

## **First steps with the Care Workforce Pathway led by Hertfordshire Care Providers Association**

Hertfordshire Care Providers Association (HCPA) is bringing organisations across their local adult social care system together to explore how the Care Workforce Pathway can support a more consistent, confident, and sustainable workforce. With a large and diverse provider market and increasing demand for complex care, the Pathway is being used to support local workforce planning by bringing greater clarity, alignment, and shared understanding across the system.

Hertfordshire has around 900 care providers supporting a workforce of approximately 38,000 people across a wide range of services. As demand continues to rise, particularly in areas such as dementia, frailty, and complex health issues, the system is seeing increasing pressure on workforce capacity and skills. HCPA plays a central role in supporting the sector by providing training and development as well as maintaining strong connections with the local authority and wider system partners.

Michelle Airey, Head of Education, Quality and Integration at HCPA, says: “We’re seeing care needs becoming more complex across the board. We know we need to plan ahead to make sure the workforce is competent, confident, and has the right support to respond to that change.”

HCPA wanted to use the Pathway to inform local workforce modelling. From the start, there was a clear focus on taking a structured and collaborative approach. Rather than starting with individual providers, HCPA worked with commissioners, Integrated Care Board colleagues, and other system leaders to build collective awareness and understanding of the Pathway.

Once these foundations, expectations, and shared language were in place, HCPA began working with care providers through information sessions and direct discussions. These conversations highlighted the realities facing the sector, with many providers describing the pressures of rising demand, limited capacity, and tight financial margins. Smaller organisations, in particular, talked about the challenge of balancing day-to-day delivery of care with longer-term workforce planning.

Joanna Vlismas is HCPA’s Education and Quality Assurance Team Manager. She says: “Providers were very open and honest about their situations. For some, just keeping services running is the priority, so anything new needs to feel both practical and achievable.”

There was strong interest in how the Pathway could help address some of the key challenges. Providers recognised the value of clearer role definitions, more structured development routes, and a shared framework to support progression. Many also highlighted the importance of seeing real examples and learning from peers to build confidence in how the Pathway could be applied in practice.

To support this, HCPA hosted a system workshop bringing together commissioning, monitoring, clinical teams and care providers. The session introduced the Pathway's role categories, values, and career structure, and gave partners an opportunity to reflect on local, shared priorities.

There was a clear recognition of the growing complexity of care and the need to develop a workforce with the right balance of skills and experience. Evolving themes included creating more enhanced and specialist roles, alongside ensuring strong induction and supervision for people who were new to care. The importance of values was central to the conversation. Partners highlighted that compassion, dignity, and good leadership continue to underpin high-quality care.

Michelle says: "The Pathway is helping us bring greater consistency to how we think about roles and career progression. It connects what we are already doing and gives us a shared way of moving forward."

HCPA has already started to turn this learning into practical action. Work is underway to map local training provision to the suggested learning and development in the Pathway, and face-to-face workshops are being delivered to support providers to adopt the Pathway. There is also growing collaboration with system partners to consider ways in which the Pathway can support wider workforce planning, commissioning, and quality discussions.

Looking ahead, the system is focussed on building on this early momentum. HCPA's plans include continuing provider engagement through targeted sessions, developing a workforce modelling tool to support planning, and creating a local library of resources to make it easier for providers to access guidance and examples. There is also interest in testing new approaches with small groups of providers to understand what works well in practice.

Peter Woolnough, Deputy Head of Education, Quality and Integration at HCPA, says: "We recognise that providers are starting from different places. Our role is to support them in a way that feels manageable and relevant to their circumstances."

HCPA's experience shows that shared understanding, collaboration, and planned practical steps are excellent first steps to help make a change. There is now a real sense of excitement and purpose across the system, creating the conditions for a more supported, skilled, and confident adult social care workforce.