

# Centralising recruitment

How centralised support fast-tracked recruitment opportunities and refined onboarding and development



A practical approach toolkit  
Based on Sheffcare's approach



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# Introduction



Recruitment and retention remain persistent challenges in adult social care, often due to fragmented processes and inconsistent onboarding. Sheffcare, a not-for-profit provider of nine care homes in Sheffield, has addressed these issues through a centralised, values-led recruitment model.

This toolkit summarises Sheffcare's centralised, values led recruitment approach and the practical steps behind it. By shifting from reactive hiring to strategic workforce planning, Sheffcare has built a scalable, person-centred system that supports long-term sustainability and care quality.

This model can be used and adjusted by any provider wanting better recruitment outcomes. The approach includes practical insights into implementation, stakeholder engagement and digital integration. It also shows how thoughtful design, cultural alignment and continuous learning can build a resilient care workforce rooted in community and compassion.

**“Retention here is high because the culture is welcoming. Staff are friendly, supportive and managers have an open-door policy. People feel valued, and that makes all the difference.”**

**Dawn Blacklaws**, Registered Manager, Sheffcare

# The context



Recruitment and retention in adult social care are increasingly impacted by structural pressures and operational demands. Registered managers frequently take the lead on HR responsibilities, often without dedicated support.

This dual role can be overwhelming, especially when urgent service needs take priority. As a result, essential recruitment tasks – such as advertising, short-listing, interviewing and onboarding – are delayed, leading to missed opportunities in a sector where the vacancy rate remains at 7%, nearly three times higher than the wider economy.

Even when recruitment is successful, fragmented induction processes often undermine retention. New staff typically join during periods of high demand, receiving inconsistent or rushed onboarding. This disorientation can lead to early exits, contributing to a turnover rate of 24.7% in the independent sector ([Skills for Care: Size and structure of the adult social care workforce, 2024/25](#)). Skills for Care identifies five key factors that help reduce turnover:

- competitive pay
- full-time hours
- relevant qualifications
- access to training
- avoiding zero-hours contracts.

Workers lacking these are nearly three times more likely to leave (42.2% vs. 14.4%).

While some organisations outsource HR functions, many under invest in internal HR capacity, risking service sustainability and safe staffing levels. This can jeopardise compliance with CQC standards. Although cost is often cited as a barrier, the financial impact of high turnover frequently exceeds the investment required for effective HR support – whether through a dedicated expert or a small team in larger services.

Succession planning is another critical but often neglected area. Many providers fail to develop frontline staff into senior roles, despite the opportunities provided by the [Care Workforce Pathway](#) and funding through [Apprenticeships](#) and the [Learning and Development Support Scheme \(LDSS\)](#). Without structured development routes, experienced carers leave for better opportunities, weakening workforce stability and continuity of care.

To address these challenges, providers must invest in structured HR support, streamline induction processes, and maximise workforce development funding. Building a sustainable, skilled workforce requires proactive, strategic planning – not reactive management.

# About the organisation

Sheffcare is a not-for-profit charity based in Sheffield that operates nine care homes for older people, supporting over 1,000 people each year.

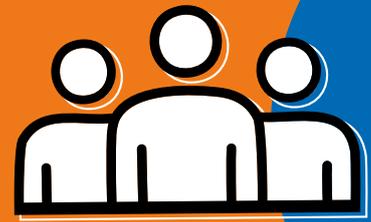
Established over 30 years ago, Sheffcare employs over 560 people and provides a range of services. As a charitable organisation, Sheffcare reinvests its resources into its homes and staff development to support ongoing improvements in care delivery.

Sheffcare provides long-term residential support with personalised care plans that promote independence and social connection. Several homes offer dedicated dementia care, with trained staff using therapeutic approaches to support wellbeing. Short-term respite stays are available for recovery or carer relief, delivered to the same standard as permanent placements. Day care services offer meals, activities and personal care during the day, helping reduce isolation and supporting carers.

Until autumn 2021, all central HR responsibilities were handled by a single individual. From that point onward, the roles and responsibilities outlined in this resource began to expand.



# The approach



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## What was the challenge?

Sheffcare introduced comprehensive recruitment and retention reforms to tackle persistent workforce challenges. This aimed to standardise processes, improve candidate experience, reduce early attrition and strengthen managerial capability across its care homes.

- **Inconsistent recruitment practices** – Individual care homes managed hiring independently, creating varied candidate experiences, delays and inefficiencies. Outcomes were unpredictable and often misaligned with organisational values due to the absence of a standardised approach.
- **High turnover during probation** – New starters reported feeling unsupported and disconnected, leading to early exits and increased recruitment costs. Lack of structured onboarding and consistent peer support contributed to isolation and uncertainty among new staff.
- **Slow response times to applications** – Heavy frontline manager workloads caused delays in acknowledging and progressing candidates. Strong applicants were often lost to faster-moving employers, damaging recruitment success and Sheffcare's reputation as a responsive, professional employer.
- **Geographic mismatches** – Staff assigned to homes far from their residence faced transport difficulties, impacting reliability, punctuality and job satisfaction. These logistical challenges contributed to attrition and reduced workforce stability.

**“We’ve found that the person who responds fastest to applicants is often the one who secures them – speed really matters.”**

**Merewyn Scafe**, Director of HR, Sheffcare

## How the challenges were addressed

### Fast-tracking applications and interviews

Sheffcare's fast-track recruitment model combines speed, structure and fairness to attract and retain talent efficiently while delivering a positive candidate experience in a competitive market.

- **Rapid application response** – All applications are acknowledged within one working day, helping Sheffcare secure talent quickly in a competitive market.
- **Centralised recruitment management** – A dedicated HR team oversees hiring, ensuring consistency and freeing managers to focus on care delivery.
- **Values-based, structured interviews** – Candidates receive questions in advance for transparency, and managers use clear templates to conduct fair, effective interviews.
- **Compliance and candidate quality** – Pre-application questionnaires improve suitability, while safeguarding checks and clear communication ensure fairness and trust throughout the process.

**“The application was dead simple. I applied online and heard back the next day. I think I started within a week once references and DBS were sorted – really quick turnaround.”**

Paul Bate, Care Support Worker, Sheffcare

**“We aim to contact people within one working day of their application. The secret to our success is being quick – it’s all about speed.”**

Chloe Wiseman, HR Advisor, Sheffcare

## Providing local opportunities

Sheffcare's recruitment strategy emphasises local opportunities to strengthen workforce sustainability and community connections.

- **Reducing travel barriers** – Matching staff to homes near their residence minimises travel time and costs, supporting work-life balance, reliability and job satisfaction.
- **Enhancing care quality through local knowledge** – Recruiting locally fosters cultural understanding and stronger community ties, enabling more person-centred care.
- **Building a sustainable, locally-rooted workforce** – Sheffcare focuses on local talent rather than international sponsorship, supported by a centralised HR system that aligns applicants with nearby homes to improve retention.

## Meeting cultural needs

As part of Sheffcare's personalised onboarding approach, new starters complete an 'About Me' form to ensure tailored support and inclusion from day one.

- **Capturing individual needs** – The form includes questions around personal preferences, cultural requirements, dietary needs and reasonable adjustments to support wellbeing and integration.
- **In-depth equality forms** – Enables staff to share practical details – such as prayer needs or food intolerances – that may not surface elsewhere, promoting inclusion and respect.
- **Supporting personalised onboarding** – Information is shared with care teams to ensure managers understand each recruit's background and needs, improving engagement and retention.

## Centralised induction

- Sheffcare's centralised induction delivers a consistent, values-led onboarding experience across all nine care homes, ensuring every new recruit starts with clarity, confidence, and the same high standard of training before beginning work. Probationary turnover fell from 42% to 14% within six months of a new induction process being introduced.
- **Structured three-day induction** – Covers safeguarding, infection control, dementia care, manual handling and operational guidance, ensuring staff have essential knowledge and clear expectations.
- **Values-led orientation** – Introduces Sheffcare's principles – kindness, dignity, respect, independence and choice – embedding these into daily practice from the start.
- **Continuous improvement and impact** – Induction is refined through feedback to make sure it's relevant, consistent and boosts new starters' confidence. This improves retention and engagement during probation.

**“Since we started this new programme, we’ve had a 95% retention rate of new starters. The combination of centralised induction and named buddy is definitely impacting turnover.”**

**Amelia Charlesworth-Dakin, HR Marketing Co-ordinator, Sheffcare**

## Buddy support

Sheffcare’s buddy system provides personalised peer support to new starters, complementing formal induction and fostering confidence, inclusion and smoother integration from day one.

- **Structured peer support** – Each new recruit is paired with a trained buddy selected for experience and values alignment, providing practical guidance and emotional reassurance to ease onboarding.
- **Recognition and development** – Buddies receive additional pay for their contribution and gain mentoring experience that supports future leadership progression.
- **Continuous improvement and cultural impact** – Regular reviews and feedback refine the programme, strengthening team cohesion and promoting an inclusive, values-led culture across care homes.
- **Flexible pacing** – Onboarding adapts to prior experience – experienced staff progress faster, while those new to care receive extended buddying without stigma.

**“We ask that the managers, wherever possible, supply just one buddy to work with new recruits throughout their buddy period.”**

**Chloe Wiseman, HR Advisor, Sheffcare**



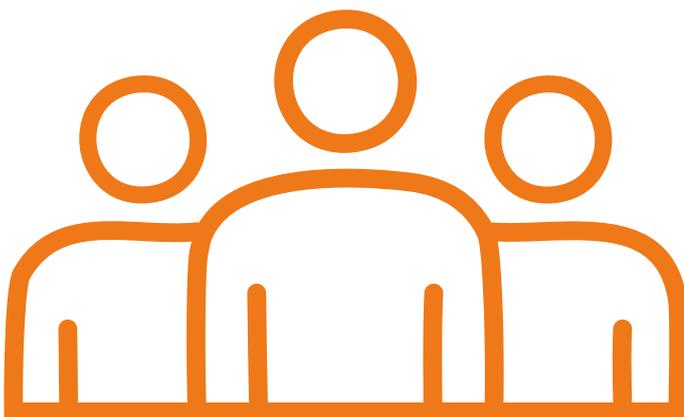
## Developing staff and succession planning

Sheffcare promotes staff development through structured career pathways, internal progression, and tailored training, creating a supportive environment that boosts retention, care quality and organisational resilience.

- **Clear career pathways and progression programmes** – Eight of nine home managers have advanced internally, supported by acting-up opportunities, mentoring schemes and a strong succession strategy.
- **Comprehensive training and qualification support** – Fully funded role-specific courses and guidance for diplomas and specialist certifications ensure staff have the skills to excel and progress.
- **Opportunities to act-up** – Promising care staff assume discrete leadership tasks under supervision, building confidence before permanent promotion.
- **A focus on progression** – Senior teams nominate colleagues for development; individuals state aspirations during one-to-ones, ensuring progression is both encouraged and owned.
- **Ongoing development and recognition** – Regular supervision, appraisals and values-led initiatives motivate staff, identify future leaders and strengthen workforce stability and retention.

**“We’ve always promoted internal progression. All our registered managers have progressed from within – none are external hires.”**

**Merewyn Scafe**, Director of HR, Sheffcare



## Key learning

**“Centralised HR is fantastic. They handle adverts, DBS, references and induction scheduling. It frees managers from heavy admin and keeps recruitment consistent, compliant and quick across homes.”**

**Dawn Blacklaws, Registered Manager, Sheffcare**

Sheffcare’s experience shows that sustainable recruitment reform depends on strategic planning, inclusive engagement and continuous improvement.

- **Centralisation with clarity** – Moving recruitment to a dedicated HR team improved speed, consistency and compliance while freeing managers to focus on care.
- **Addressing recruitment timelines** – Tracking time to recruit for the first time, Sheffcare learnt that it took an average of 44 days from vacancy to first day. This reinforced the need for proactive workforce planning and swift action when vacancies arise to prevent staffing gaps that can impact care quality and compliance with CQC standards.
- **Structured onboarding and support** – A three-day induction and buddy system transformed early retention, boosted staff confidence and embedded organisational values from day one.
- **Culture of collaboration and adaptability** – Co-designing processes with managers, listening to feedback, and refining systems ensured trust, ownership and long-term success.

Smaller services without a dedicated HR team can still adopt the core elements of this model by applying the principles in proportion to their size. The most impactful aspects – fast, consistent candidate communication, values based screening, structured induction and a simple buddy system – can be delivered by a registered manager or senior staff member without needing central HR capacity.

Even light-touch standardisation, such as using shared templates for short-listing, interview questions, and induction check lists, creates consistency and reduces the burden on individual managers. Smaller providers may also benefit from batching recruitment tasks (e.g., reviewing applications at set times), using low cost digital tools for tracking progress, and drawing on local networks to strengthen recruitment.

## Recommendations

The recommendations provide practical, evidence-based steps for planning, implementing and sustaining Sheffcare's centralised recruitment and onboarding model. It covers everything from securing leadership approval and engaging stakeholders to leveraging digital tools, embedding governance and monitoring workforce impact.

Each recommendation is supported by actionable ideas drawn from Sheffcare's experience. Use the checklist to adopt and adapt this approach to improve recruitment speed, strengthen retention and build a values-led culture that supports workforce stability and care quality.



# Timelines

Year	Key activity
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Recruitment reform programme began; first dedicated recruitment role introduced to improve consistency and compliance.</li></ul>
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ HR director assumed recruitment oversight; structured processes and tracking systems established.</li></ul>
2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ HR team expanded with additional roles to strengthen compliance and streamline operations.</li></ul>
2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Enhanced safeguarding checks implemented; capacity increased to manage regulatory requirements.</li></ul>
2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Centralised three-day induction and buddy system launched to improve onboarding and retention.</li></ul>
2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Resident involvement added to recruitment; volunteer onboarding aligned with staff processes.</li></ul>

**“The three-day induction is the best thing we’ve introduced. New starters meet the CEO, learn safeguarding and dementia care, and connect with others. It builds confidence and reduces early leavers.”**

**Dawn Blacklaws**, Registered Manager, Sheffcare