

Salford City Council

NHS
Greater Manchester
Mental Health
NHS Foundation Trust

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Salford Care Organisation
Northern Care Alliance
NHS Foundation Trust

Salford Adult Social Care

Report by the Principal Social Worker (PSW) for Adults
1 April 2023 – 31 March 2025

Section 1: Introduction and Overview

The Care and Support Statutory Guidance to the Care Act requires local authorities to identify Principal Social Workers (PSWs) for adults' services, and sets out the PSW role as follows:

“Local authorities should make arrangements to have a qualified and registered social work professional practice lead in place to:

- lead and oversee excellent social work practice
- support and develop arrangements for excellent practice
- lead the development of excellent social workers
- support effective social work supervision and decision making
- oversee quality assurance and improvement of social work practice
- advise the director of adult social services (DASS) and/or wider council in complex or controversial cases and on developing case or other law relating to social work practice
- function at the strategic level of the Professional Capabilities Framework”

(1.27)

Children's services are also required to have a PSW.

I am based within the Northern Care Alliance which provides adult social care in Salford through an agreement with Salford City Council under section 75 of the NHS Act 2006. However I offer professional leadership to all social workers in Salford who are working with adults. I also support partners across Salford to understand the remit of adult social care and support joint working between agencies.

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Executive summary

This is my first report as PSW for Salford adult social care since my appointment in March 2023.

I've had great support from colleagues within adult social care and partners across Salford, as well as the PSW networks within Greater Manchester and the Northwest ADASS region. From my first day in post I've been very impressed by the commitment and ability of all my colleagues in adult social care and their willingness to learn and innovate. I'm also grateful to my predecessor Ann Brooking for all her support and encouragement.

The key achievements that I've led or supported since 2023 are as follows:

- Introduction of a new vision for Adult Social Care in Salford
- Development of a quality assurance process for social care practice
- Opportunities for professional support for social care staff
- A new practice forum for Safeguarding lead professionals
- Ensuring that the human rights of our residents are protected by Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards
- Training for children's services in the Mental Capacity Act / Deprivation of Liberties Safeguards
- Accreditation of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme by Skills for Care
- Chairing a national webinar on the 10th anniversary of the Supreme Court judgement in *Cheshire West* re: deprivation of liberty

I discuss these in more detail below.

Section 2: Key areas of activity

Quality and practice – Achievements, evidence, challenges, future priorities

Setting standards for practice – delivery of the Care Act, strengths-based approaches, self-directed support etc.

At the end of 2024 we launched our vision for adult social care in Salford,

Working with communities and partners so every person can lead fulfilling, healthy, safe, and independent lives.

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This vision will inform all our development activity and service improvements.

Our Executive Director Becky Wilkinson has launched the IGNITE programme to build on this vision and transform adult social care. At the time of writing the project has collected data from our dashboards and practice audits (see below) and specific workstreams are being developed. This will be addressed at greater length in my report for 2025-2026.

Our vision commits us to a strengths-based and person-centred approach to supporting our residents. We know that we need to support our staff to be more confident in working in this way. We also need to change some of our policies and structures, particularly at the point when people come into contact with adult social care for the first time. These developments are being co-ordinated through the improvement plan and the IGNITE programme. I will offer support and critical friendship to progress this work.

We also need to improve our offer around direct payments. We are aware that fewer people are supported by direct payments in Salford than in other comparable areas. The arrival of Blue Sky Brokers as our new direct payments support organisation in February 2025 has given us the opportunity to renew our focus on direct payments as an option for our residents. I have supported colleagues to streamline our processes for considering and approving direct payments

Enursing and embedding quality – practice audits, supervision, Complaints & compliments etc

In autumn 2023 I launched a formal quality assurance process for adult social care, building on work begun under Ann Brooking my predecessor. Until that time quality was discussed within individual service areas but there was no oversight by the PSW and other senior managers.

My colleagues now complete regular reviews of our assessments, support plans and other documentation, and I compile their findings into a quarterly assurance report to the Director. In these reports we can see examples of good practice but also areas for improvement, particularly around hearing the voice of the adult, working with strengths, and applying the eligibility of the Care Act.

These findings have been confirmed by an audit exercise undertaken as part of the IGNITE programme. In the year ahead I will be developing practice guidance for staff to set clear standards for strengths-based and person-centred practice. I will also develop our quality assurance processes so that we are better able to learn from good practice and understand where and how we need to improve.

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Opportunities for professional support for social care staff

I host regular lunchtime learning sessions that are open to all colleagues. I use them to highlight particular aspects of the Care Act and statutory guidance, and to compare this with the realities of practice in Salford. The sessions give me the chance to share key messages around legal literacy and professional curiosity and get a better understanding of the support that my colleagues need. They are also a good way for me to meet people across the department and especially any social workers who are new to Salford.

I have ensured that these sessions are available to social workers based within GMMH. I have also developed a close working relationship with the Professional lead for social care within GMMH to support him in his role in promoting good practice in social care in the mental health teams.

In all my contacts with my colleagues I stress the importance of self-care and well-being. I am committed to compassionate leadership, as a matter of principle and in view of the clear evidence base for the effectiveness of this approach. I am supporting the NCA's initiative to promote psychological safety across the organisation which was launched in autumn 2024.

As we take forward our priorities I want to ensure that we promote equity and inclusion in everything that we do. The Equality Diversity and Inclusion Group that I established in 2023 is growing and is helping to develop and influence our policies. The group has recently contributed to guidance for managers on supporting staff who have been subject to racist abuse and other forms of abuse.

The challenge for the year ahead is to develop an action plan to promote equity and inclusion in all our activities, working with our partners and diverse communities.

Safeguarding - Achievements, evidence, challenges, future priorities

A new practice forum for Safeguarding lead professionals

When I became PSW I established a Safeguarding leads' network for managers and other senior professionals who oversee Safeguarding investigations. This provides an opportunity for us to discuss the performance reports that we submit to the Safeguarding Board, and to identify any areas for improvement as well as good practice to share. We also hear from our colleagues in other agencies to promote good practice in multi-agency working.

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Ensuring that the human rights of our residents are protected by Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards

Salford's Mental Capacity Act / Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards team is based within the Council. I provide professional supervision to Suzanne Jankowski the manager of the team. Suzanne has led on improving Salford's DOLS processes to cope with the ongoing high numbers of DOLS applications and the delay to the introduction of Liberty Protection Safeguards.

I provide professional support to the DOLS team and the social work teams whenever a DOLS authorisation is challenged in the Court of Protection.

Suzanne and I deliver monthly training sessions on the Mental Capacity Act. This gives practitioners a thorough grounding in the principles of the Act and is informed by developments in policy and case law.

In the year ahead we will be looking to train more Best Interests Assessors to join the rota within adult social care to support the team of full-time BIAs within the MCA/DOLS team.

Other responsibilities

I am a member of Salford's Safeguarding Adults Board. I also chair the Salford High Risk Advisory Panel and the Implementation and Innovation Network which are both sub-groups of the Safeguarding Adults Board.

I am a member of the Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR) Panel which considers all referrals for SARs in Salford. I have contributed to several SARs, including a joint SAR/Safeguarding Children's Practice enquiry concerning support for a family from both children's and adults' services. Each SAR is followed by a practitioners' learning event which I support.

I lead for the senior leadership team on identifying and implementing learning from SARs. I have recently developed an internal process for managing SAR referrals and supporting any staff whose practice is being scrutinised.

A new version of the Safeguarding pathway was launched in March 2023 just as I came into post. This was designed to enable closer oversight of the Safeguarding process and generate data for the Safeguarding Adults Board and the statutory data return to the Department of Health & Social Care.

My colleagues and I are now reviewing the pathway and we have identified some areas for improvement. We also need to improve joint working between social care staff

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based in adult social care and mental health services to ensure robust oversight of all Safeguarding referrals.

As PSW I am the point of contact for Social Work England for any issues concerning social workers' fitness to practise. At present there is one FTP investigation in progress relating to a social worker who was employed by Salford some years ago.

I am very fortunate to have a good working relationship with my counterparts in Salford children's services. We regularly discuss how we can work better together and address any practice issues of relevance to all our services.

Training for children's services in the Mental Capacity Act / Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards

I have also contributed regularly to children's services learning events within Salford and across the North-West, as well as offering training in Salford on the role of adult social care and the Mental Capacity Act and 16–17-year-olds. My colleagues Suzanne Jankowski and Jackie Gibbon attend the children's services legal panel to provide advice and support on the application of the MCA to young people.

Workforce Development - Achievements, evidence, challenges, future priorities

I collaborate closely with our Learning and Development team to support all our colleagues in their learning journey, both in social work and in the other professions that contribute to adult social care. I have regular discussions with Sarah Hardman (team manager), with Shoyley Chowdhury (lead for social work development), and with Dave Williams (Head of Service, Learning Disabilities and Complex Needs) who manages the team.

The team has led a recruitment exercise in the last two years which has resulted in a significant and sustained increase in our social work headcount.

We're very fortunate to have a sizeable cohort of social work students and apprentices in Salford, as well as around 20 newly qualified social workers completing their Assessed and Supported Year in Practice (ASYE) in Salford. They bring so much to our city and we are very grateful that they have chosen to develop their careers with us. We also support our more experienced colleagues to obtain their Level 3 social work accreditation.

I regularly chair ASYE / Level 3 Panels and provide feedback on the programmes to the Learning & Development team.

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Accreditation of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme by Skills for Care

I took part in the first Skills for Care accreditation of the ASYE programme in the summer of 2024. The Learning and Development team (managed at the time by Sheila Jones) did a great job of providing evidence to Skills for Care for the quality of our ASYE programme.

Skills for Care gave us some very positive feedback and also confirmed our view that we needed to improve our support for practice educators and provide more assurance that the programme is as equitable and inclusive as we want it to be.

Section 3: Working regionally and nationally

I contribute to PSW forums in Greater Manchester and the Northwest, and also participate in the national PSW network led by the Chief Social Worker. The focus of these discussions in the previous two years has been preparation for CQC assurance and what we can learn from colleagues who have participated in the assessment process for their local authorities.

I also support the following national networks and committees:

- National ADASS MCA/DOLS forum (co-chair)
- NHS MCA Strategic Leadership Forum (member)
- National Mental Capacity Forum (member)
- Court of Protection Rules Committee (member)

In these roles I am in regular contact with DHSC officials, ADASS national leadership, NHS England, and the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) to positively influence the perception and role of social work.

Between June 2020 and June 2024 I chaired BASW's Policy Ethics and Human Rights Committee and was a member of BASW Council. My term of office on BASW's Risk and Audit Committee comes to an end in September 2025.

Over the two years covered by this report the main focus of these discussions has been reform of the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and the need for a revised Code of Practice for the Mental Capacity Act.

I keep the DASS and other senior managers updated on developments at these meetings and share any key learning with colleagues.

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Chairing a national webinar on the 10th anniversary of the Supreme Court judgement in *Cheshire West* re: deprivation of liberty

I was honoured to be invited to chair a webinar in March 2024 to mark the 10th anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in *Cheshire West* which led to the rapid expansion of the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLS) scheme. The webinar was hosted by Ben Troke of Weightmans solicitors and was joined by many of the leading figures in this area from the law, social care, medicine, and civil society groups. We re-affirmed the human rights focus at the heart of *Cheshire West* and tried to identify ways of maintaining that focus at a time of increasing DOLS applications, static resources, and uncertainty over the future of Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS).

Section 4: Looking ahead

My priorities for the year ahead are as follows:

- Lead the implementation of the ASC Improvement plan
- Workstream lead for:
 - Strengths-based working: resources, training, overcoming barriers
 - Quality assurance: developing and embedding this in SW practice
 - Equity and Inclusion in adult social care
 - Co-production of change with Salford residents
 - Carers' support
 - Direct payments
- CQC assessment – engage with the assessment process, provide support to staff, and take forward any further improvements identified in the inspection report
- Organisational change:
 - Support to all ASC staff and assurance of practice quality during the ending of the s75 agreement for the delivery of adult social care in Salford
 - Developing a model for social care assessment for people with mental health needs following the end of the s75 agreement with GMMH
 - Support colleagues in children's services as they take forward the Families First Partnership

CQC assessment and the improvement plan

Just after the period covered by this report we received our call from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to let us know that they will be assessing Salford Adult Social Care in late 2025.

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A great deal of work has already been done by colleagues in the three organisations who support Adult Social Care. We are confident that we can give the CQC an accurate and positive account of our strengths and areas for improvement, and we can demonstrate what we are doing to better understand the outcomes that our residents want to achieve and how we can support them.

I am overseeing the improvement plan that we have developed to address the issues identified in our CQC self-assessment. We are committed to positive change in practice and performance across all areas of our work, in line with our vision.

We have a lot of positives to build on, but we recognise that our social care staff need more support and encouragement to embrace strengths-based working. We also need to work more closely with our residents and find ways of realising our vision together for Salford.

Some of the CQC reports already published on other authorities include inspiring examples of how adult social care can be a force for equity and inclusion across communities. We will be drawing on the best of these examples in our work with Salford's Community and Voluntary Sector to ensure that everyone in Salford can access the support they need.

Organisational change

In August 2025 the Northern Care Alliance gave notice to Salford City Council that it intended to withdraw from the existing section 75 agreement and explore other ways of working in partnership. This follows on the decision of GMMH to leave the section 75 agreement covering the delivery of social care to people with mental health difficulties.

This will of course present significant organisational challenges, but it will also give us new opportunities for joint working. My role as PSW will be to help partners explore these opportunities whilst supporting the staff to always maintain the highest standards of practice.

Our colleagues in children's services are also going through significant change as they implement new national guidance in their Families First Partnership. As adults PSW I will ensure that we maintain and develop the connections between our services in the spirit of Think Family and provide assurance that adult social care services are aware of how the changes will impinge on their practice.

I am also conscious that the Council's relationship with Aspire will be going through significant change during the year ahead. I will keep in close contact with my colleagues to identify any ways in which I can support these developments to ensure the best outcomes for our residents and compliance with our legal obligations.

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Conclusion

As PSW I am accountable for promoting and enabling change and maintaining high practice standards in the midst of this change. I do this in partnership with my counterparts in other professions, with our partner organisations as well as our staff. It promises to be a very exciting (but no doubt challenging) time. It's an honour to be able to make a contribution as the PSW for adults in Salford.

Martin Sexton

19th September 2025