Planning and preparing

Effective planning and preparation were critical to transforming Sheffcare's recruitment approach.

Overview of actions

> "Some managers were very good at recruitment; some weren't quite so good. So, it was about us looking at a consistent approach."
>
> **Merewyn Scafe,** Director of HR, Sheffcare

Identifying the case for change

- **Decentralised recruitment challenges** – Inconsistent candidate experiences, delays in hiring and high turnover, particularly during probation, were common across Sheffcare's nine care homes.
- **Limited HR expertise** – Managers lacked recruitment knowledge, and processes varied widely, creating inefficiencies and poor outcomes.
- **Strategic review findings** – Highlighted the need for a centralised, values-led approach to improve consistency, speed and staff retention.
- **Compliance concerns** – Inconsistencies in recruitment checks and documentation risked negatively impacting CQC ratings, reinforcing the urgency for change.

Setting objectives and benefits

- **Core objectives** – Streamline recruitment, improve candidate engagement and reduce early attrition while freeing managers to focus on care delivery.
- **Key benefits** – Faster response times, improved onboarding and stronger alignment with organisational values to build a resilient workforce.
- **Overall aim** – Create a professional, supportive experience for applicants and new starters, enhancing retention and organisational reputation.

Identifying and managing risks

- **Key risks** – Resistance from managers used to local control, potential delays during transition, and challenges in maintaining consistency across sites.
- **Mitigation strategies** – Early stakeholder involvement, clear communication, piloting changes before full rollout, and ongoing feedback with data monitoring to address emerging issues.

Assessing infrastructure needs

- **Investment in infrastructure** – Centralising recruitment required additional HR capacity, digital systems for tracking applications and standardised interview templates.
- **Gap analysis and resourcing** – Sheffcare assessed existing infrastructure and addressed gaps to ensure the central team had the tools and resources to manage recruitment effectively across all homes.

Developing a realistic timeframe

- **Phased transition** – Rolled out over extended period (see timeline), starting with planning and stakeholder engagement, followed by implementing centralised processes and onboarding reforms.
- **Sustainable change** – A realistic timeframe allowed for training, adjustment and evaluation, ensuring changes were embedded effectively for long-term success.

Engaging the right people

Between 2021 and 2025 a number of roles were introduced in addition to HR director to strengthen the central team:

- **Recruitment officer (2021)** – First dedicated recruitment role introduced to centralise processes. Focused on DBS checks, reference verification and interview scheduling. Role disestablished (2022) but functions evolved into other roles.
- **HR advisor (2023)** – Joined the recruitment team to refine processes, strengthen compliance and ensure systematic communication with managers.
- **HR recruitment co-ordinator (2023)** – Added part-time to support recruitment operations. Played a key role in improving reference checking and later managing enhanced safeguarding checks.
- **HR marketing co-ordinator (2024)** – Began supporting recruitment and induction, bridging HR and organisational development. Focused on improving onboarding experience and internal communications.

Key decisions

- Secured executive and board backing for phased centralisation, engaging with registered managers early in the process to align expectations and ease transition.
- Established simple shared infrastructure from day one – recruitment notification form, live tracking spreadsheet, and weekly manager updates (including cc'ing managers on applicant emails).

Key learning

Sheffcare took time at the start of the process to introduce simple processes and build a shared understanding, before rolling out the new approach in full.

- **Transparent communication** – Weekly updates and copying managers into applicant correspondence maintained confidence and visibility throughout the transition.
- **Phased implementation** – A realistic timetable allowed time for training and adaptation, reducing disruption and embedding sustainable change.