

Action in focus

National strategy, local impact

Two years on



National strategy, local impact

When the Workforce Strategy was launched two years ago, we set out an important ambition: that everyone should be able to live the life they choose, in the place and community that matters most to them. Achieving that ambition depends on having enough people, with the right skills, values, support and recognition to do their jobs well.

At the two-year mark, nearly three quarters of the 56 recommendations set out to meet that ambition are now complete or in progress, and the number of actions still to get started has halved.

That is a sizeable shift given the scale and complexity of the work, and it reflects the commitment and action already happening across adult social care.

Across the sector and in government, recommendations are being turned into practical action that is making a difference to people's lives. We feel privileged to work alongside committed sector colleagues who are using the recommendations in their own services, systems and communities, and helping to build momentum across the country.

This edition of 'Action in focus' brings together national updates and practical examples to show how the strategy is being put into practice, and what others can learn from that progress.

The latest Size and Structure of the Adult Social Care Sector and Workforce in England report is a timely reminder of where sustained action is still needed.



The workforce has grown for the fourth year in a row, with 22,000 more filled posts than last year. Vacancy rates have fallen to 6.1%, the lowest level in a decade.

These figures show improvement, but they do not remove the pressure on employers or people working in care. Vacancy rates remain too high, demand is growing, and many employers are still making difficult decisions about recruitment, retention and development.

One of the most important opportunities ahead is the development of a ten-year attraction plan for adult social care. Done well, it can give employers, partners and local systems a stronger shared basis for attracting people into care and building pride in the workforce.

It will also connect attraction with wider work on the Care Workforce Pathway, digital skills and local recruitment, helping to link how people enter care with how they are supported to stay and develop.

Social care continues to be discussed alongside wider questions facing public services, including reform, funding, pressure on local government, closer working with health and what care should look like in the future.

The Workforce Strategy gives the sector a clear way to show what the workforce needs, where action is already happening and what should stay visible as national decisions are made.

The more it is used by leaders, partners, policymakers, employers and people working in local services, the stronger its role will be in shaping decisions and improving support for the workforce.

Professor Oonagh Smyth CBE and Sir David Pearson.

Co-chairs of the Workforce Strategy Oversight Executive Group.



In this edition

The Workforce Strategy for Adult Social Care in England is two years old. So, what are we learning two years on?

In this edition of Action in focus, we explore the progress made, learn from the people putting the strategy into practice, and share the resources ready to help others.

- Read why the strategy is much more than a set of recommendations for those leading the work at a national level.
- Check out the two-year road map for an at-a-glance look at where progress is being made.
- Learn about the six priority recommendations including the big announcement for a new 10-year attraction plan for adult social care.
- Follow the spotlights on organisations up and down the country using the strategy.
- Explore the ‘out now’ resources we trailed in the last Action in focus.

From commitment to implementation

The strategy was designed as a 15-year programme of change, recognising the scale and complexity of the sector. Two years on, the snapshot of activity in the roadmap infographic shows growing implementation across the strategy’s 56 recommendations and commitments.

Since 2025, at the one-year point, the proportion of recommendations and commitments in progress or completed has increased from 59% to 77%, while those yet to start have fallen from 41% to 23%. This is a sizeable shift.

Whilst recognising there is still a way to go, these figures point to a strategy that is becoming increasingly embedded in delivery, with action taking place across workforce planning, attraction, retention, training and transformation.



Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy two years on

Our journey so far

Yet to start

Transform

- Implement workforce planning. Government should create a central workforce body to be responsible for the development and implementation of this and future workforce plans, making any necessary changes to legislation and any funding implications for a workforce strategy and workforce plan to be implemented.



In progress

Train

Maintain training funding. Three-year DHSC funding plan for training to allow the sector to plan.

Attract and retain

Develop a 10-year attraction plan focusing on men, younger people and people with technical skills



Complete

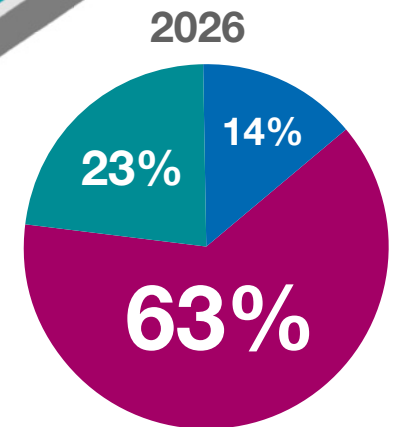
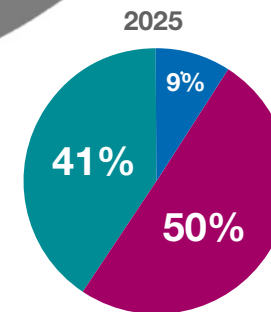
Train

- DHSC and the National Institute for Health and Care Research should build into their research programme registered nurse-led research opportunities.
- DHSC should encourage employers to develop employer-funded preceptorship programmes for newly registered nurses and nursing associates transitioning into their roles.



56 recommendations and commitments

■ Complete ■ In progress ■ Yet to start



Keeping the sector connected

The Workforce Strategy was created by the sector, for the sector. Two years on, that shared ownership remains one of its greatest strengths.

Leaders across the strategy's oversight executive group still describe it as more than a set of recommendations. It gives organisations a common direction, helps partners understand each other's roles and creates a stronger basis for influencing national conversations about the workforce.

This matters because no single organisation can solve adult social care's workforce challenges alone. Providers, local authorities, government, regulators, unions, care workers, people who draw on care and support, and national partners all hold different parts of the solution.

The reflections from leaders show how the strategy is being used in practice: to keep partners connected, align support around shared priorities, bring different perspectives together and strengthen conversations with government. Together, they show that the strategy's value is not only in what it says, but in how it helps the sector keep working as one.

"The strategy helped us in our conversations with DHSC, and being part of the partnership helps us in aligning our support to recommendations, which were co-designed with the adult social care sector."

Hazel Summers, LGA

"Most joined-up, policy-influencing driver."

Melanie Weatherley MBE, Care Association Alliance

"Being part of the group keeps us well informed and connected."

Karolina Gerlich, Care Workers' Charity

"A key strength is that everyone is on the same page in terms of direction of travel."

Natalie Day, Social Work England

"The oversight executive group gently points us all in the same direction... a strategic space to talk about the Workforce Strategy and our roles."

Sally Burlington, ADASS

"Being part of the group enables cross sector collaborations and brings a nursing perspective into development."

RCN

Spotlight on Bradford Care Association

In the Bradford district, the Workforce Strategy is helping providers turn national ambition into practical support they can use locally.

[Bradford Care Association](#), the local representative body for independent adult social care providers, has developed the Bradford Cares Hub to bring people, skills and opportunities together in one place. The Hub gives providers a clearer route to support on workforce issues and helps connect local action with the wider priorities set out in the national workforce strategy.

Trevor Hewitt, Adult Social Care Strategic Workforce Lead with Bradford Care Association and Bradford Council, says their work has moved from early alignment with the strategy to delivery and that is making a practical difference for employers and the workforce.

“The national strategy has provided a valuable framework to coordinate local action, and in Bradford we have seen particular benefit from linking strategic intent with practical delivery through the Bradford Cares Hub.”

- **Giving local work a shared direction:** the national strategy has helped Bradford connect its local workforce priorities with the wider focus on attracting, retaining, training and transforming the adult social care workforce.
- **Helping providers see what it means for them:** the Hub supports providers to understand how national priorities translate into local action, through shared messages, opportunities and feedback.
- **Making support easier to access:** by bringing workforce activity together through the Hub, Bradford is making it easier for employers to find and use the support available to them.

Explore [Bradford Cares Hub](#)

Attract and retain

Developing a 10-year attraction plan for adult social care

Finding and keeping enough people with the right values and skills remains one of the biggest challenges for adult social care. This year, the oversight executive group identified the recommendation to develop a 10-year attraction plan as a priority.

They will bring the sector together to design a plan to increase the number and diversity of people choosing careers in adult social care - responding directly to falling domestic supply and reduced international recruitment.

A task-and-finish group, chaired by Melanie Weatherley MBE, Care Association Alliance and Professor Oonagh Smyth CBE, Skills for Care, will lead the work. With membership spanning providers, government, national bodies, people with lived experience, unions, think tanks and more, the group will define what the plan must deliver - such as how to better attract younger people, men and those with digital skills, and bring together partners to develop solutions that can be implemented nationally and locally.

We know that in order for this plan to succeed these changes need organisations across the system to work together, because the power to make progress does not sit in one place.

Recruitment campaigns, career pathways, employment support and local commissioning all need to align to give a clear, consistent offer. By coordinating existing and new action across organisations, the sector can connect existing initiatives, focus effort where it has most impact and create a stronger, more visible route into care.

“Often, we can feel ‘done to’ as adult social care organisations, but the 10-year attraction plan is an opportunity for us to work together. It allows us to show younger people for example that social care is a positive career choice, where you can work right up to being the CEO of an organisation.”

Kirstie Jones, Chief People Officer at Salutem Care and Education, and strategy champion



Why You Care

Care workers have a unique understanding of what works well in care and where improvements are needed. The Care Workers' Charity is helping more care workers use their experience to influence change, develop new skills and raise the profile of the profession. The charity has recently published an [updated guide](#) to centring care workers in the decisions that shape their work, and invites the sector to put it into practice with CWC's support.

The charity is launching a new campaign, Why You Care, which will share the stories of care workers from across the sector. Through short videos and blogs, care workers will talk about what their role involves, why they chose a career in care and what people often misunderstand about the job. The campaign aims to celebrate the contribution care workers make and encourage more people to consider a career in care.

Spotlight on Stockton-on-Tees Employment and Training Hub

When it comes to targeted approach to recruitment, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has developed a central Employment and Training Hub, complemented by a mobile "Hub on Tour", to connect more people to jobs in adult social care and other sectors.

By taking employment support directly into communities and removing practical and confidence barriers, they are widening access to opportunities and creating a stronger, more inclusive local route into jobs.

"The Hub on Tour microsites are really useful, especially for people who are quite far away from the labour market, because we're taking the support directly to them rather than expecting them to come to us."

Sophie Proud, Recruitment Coordinator, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

[Read the Stockton-on-Tees practical approach toolkit in full](#)



Spotlight on St Monica Trust

St Monica Trust supports over 1,400 residents and tenants and employs more than 1,200 staff. This makes them one of the largest providers in the region and their approach to recruitment and retention is clearly built around people, not posts.

A not-for-profit care and housing provider based in the South West, providing care for older people across Bristol, North Somerset and surrounding areas, St Monica Trust's transformational approach is its age-responsive support model. This reimagines how young people are recruited, inducted and retained in adult social care.

This approach goes beyond simply filling vacancies – it builds a sustainable, resilient workforce by recognising the unique needs of younger employees and adapting organisational practices to meet them.

Rather than assuming workplace readiness, they provide structured, personalised support from day one. Apprentices are welcomed through supernumerary roles and simplified communication methods.

“If you’re going to make a real difference to this part of the population, you need a more strategic way of addressing the issues. You don’t do that as a single organisation. We’re not going to have as much impact as a sector unless we start joining together and working in partnership on these issues.”

David Williams, Chief Executive Officer, St Monica Trust

[Read the St Monica Trust practical approach toolkit in full](#)

Government-led joined up, consistent action on pay

This priority recommendation continues to move forward through the government's commitment to a Fair Pay Agreement. The Employment Rights Act - the legislation allowing the Agreement - became law in December 2025.

Employer and employee representatives are preparing for negotiations, which are expected to start in 2027. The agreement is due to come into effect in 2028.

Workforce race equality

We should want diversity in our workforce so that we represent our population, creating the most inclusive workforce in England, attracting and retaining talent through equal access to career development.



The latest [national Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard \(SC-WRES\) Report](#) (2025/26), which now includes 70% of staff employed in the local authority social care workforce (43% in the previous phase), shows it is clear that structural inequalities continue to shape experiences in the workforce for Global Majority colleagues working in adult social care.

This is why engagement, support and funding for the SC-WRES programme remains a priority recommendation.

In the most recent phase Skills for Care has been working with 100 local authorities to strengthen and support their anti-racist action planning. Around 160 people learn from each other through a monthly Community of Practice. This voluntary commitment of time and resources demonstrates a solid commitment to the programme and to tackling systemic inequalities. The programme has been strengthened this year by learning with brap, a Global Majority led learning partner.

Ambitious plans for continued expansion into phases 4 (2026/27) and 5 (2027/28), funded by Skills for Care, will widen the reach and impact of the programme, including piloting the involvement of care providers outside of the local authority.

Skills for Care's publication of an [Anti-Racist Interventions Guide](#) aims to support local authorities in selecting the right evidence-based intervention and the planning of a robust evaluation framework in the year ahead.

The call for support from national policymakers remains a priority. The SC-WRES evidence base has grown significantly and its continued expansion, credibility and focus on measurable anti-racist systemic improvements make it essential to building a fairer, safer and more resilient social care system.

Out now – attract and retain

Recent resources supporting the strategy and sector.

- Explore the [practical approach toolkits](#) to support leaders and commissioners in adult social care. These toolkits bring together what's working across adult social care and show how others can apply it. Designed for leaders and managers, they offer clear, actionable insight into tackling key workforce challenges through proven, real-life approaches.
- **Retaining regulated professionals** [What good looks like in the retention of regulated professionals | Local Government Association](#) Partners in Care and Health shares what we know works to help regulated professionals stay, grow and thrive in adult social care, drawing on evidence and real practice. This hub supports local authorities, and partners working with them, to improve retention of regulated professionals working in adult social care, including social workers, occupational therapists, nurses and allied health professionals.



Train



Care Workforce Pathway provider support expands

The Care Workforce Pathway continues to grow with additional role categories coming soon including nominated individual, activities coordinator, and care technologist. These new roles represent a significant expansion of workforce coverage on the Pathway and will help the sector to recruit and retain talent by showing the diversity a career in care can offer.

Skills for Care has also been working with employers and wider systems to adopt the Pathway to support with workforce planning, career progression, and recruiting and retaining staff.

There is now opportunity for more care providers to join the direct support programme as they adopt the Pathway. For further information and to register interest head to [Care Workforce Pathway support programme for providers.](#)

New resources are now available to help guide employers get started with practical tools to do things like map roles and develop careers in regulated professions. This includes system partner case study showing how an Integrated Care Board is adopting the Care Workforce Pathway to support a fully integrated workforce in adult social care across the area.

- [Career pathways into regulated professions](#)
- [How-to-guide and role mapping](#)
- [Adopting the Care Workforce Pathway](#) case studies including [Coventry and Warwickshire ICB](#)

Look out for a new local Pathway adoption briefing to support system partners coming soon.

Spotlight on Lincolnshire Care Association

Lincolnshire Care Association (LinCA) has used the Workforce Strategy as a practical framework for turning national ambition into local action.

With a long-established workforce role, part-funded by Lincolnshire County Council, LinCA has connected the strategy to the real priorities of adult social care providers across Lincolnshire.

One of the benefits they see is that the strategy offers a shared language when working with providers, Lincolnshire County Council, Skills for Care and wider system partners, while reinforcing their distinct role in championing the adult social care provider workforce.

The strategy's core themes of attract and retain, train, and transform have shaped LinCA's move from a Workforce Development Team towards developing a Care Academy model, bringing recruitment, retention, learning, competence and transformation into one coherent local offer.

Their attraction and retention work has prompted richer conversations about who works in adult social care, why people join and what helps them stay. At one of their Community of Practice for registered managers, Veterans in Care presented on recruiting veterans into care roles and recognising veterans already in the workforce. This has helped providers consider different approaches to workforce identity, wellbeing and support needs.

When it comes to training, LinCA's developing Care Academy is helping them explore accredited provision, assessment capacity and Oliver McGowan training, working with local learning disability providers and people with lived experience. The aim of the Care Academy is to strengthen quality, competence and progression across Lincolnshire's adult social care workforce.

LinCA has reflected the strategy's transform ambition through plans for an AI-enabled workforce information hub. The proposed website would help providers find training, career pathways, qualifications, funding and local opportunities through practical questions, such as how to support a care worker towards a nursing associate pathway or access dementia training.

Delegated healthcare activities: building confidence, capacity and good practice

Delegated healthcare activities (DHA) remain one of the six priority areas within the Workforce Strategy. As more people receive complex care in community settings, supporting the safe and effective use of delegation continues to be a key focus for the sector.

While awareness is growing, challenges remain. Early ASC-WDS data shows that around half of respondents are unsure whether they are undertaking delegated healthcare activities, highlighting an ongoing need for clearer understanding of what delegation is, when it applies, and the governance and support arrangements needed to deliver it safely. Care providers also continue to identify challenges around funding, clinical supervision, workforce support and access to quality training.

The [recent research](#) from the Care Workers' Charity provides insight from a care worker's perspective.

Over the past year, Skills for Care has developed a range of national [resources](#) to support providers, care workers, personal assistants, people drawing on care and support, and health professionals. These include short practical guides, [written](#) and [video](#) case studies, and [Innovations in Practice](#) resources showcasing approaches from across health and social care systems. These resources explore governance, competency, clinical oversight, communication and review, helping organisations apply the [delegated healthcare guiding principles](#) in practice.

Work is now focused on increasing the safe adoption of delegated healthcare activities. This includes supporting the national steering group, delivering online learning exchanges, sharing good practice and developing the Skills for Care website into a virtual hub that brings together resources, events, case studies and sector updates.

Several new resources are also in development. These include a clinical supervision framework for providers, being developed with DHSC, NHS professionals, the NMC and HCPC, alongside a decision-support resource for nurses and allied health professionals to help determine when an activity becomes delegated healthcare and when formal governance arrangements are required.

Further work is also planned to help providers identify and access high-quality training.

We are keen to hear from organisations demonstrating good delegation practice and positive outcomes for people who draw on care and support. If your service has examples that reflect the delegated healthcare guiding principles, **please [share them](#)** to help build the evidence base, support learning across the sector and encourage wider adoption of effective approaches

Out now - train

Recent resources supporting the strategy and sector.

- Delegated healthcare: short, highly practical guides the delegation principles and help providers take the next step with confidence. [Explore case studies, best practice support and videos](#) from Coventry and Warwickshire ICB, South Yorkshire ICB, Devon ICB.
- Messenger's recommendations are now in the:
 - [induction standards for new commissioners](#)
 - refreshed [Leadership Qualities Framework](#) leadership code and diagnostic tool
 - refreshed [social care manager's handbook](#)

Transform

Investing in transformation

Funded through Skills for Care's charitable reserves, a significant new Impact Fund will support projects and initiatives that help deliver the recommendations of the Workforce Strategy and demonstrate clear impact for the adult social care sector.

This first year represents a £1 million commitment, focused on work that can create bigger impact for the sector aligned to government's three shifts in health, strengthen accountability and build momentum behind the strategy taking delivery forward at a faster pace.

Skills for Care has confirmed the successful bidders for the Workforce Strategy Impact Fund, marking a significant investment back into the adult social care sector.

These are the organisations that will be working with partners and people with lived experience to scale up practical, shareable projects:

- 33n, St Monica Trust and Nourish - inclusive ambient voice technology for social care assessments
- Just Checking, Stellar Homecare - neighbourhood workforce and remote monitoring
- TSA – enhanced immersive Virtual Home
- West Midlands ADASS – workforce insight in action

The fund supports innovative, sustainable and sector-led approaches to long-term change. It will enable the successful applicants to take forward projects that contribute to the strategy's ambitions, with strong governance, reporting and oversight in place to ensure the funding delivers maximum value.

There will be more information from these exciting areas of work coming out soon.



AI and the future of social work

Artificial intelligence is already part of social work. The question now is how it is used safely, fairly and in ways that support good practice.

Digital transformation is a key part of the Workforce Strategy and Skills for Care and Social Work England came together earlier this year with hundreds of social workers, people with lived experience, educators, leaders, technology partners and national bodies to explore just that. Building on insights and research the focus of the day was what does AI mean for day-to-day practice.

Attendees were curious, energised and realistic. They could see how AI might help with admin and free up time, but they also wanted strong safeguards around privacy, bias and professional judgement. Above all, they wanted social workers and people with lived experience to shape what happens next.

People wanted to understand how AI could help with tasks such as writing, editing, summarising, note-taking and reducing paperwork. They also raised questions about privacy, bias, over-reliance on tools and the risk of weakening professional judgement.

The strongest message was that AI must support social work, not steer it. It can be useful, but it should not become the decision-maker.

People left the summit with a better understanding of the risks and opportunities, as well as new contacts, resources and practical ideas. Common reflections described the day as informative, thought-provoking, insightful, interesting and inspiring.

The next step is to keep building confidence across the workforce. That means clear guidance, practical training, strong leadership and honest conversations about where AI helps, where it does not, and how to keep people at the centre.

[Explore some of the feedback and sessions from the day.](#) 



Workforce planning

Work continues towards national mandated workforce planning and a strategy detailing how current and future workforce needs across adult social care will be met.

National partners have established governance arrangements, an Oversight Executive Group and a network of Strategy Champions to steer and support the sector-led Workforce Strategy.

The sector has laid important foundations, but implementation now depends on government action to embed workforce planning and create the national infrastructure needed to sustain it.

Out now - transform

Recent resources supporting the strategy and the sector from Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)

- New report ['Towards a National Care Service: raising national standards of care'](#)¹ sets out how national standards could help deliver greater consistency, fairness and quality in adult social care across England.
- [Care Equity Evidence Hub](#),² launched early 2026, brings together evidence and analysis on inequities in access to, experience of, and outcomes from social care. It curates research, case studies and data to show how inequities arise across services, settings and places.

Our Social Work Future

During 2026, partners across adult social work are working together to develop a new workforce strategy for the profession. The aim is to make sure adult social work has the people, skills and support it needs to help people live with choice, dignity and connection in their communities.

The strategy will build on the wider Workforce Strategy for Adult Social Care in England. It will focus more closely on the role of adult social workers, recognising the specialist work they do in areas such as safeguarding, mental capacity, legal duties, rights-based practice and support for people with complex needs.

The work comes at an important time. Demand for adult social work is growing, people's needs are becoming more complex, and social workers are working across a wider range of settings, including local authorities, the NHS, housing and voluntary organisations. We know there are regional differences in workforce supply and vacancy rates too, showing why better long-term planning is needed.

In 2026, the focus will be on building a shared view of what adult social work should look like in the future. This includes how to attract and keep social workers, how to support learning and career development, and how to make the best use of technology without losing the human relationships at the heart of good social work.

The strategy will also look at how adult social work can be better supported within a changing health and care system. It will explore how social workers can spend more time doing the work that only they can do: using professional judgement, standing up for people's rights, helping people stay connected to their communities and challenging barriers that affect people's lives.

By working with people across the sector during 2026, the strategy will help create a clearer plan for the future of adult social work. It is an opportunity to value the profession, strengthen the workforce and make sure social workers are supported to make the biggest possible difference to people's lives.

Stay connected

Join with others and stay connected by becoming a Workforce Strategy Champion.

Nearly 600 Workforce Strategy champions are now using the Workforce Strategy for Adult Social Care in England to shape policy, influence local decision making and strengthen collaboration in their local area. This expanding network has become a powerful driver of momentum, helping to translate national ambitions into practical action on the ground. Sharing this Action in focus with your colleagues and networks is a great way to start.

By signing up, you'll receive quarterly updates including practical ideas from others and resources to help you.

[Sign up to be a champion](#)

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this edition of Action in focus. To read the 56 recommendations, or strategy in full, head to www.ascworkforcestrategy.co.uk

