vulnerable, disadvantaged and/or have special educational or additional needs".

Our overall objectives are simply stated but extraordinarily hard to achieve, we are aiming for:

- A highly competent, well-trained workforce
- Well supported staff who feel part of a learning organisation
- Staff who feel valued and adequately rewarded
- A stable, representative, and ambitious workforce

## Equality and Diversity statement

We are committed to making sure we give equal opportunities to everyone in our employment.

We need a workforce which reflects the community we serve to make sure we provide appropriate services to our diverse communities.

We work hard to make sure we do not unfairly discriminate against any job applicant or employee for any reason and that our work environment is free from harassment and bullying, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

We will use positive action to put right past inequalities in the workplace, examples of this positive action include Disability Confident Employer Scheme and the Apprenticeship Development Programme.



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As a disability confident leader, we are committed to:

- challenging attitudes towards disability
- increasing understanding of disability
- removing barriers for disabled people and those with long-term physical and mental health conditions in employment
- making sure disabled people have opportunities to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations.

Actions we are taking to maintain these commitments include:

- making sure our job application process is fully accessible
- guaranteeing an interview to all disabled people who meet the essential criteria for an advertised job role
- ensuring that reasonable adjustments are made for disabled staff when they start work
- providing support for disabled staff, using our health and safety team, ICT service, occupational health, disability leave scheme, Access to Work and Fit for Work service
- inviting disabled staff to join our Disabled Staff Forum for ongoing support and engagement on the development of staff policies and processes.

## Our Principles and Beliefs:

Our priorities as a council are to ensure that:

- We are an open and enabling organisation
- We are a thriving and sustainable place
- We are a council that empowers and cares about people

As a Children's Services Directorate our principles and values are that:

- We listen and respond to children, young people and their families' voices and seek to understand their experience and what their life is like
- We will work to give families the Right Help at the Right Time, adopting a whole family approach
- We will work with families only for as long as is necessary
- We build strong relationships with all those we work with, and these are based on the belief that there are existing strengths to be built on
- We are curious and value different perspectives
- We value diversity and difference and are inclusive

Our approach to practice is about listening and understanding what our children and young

people need and responding appropriately to provide the best possible service.

Our ambition for our service is that staff feel valued, trusted and supported and understand their role in achieving our vision.

We shall ensure that our strategy provides sufficient resource and is flexible and responsive enough to the changing demand, enabling us to respond to the needs of children and young people within our service.



### Training and Development (including Signs of Safety)

There is an established training offer that is in place to meet the needs of individuals and our organisational priorities, and the needs of the children and families that we work with.

Our training and development programmes are underpinned by our People Strategy and aligned to the professional capabilities' framework, knowledge and skills statements, as well as professional standards defined by the regulatory body.

The programme of training is well embedded across the organisation to support career development for every level of practitioner, ensuring opportunity to progress.

Our training pathway has been devised in a way that supports the consolidation and advancement of key skills and knowledge to strengthen the workforce and improve outcomes for children and families.

We draw on a range of methods of delivery which includes formal training and masterclasses, lunch and learn seminars, e-learning, coaching and group supervision. Training is also provided through our links with the Southwest Teaching Partnership and through our own safeguarding

partnership. We also provide membership to Research in Practice and the Signs of Safety knowledge bank..

Our approach to practice is more fully explained in our Practice Framework, it explains how we use a number of models of intervention to achieve the best outcomes for children. Within this Signs of Safety has been adopted as a whole service approach to working with children and families, and staff are being supported through a rigorous training package to ensure that they have the skills and confidence to work within the approach.

The training provides guidance on how to build relationships with families and work effectively with them to make positive changes to improve the lives of children and young people.

Regular supervision and personal development plans contribute to measuring the impact of training and inform ongoing needs as well as identifying deficits in practice knowledge.

North Somerset has the following four key priorities:

**Priority 1:** to recruit sufficient permanent, high-quality staff with suitable qualifications and experience

**Priority 2:** to retain existing staff by supporting them to carry out their roles effectively, and by ensuring that our total offer for new and existing employees is competitive within the marketplace and that our staff feel valued

**Priority 3:** to sustain manageable caseloads for our practitioners

**Priority 4:** to develop a skilled workforce

Simply put, we want people to feel proud to work in North Somerset.

This strategy sets out the proposed approach in 2021-2024 under each of the priority areas.

### Priority 1 - Recruitment

To recruit sufficient permanent, high-quality staff with suitable qualifications and experience, over the next three years we will:

- Increase our exposure in the marketplace through social media and the internet, targeted advertising on SW Jobs, etc
- Develop our microsite to promote our service and utilise recruitment opportunities
- Ensure there is a targeted programme of recruitment
- Develop the recruitment and selection process to focus on critical factors such as values and resilience
- Continue to support the Frontline and Step-Up to Social Work Programme

#### Recruitment Principles

The principles applied to a holistic approach to recruitment are:

- All opportunities for engagement with potential recruits will be explored
- The first point of contact with North Somerset will be a professional and informative experience
- The recruitment process is swift and timely

- Young people form a part of the decision-making process for our leadership positions
- A targeted programme of recruitment is adopted

#### Grow Your Own (GYO)

GYO is a term used to describe a place-based workforce model that focuses on attracting, developing, supporting, and retaining people, at any level and in any discipline, in an effort to create a sustainable pipeline of workers. It essentially involves two separate but complementary approaches, namely an outside-in and an inside-up approach.

#### Outside-in approach

An outside-in approach is when we as an employer look to fill a position with a suitable person outside the business. It involves strategies to increase attraction, development, and inclusive employment opportunities.

#### Inside-up approach

Outside-in strategies should be complemented by inside-up initiatives that focus on the retention and advancement of staff in the service. Through succession planning, mentoring, training, job coaching and career progression opportunities, an organisation can keep our local workforce pipeline moving.

North Somerset have created further career opportunities for our non-social work staff and alternatively qualified practitioners by enrolling them on the accredited courses as well as taking advantage of the apprenticeships levy. This has helped create other additional pathways of specialist knowledge and provide an alternative career pathway for those who do not want to become Social Workers.

#### Routes into Social Work

We have built good relationships with local universities and training providers. The Step Up to Social Work and Frontline programmes are widely used by authorities across the Southwest region. Our investment in them forms a critical part of our ongoing efforts to attract the best candidates into North Somerset.

The Step-Up programme allows graduates from other professions such as teaching to fast-track their social work qualification.

Frontline is a training route into social work for graduates. National recruitment is undertaken by Frontline and units of 4 students are linked to Local Authorities for 2 years.

#### The Recruitment and Selection Process

Our recruitment and selection process has been improved and streamlined following the

introduction of North Somerset online recruitment platform, and ongoing development work, to ensure a smooth and efficient route into Children's Services Directorate. Recruitment will continue to be improved by promoting North Somerset's exposure in the marketplace through social media, the internet and targeted advertising.

### Priority 2 - Retention

To retain existing employees by ensuring they have the right skills, equipment, and support to carry out their roles effectively we will:

- Continue to uphold professional standards, giving clarity and full understanding of the expectations and requirements of all staff
- Provide greater opportunity for peer and manager support around practice and professional standards
- Support our Social Workers in their assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE)
- Maintain a programme of professional development to support our ASYE Social Workers progressing to experienced social workers and create opportunities for career progression through the Senior Social Worker route to Team Manager.

#### Retention Principles

The principles applied to a holistic approach to retention are:

- A quality first day experience followed by thorough induction
- A comprehensive programme of training and support including Signs of Safety
- Practice expectations are communicated and understood

- Regular quality supervision, with the emphasis on reflective practice
- A clear and transparent career path progression
- Appropriate caseloads for the level of experience
- Systems to support flexible working
- Opportunities for reflection and open discussion
- Career and succession planning
- A culture of reflection and learning using exit interviews, exit questionnaires and staff surveys

#### Health, Safety and Wellbeing

Individuals, teams and the council will aim to operate with high levels of service and personal resilience, focusing on confident, high performing services that can adapt more effectively to significant change. The wellbeing of our staff and maintaining our low levels of sickness absence will be a priority; we have a range of health and wellbeing initiatives for our staff and we will continue to develop these.

We will ensure health and safety responsibilities can be achieved.

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We will support the development and implementation of the North Somerset Healthy Workplaces Accreditation Scheme.

We will promote coaching and mentoring to contribute to wellbeing by supporting staff to achieve a work/live balance, to adjust to changing circumstances and to develop confidently in their roles.

### Ways of Working

Staff have told us that they value our new ways of working, which is creating a more flexible, agile and effective organisation. Developing our approach, building on the positives learned during the covid pandemic, has enabled a more flexible and agile approach. This has enabled us to prioritise the needs of the service, whilst empowering teams and individuals to have more control over their work/life balance. By listening and responding to the voice of our practitioners will ultimately help us to become an employer of choice, improve our ability to recruit and retain people and develop a pipeline of talent.

### Practice Standards

Practice Standards play a vital role in making North Somerset a great place to work and be, where children and young people are happy, healthy, safe, and have opportunities

to enjoy life, learn and develop. To achieve this all practitioners and managers have clear guidance regarding their roles and responsibility as professionals. We will ensure there is a consistent approach across all teams and a clear expectation for practitioners, social workers and front-line managers which they can measure themselves against.

### Induction and Supervision

Induction and Supervision policies and procedures are reviewed to ensure that they are current and fit for purpose and available to the entire Social Care workforce, including our locum colleagues.

### Reflective/Reflexive Practice

Opportunities for reflective practice and shared learning that considers the needs and views of our children and young people are available to all professionals through team meetings and group supervision using the tools, skills and models of intervention referenced in our practice framework.

Reflective supervision may form part of general supervision, it may be a separate session or a group event. The principle of reflective supervision and reflexivity is to enable our practitioners to step back and look at their work

from a range of perspectives. We consider this to be the most important vehicle for learning, understanding and developing practice identity over the first twelve months.

### Appraisal

An effective appraisal system can positively impact performance by increasing motivation, which will in turn benefit the service we offer. We have set annual appraisals, this enables us to reflect our observations on performance, review what works and define opportunities as we move into the next 12 months.

### Resilience and Wellbeing

North Somerset understands the importance of providing support and resources to promote resilience and well-being. The World Health Organisation defines wellbeing as:

‘A state of mind in which an individual is able to realise his or her own abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to his or her community.’

Resilience helps us to maintain our wellbeing in difficult circumstances and situations. North Somerset Council is a Learning Organisation and is committed to providing a range of support



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and guidance to ensure that staff can seek the appropriate level of support, should they need to.

It is important to recognise that building effective relationships with others at work is the cornerstones of working life, investing time in developing these connections will support and enrich our working day. Our Employee Assistance Programme is a confidential advice and support service available to all employees and to their household members.

As stated above, one of our organisational priorities is resilience and wellbeing, we are very keen to find out what organisational factors can help foster the conditions to better support our practitioners to develop and sustain resilience and how our leaders can help in creating positive environments that support workforce wellbeing.

As part of our agenda related to recruitment, retention and building resilience we have partnered with Research in Practice (RiP). RiP have designed the Social Work Organisational Resilience Diagnostic (SWORD). This tool will inform our understanding, planning, response and evaluation of the golden threads that underpin organisational resilience and culture.

### Trauma Informed Organisation

We are members of the Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) trauma working group. As a regional group we are working together to develop and promote a trauma informed and responsive approach across BNSSG.

BNSSG share an ambition to embed trauma informed practice in a consistent and co-ordinated way, in all that we do. We want to bring about a sustainable, organisational change in systems and services by taking a collaborative, co-ordinated and long-term approach, using lived experience, cross-sector partnerships, community organisations and relationships. We believe that by increasing knowledge and skills among our workforce, adversity and trauma informed practice will become embedded across our whole organisation and workplace culture.

### Training and Development

North Somerset has an annual training offer for our Children Services Directorate Workforce, to support confident and consistent practice aimed at achieving our vision. We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to grow, develop and progress at every stage of their career.

### Children and Young People's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (CYP-IAPT)

We have created further career opportunities for our non-social work staff and alternatively qualified practitioners by enrolling them on the CYP-IAPT accredited courses. This has helped create other additional pathways of specialist knowledge and provide an alternative career pathway for those who do not want to become Social Workers.

### Apprenticeships

The government introduced the apprenticeship levy to create long term sustainable funding for apprenticeships and to give employers more control to provide their staff with a range of training opportunities. North Somerset are keen to promote and take advantage of the levy to promote and develop staff at all levels of our directorate.

### Career progression

The career pathway has been developed in order to provide transparency in career progression, to properly recognise and reward good performance and practice. It aims to provide a competitive edge as part of North Somerset Councils workforce planning strategy to recruit,

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retain and develop high calibre Social Workers to meet current and future demand.

### Total Reward Package

As part of our recruitment strategy, we will continually review our total reward package. The basic salary offer is comparable or greater compared to other authorities. We will promote those aspects of working rewards that set us apart from other employers, to include Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) and other staff benefits such as a green car schemes, cycle to work scheme, childcare voucher schemes, employee assistance programme, relocation package, annual leave purchase, car allowances and more. What we offer social workers | North Somerset Council ([n-somerset.gov.uk](http://n-somerset.gov.uk))

### Exit Interviews

A framework for exit interviews for staff to ascertain their reasons for leaving and learn lessons about why staff may not choose to stay in North Somerset is established. A report summarising patterns and themes drawn from exit interviews will be produced utilising data from the HR information system with recommendations will be provided and evaluated to make improvements to support our employer of choice ambition within the region.

## Priority 3 - Caseloads

Our approach to practice is to connect and build trusting relationships with children, young people, families, carers, and others to understand what is happening, and how we can best help. We do this by working together, being critically reflective, evidence based, curious and focusing on strengths. Trauma informed principles are central to all our services to children, these principles will serve as a golden thread throughout our engagement.

To sustain manageable Social Worker caseloads, we will:

- Reflect the level of experience of the worker
- Review practice robustly and challenge performance if necessary
- Work with our partners to ensure children and their families are receiving the right support from the right service
- Operate as a whole service and support proportionate intervention
- Have Family Support Workers in the teams to work with Social Workers.

## Priority 4 - Career Development

To ensure that career pathways and opportunities for development are available to all staff that seek them we will:

- Offer a wide range of student placements, including Step up and Frontline programmes to select the best possible candidates
- Continue to develop, improve, and evolve our already well regarded ASYE programme
- Expand our ASYE programme into a year two transitioning programme of support
- Support social workers to progress through the grades from ASYE to Senior Practitioner
- Support and raise the profile of Senior Practitioners through lead roles that drive practice across the whole directorate
- Look for development opportunities for staff within the service, balanced with bringing in new talent with fresh ideas
- Ensure Managers and employees participate in the IAPT training at Exeter University
- Provide leadership training with accredited qualifications

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### Career Development Principles

North Somerset's career development principles are:

1. Creating long term stability in the workforce through opportunities for progression and development
2. An unswerving commitment to equality of opportunity
3. Identifying and supporting all our staff who wish to progress and advance their careers
4. Ensuring that workers who find a level at which they prefer to operate are still supported and offered developmental opportunities
5. A 'mixed economy' of growing our own talent and bringing in new people with fresh ideas

### Approved Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) Programme

A comprehensive Induction to Children's Services Directorate is offered to all new staff including experienced Social Workers, Team Managers and Senior Leaders. All newly qualified social workers (NQSW) placed within Children, Young People and Family Service social work setting will be set a ten session Core training, each session taking place monthly and tailored to support the NQSW's development, in addition to the annual workforce training programme.

The NQSW case load will be designed to help them develop a broad base of expertise in the core tasks of statutory social work in the team they work in. This is reviewed at the review meetings and adapted in line with identified learning and development needs. North Somerset Council are clear that the ASYE caseloads are protected in number and complexity of cases are acknowledged until they finish their supported year in employment.

### Progression and Senior Practitioner

The opportunity to achieve progression from a social worker and senior social worker is linked to achievement of practice educator status, alongside demonstrable practice competence at an enhanced level.

### Management Development Opportunities

The manager development programme provides an opportunity to support the existing group of managers, as well as those identified as aspiring managers, Independent Safeguarding and Reviewing officers and Child Protection Conference Chairs to ensure that they have the key knowledge and skills to assist with the rigour that is expected within this role.

### Coaching

Coaching is a process that aims to improve performance and focuses on the 'here and now' rather than on the distant past or future. Coaching can help unlock potential and maximise performance. At times when work is hectic and busy, coaching provides a protected space to think and reflect in more depth, on issues or dilemmas. Coaching and mentoring is an effective intervention to support career development/ progression, job satisfaction and high performance. It is also an ideal follow up tool to help embed practice learning; formal and informal training; e-learning and other self-directed learning activities by providing space for reflection.

### Who can access coaching?

Anyone and everyone! Coaching is open to colleagues across the service who would like support to think about a dilemma and find a way forward.

### What can you expect from coaching?

Coaching is not about teaching you or telling you how to solve difficulties or issues. Instead, a coach will ask questions and support you to reflect, in order to facilitate your learning and support you to work through the specific challenges you bring to coaching.

### Delivering on our Priorities

#### Action Plan

The priorities and actions set out in this strategy will be incorporated into the Recruitment and Retention Plan and will be regularly reviewed by the Senior Children's Leadership Team.

#### Governance

The Recruitment and Retention Group will provide the initial governance to oversee this strategy, with performance reporting and impact to the Senior Children's Senior Leadership Team every six months. The recruitment and retention of social workers is an essential part of the Council's business and our challenges in this regard have led to its priority inclusion in the North Somerset improvement plan.

The Recruitment and Retention Task Group is chaired by our Principal Social Worker and comprises senior managers from across the council. Our recruitment and retention task group is responsible for the implementation of this strategy and the action plan, they will review whether:

- Our approach to recruitment and whether it is achieving the required results
- The information provided to potential applicants is attractive and informative

- The working rewards that we offer potential applicants are competitive with the marketplace and whether we can offer more
- The first point of contact with North Somerset Council is professional and efficient
- We contribute and directly interface with our workforce development subgroup

#### Measuring Success

The success of the strategy will be measured based on a range of quantitative and qualitative measures.

#### Quantitative Measures

1. Percentage of permanent staff in each service
2. Percentage of unfilled vacancies in each service
3. Spend on agency staff by service, and role
4. Reduction in maximum Social Worker caseload
5. Reduction in average Social Worker caseload
6. Reduction in the number of agency workers occupying permanent posts during 2021-2022 and last 3 years
7. Number of ASYEs successfully completing first year

8. Number of ASYE progressing to 2nd & 3rd year with North Somerset
9. Number of social workers years in service - retention rates
10. Number of Social Worker progressing to Senior Practitioner
11. A reduction in turnover in 2021-2022 of key cohorts e.g. social workers, nursery workers, early help officers
12. Number of Social Workers on aspirant manager scheme
13. Loss of practitioners within directorate, by service, team and role
14. Workforce stability, by role, service

#### Qualitative Measures

1. All Staff Survey
2. SWORD staff survey through research in Practice (Children's Services Directorate)
3. Staff feedback, including exit interviews and exit questionnaires
4. Feedback from parents and children collected at children in need, initial child protection case conference, child protection case review meetings and at point of closure.

### Appendices:

#### Appendix A: Recruitment & Retention Task Group, Terms of Reference

The function of the group is to promote a strategy rather than a short-term plan. There are immediate priorities but medium-and long-term responses are essential to meet our strategic objectives. The strategy is therefore as concerned with supply, that is increasing the number of people pursuing social care careers as it is with ensuring that North Somerset secure its market share of the people currently available.

Our overall objectives are simply stated but extraordinarily hard to achieve, we are aiming for:

- A competent, well-trained workforce
- Well, supported, well managed staff
- Staff who feel valued and adequately rewarded
- A stable, representative, and ambitious workforce

North Somerset has the following four key priorities:

**Priority 1:** to recruit sufficient permanent high-quality staff with suitable qualifications and experience

**Priority 2:** to retain existing employees by supporting them to carry out their roles effectively, and by ensuring that our total offer for new and existing employees is competitive within the marketplace

**Priority 3:** sustain manageable caseloads for our social workers and alternatively qualified practitioners

**Priority 4:** develop a skilled workforce

#### The Task Group's aims and objectives were agreed as follows:

- To understand the current recruitment process and the barriers and challenges to recruiting staff
- To discover best promotion and recruitment and retention practice undertaken across the southwest that can be adopted in North Somerset
- To make recommendations on how recruitment and retention of staff could be improved
- To monitor and drive the action plan

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