

Principal Social Worker Annual Report

Sharon Davey, PSW

**be the
difference**



Abstract

The key focus of the year could be summarised into two main aims. Firstly, ensuring children and young people receive the right support at the right time which has a meaningful impact on their everyday lives. Secondly empowering a workforce to be clear in its practise model of strength based, relational practice which is making a difference for the people they seek to serve - **#BeTheDifference**.

Sharon Davey
PSW for Children’s Social Care and Lifelong Learning

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Introduction



Helen Fergusson
Director of Children's
Services and Lifelong
Learning

I would like to take the time to thank the staff for their commitment to providing excellent care, support and all the heartwarming examples of wonderful practice I hear about. This has been a year of success throughout all areas of Social Care.



Sharon Davey
PSW for Children's
Social Care and
Lifelong Learning

Welcome to the annual principal social worker (PSW) annual report for children's social care and lifelong learning in Gateshead. This report highlights the role of the PSW in promoting excellence in social work practise and celebrating the achievements of all involved in delivering social care.

The PSW annual report is an opportunity to reflect over the past 12 months, celebrate achievements and identify learning to unlock our next steps as we embark on a positive future in Gateshead.

In Gateshead we have a vision -

"Children and Young People in Gateshead enjoy their childhood and have the opportunity to THRIVE and be their BEST SELVES."



"As the newly appointed PSW for Gateshead, I have had the pleasure and privilege to work alongside some outstanding practitioners who really care and hold the children and young people of Gateshead at the centre of all they do. I've had the honour to work in partnership with young people with lived experience and to learn from their stories to see how we can shape the future of Gateshead Children's Services. Each day I am blown away by the tenacity, care and compassion the workforce shows and see how they rise to the challenges which we face - not just as a region but nationally, and for this I want to thank each and everyone of them." - **Sharon Davey**

Background

The Department for Education highlights the role of the PSW;

“As a principal social worker, you’ll:

- provide leadership to social workers and practitioners and represent their views to senior managers
- support social work teams to ensure positive outcomes for children and families
- provide quality assurance to help social workers navigate complex decisions
- use different models of practice and learning to guide decision-making
- monitor cases to ensure professional standards are met
- work with team managers to manage resources and performance
- contribute to the development of policies, procedures and practice models
- provide training to social workers to support professional development
- develop and maintain effective working relationships with multi-agency partners.”

In Gateshead we taken these key principals to feed into our ‘Journey to Excellence’ with five strategic objectives,

1. Promote the Voice of Children and Families

2. Strengthen Social Work and Family Support Practice

3. Enhance Workforce Development and Retention

4. Improve Multi-Agency Collaboration

5. Embed a Culture of Continuous Development



These strategic objectives will guide the Principal Social Worker's efforts over the next 12 months to enhance practice, support the workforce, and improve outcomes for children and families in children's social care. By focusing on collaboration, development, and continuous improvement, this plan aims to foster a resilient and responsive social care service. We want to see a working environment where good practice can flourish.

The PSW is a link between the frontline practice to all levels of practitioner within the system. This includes communication between frontline practitioners, through to the Director of Children Services and back down the chain.

Gateshead Children's Services has had a change in their PSW. Sharon Davey came into post in March 2024 after the role had been vacant for a number of months. This brought its challenges, whereby lines of communication were not established, performance meeting had dissolved and there was a disconnect with the workforce to what the Practice Model of working is. Therefore, in the first months in post, Sharon Davey had a focus on reestablishing links between the workforce and management team.

Progress

This year has seen Gateshead Children Services undergo a full Ofsted ILACS Inspection where the outcome was 'Good' in all areas.

"Since the last inspection, in 2019, children in Gateshead continue to receive good services. Leaders have maintained and, in some areas, improved practice."

"Senior leaders and committed staff have worked hard to make sure children in Gateshead receive the help they need, when they need it and most children's lives improve as a result."

"The voices of children are valued. The Young Ambassadors and Youth Network groups ensure that children's voices shape the way services are designed and delivered. This continues to develop and strengthen services and is making a difference to the way children experience help in Gateshead."

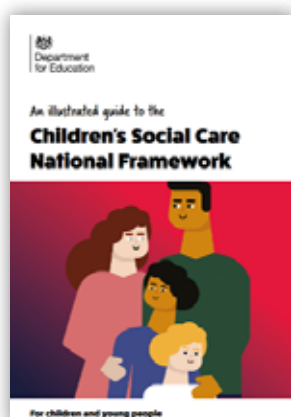


As part of our continued learning, we have refreshed our **Practice Standards** with input from all layers of leadership and managers across the service. These are reviewed annually and brought up to speed in line with the changing practice landscape.

Moving into 2025 we are embarking on a full system change through the Social Care Reform work, Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme. This will be an exciting time for us to reframe our practice and evaluate how we make a difference for the children and families we seek to serve. This includes working within the principles of the Children's Social Care National Framework.



[The Families First Partnership \(FFP\) Programme Guide:
The families first partnership programme guide](#)



[Children's Social Care National Framework: An illustrated
guide to the Children's Social Care National Framework](#)

We have strengthened our training offer to the full workforce with a committed of a two-year training plan to include frontline practitioners from our Early Help Services, Child Protection, Children In Our Care through to Leaving Care. This is to provide a holistic understanding and joint thinking about the family as a whole and consistency of practice focusing on assessment, care planning, review, strengthening communication and building a culture of reflective supervision for practitioners.

This year has seen Gateshead increase its intake of Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWS) by 30%, along with commencing on a Trainee Social Work Apprenticeship program. This strengthens our 'Grow your own' approach to developing practitioners and provides further opportunities for career development. We hope to develop this further over the forthcoming year. As social care practitioners working with children and their families, we have continued to benchmark ourselves against the Post Qualifying Standards. This includes holding high aspirations for our Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWS) to participate in quality workshops, support through a committed Academy model and be able to embark on their journey as social workers with confidence. We have had the pleasure of 13 new NQSW's join our service in September 2024 and a further 5 Step Up to Social Work students on course to qualify in May 2025.



Highlights of the year!

- Refreshed the Practice Standards
- Launched the 'Our Practice Model' Training
- Increased our Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) intake by 30%
- Social Work Degree Apprenticeships commenced in September 2024.

Quality Of Practice

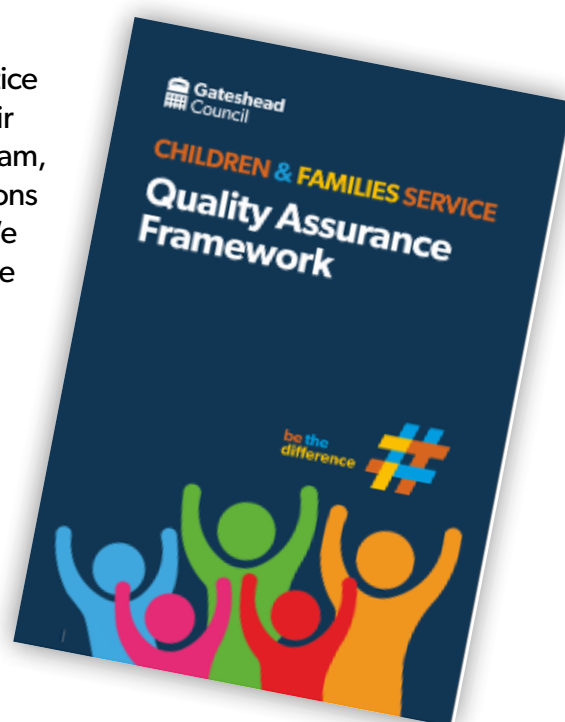
As previously mentioned, there had been a period whereby the PSW role had not been in place and therefore, some quality assurance, support groups and communication workshops were placed on hold. These are all now fully established across the Team Managers and Senior Leadership Team. We have taken this further to include our aspiring leaders by setting up Consultant Social Worker forums, including our CSW in Performance meetings and including our CSW in thematic audits. This has strengthened learning across the service and provided a different dynamic to quality assurance in frontline practice.

We understand that our practitioners work with a diverse range of families with competing needs. Through Social Graces Workshops and development session we have recognised we require a much deeper understanding of how this impacts our workforce and in turn the families we seek to serve. Therefore, we have established an Equality Diversity & Inclusion Working Group. This has been the pivotal point for change and supported the set up of a support group in Neurodiversity and Menopause awareness for our workforce. We have also started to establish an Emotional Wellbeing Working Group to take this further into 2025/26.

Our teams have shared learning through Service Development Days and had a focus on emotional wellbeing, resilience and celebrating the difference we make for families.



We have continued to reflect and learn from frontline practice to understand the lived experience of our children and their families. We do this through our collaborative audits program, feedback from children and their families, direct observations of practitioners, thematic dip samples and data analysis. We have taken the opportunity to refresh our Quality Assurance Framework which we hope to build upon further moving into 2025/26.



Our Priorities for 2025 - 2027

- Strengthening the effectiveness of multi-agency practice relating to child protection
- Strengthening practitioner awareness and responsiveness to children and young people who suffer from neglect
- Reducing the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people and protecting them from harm
- Reducing the fear of knife crime and involvement in serious youth violence
- Improving the mental health of children and young people who are in need of protection from harm

Highlights of the year!

- Re-Launched the CSC Performance Group
- Re-Launched the PSW Group
- Established an EDI Working Group focus group
- Set up Monthly Team Manager Forum
- Set Up Monthly Consultant Social Worker Forum
- Refreshed the Quality Assurance Framework.
- Established a GSCP Audit Framework.



Workforce Development

Our staff development and learning are important factors of a healthy culture and environment. We have established a weekly communication method called “The Weekly Round Up” whereby all our training is promoted across the service. We have continued to provide quality training, with a targeted view on enhancing our cultural awareness through the Social Graces framework. We have started to look at staff development across the service with the continued support through the Social Worker Academy, now taking a new and exciting move to a ‘Service Wider Academy’ model. We offer support to those social workers in year two of their career, Practice Educator Group support sessions, peer mentor support sessions and now looking at our aspiring leaders.

We have been proud to launch our Aspiring Leaders Programme. This programme has had a specific focus on practitioners across the service who are leaders in practice and would like to enhance their learning and development.

This course has had a range of practitioners from Children’s Homes, Early Help, Specialist Services, Social Workers and Independent Reviewing Officers, who have wanted to expand their skills and knowledge.

As previously mentioned, we have launched our Full Service, ‘Our Practice Model’ Training **#BeTheDifference**. This commenced in January 2025, and we are excited to bring you further updates in the forthcoming year on the impact from this investment in our workforce.

We are ever so proud that the Academy and Workforce Development Team have been working collaboratively to seek endorsement from Skills for Care for the letters that our finishing cohort writes to the next cohort. The letters are unique to Gateshead and have been mentioned at National Conferences by Skills for Care following them hearing about the letters on the Quality Assurance Visit to the Academy in October 2023. This was achieved in February 2025.

We were proud to host our second Annual Social Care and Lifelong Learning Annual Conference. This was a huge success, with practitioners from Early Help, Specialist Service, Social Care and Education sharing knowledge, skills and experiences to shape our services.

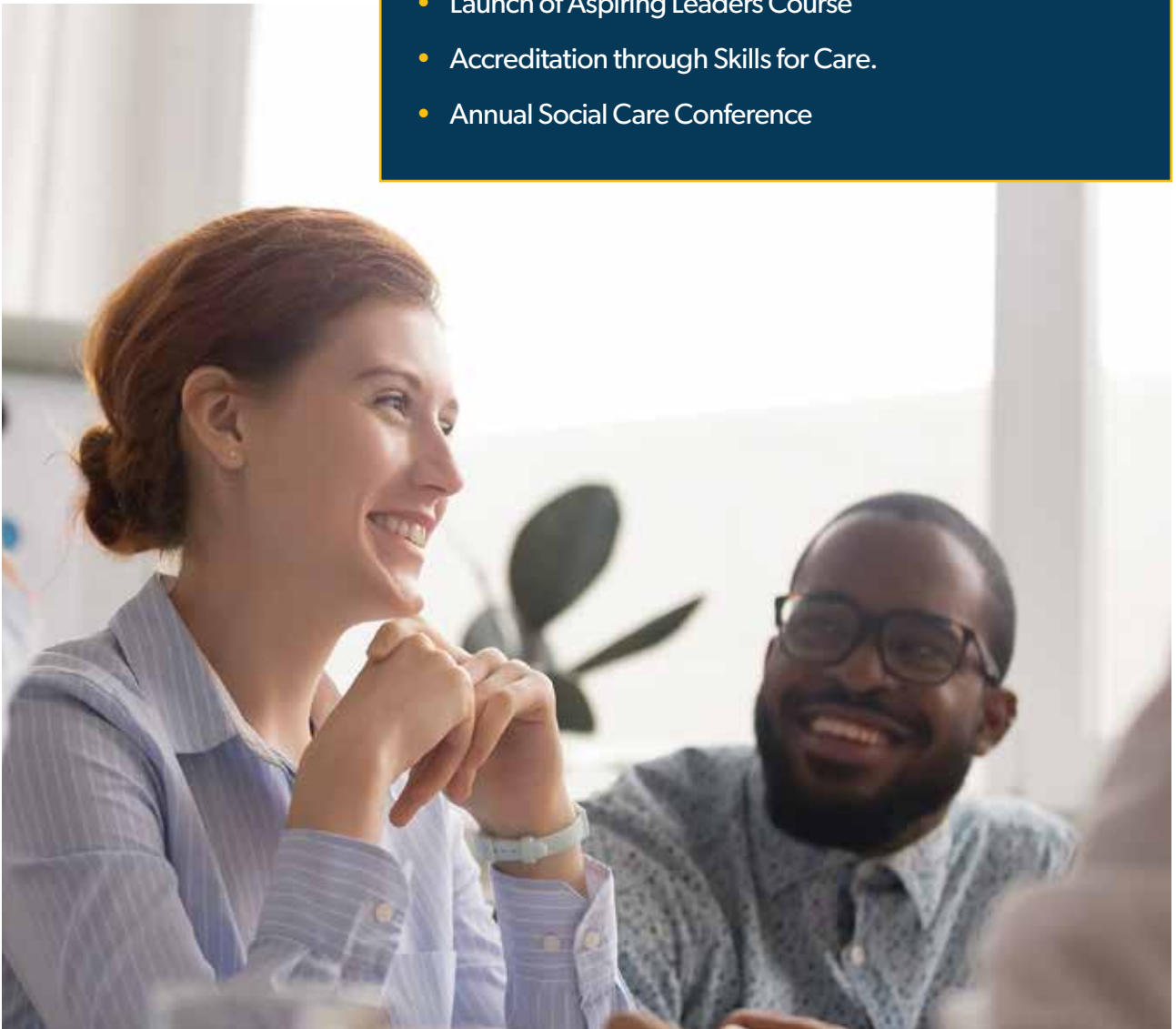


We have also shared some celebrations over the year through workshops, training, Practice Shorts and time to reflect and connect through World Social Work Week. Not to mention our guest band performance which blew us all away.



Highlights of the year!

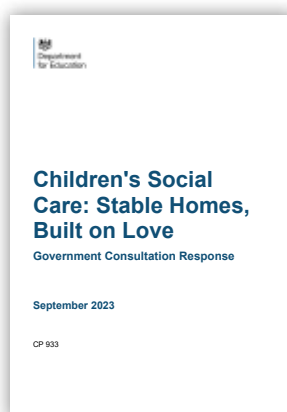
- Launched the 'Our Practice Model' Training
- Strengthening communication through weekly 'roundups'
- Launch of Aspiring Leaders Course
- Accreditation through Skills for Care.
- Annual Social Care Conference



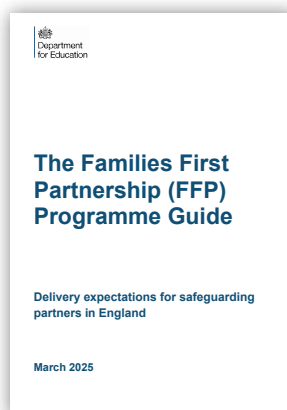
PSW Network Activity & Regional working

This year has been a time of change across social care. Looking at legislation has been a focus of the group, ensuring all practitioners are informed of the forthcoming change for the sector. This has included the following “[Stable homes built on love](#)” response report and moving into March 2025 the [Families First Partnership \(FFP\) Programme guide](#). The PSW group has provided expert views on proposals and informed consultations.

This has not stopped the group from progressing on some meaningful projects and sharing of good practice.



Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love: [Children's Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love consultation response](#)



The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide: [The families first partnership programme guide](#)

Highlights of the year!

- Established Lunch Time Learning Sessions across the region.
- Sharing of good practice across the region.
- Gateshead has delivered Narrative Practice Workshop to the region
- Collaborated with the region for a PSW Health Check.
- ADCS Quality Assurance group focus on deliverable plans.

Priorities for 2025

Whilst we have a PSW Strategic Plan focusing on the five strategic objectives,

1. Promote the Voice of Children and Families
2. Strengthen Social Work and Family Support Practice
3. Enhance Workforce Development and Retention
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We will continue to strengthen practice through the following areas of focus.

- ✓ Strategic planning for “The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme” across the full spectrum of the service.
- ✓ Strengthening leaders across the service
- ✓ Monthly group supervision to be embedded in line with the Our Practice Model.
- ✓ Strengthening the learning and development from Quality Assurance.

“Celebrating Good Practice”

We have many areas of good practice, and these have been recognised through ‘Directors Shoutouts’, good news items and also through our nominations for National Awards. We have seven staff across the service who are Finalists at the National Star Awards and await the outcome very soon. This has been a continuous theme for Gateshead as we are proud of the work and achievements our staff make. We have had the pleasure of celebrating practice during World Social Work Day and with a range of wellbeing sessions, practice shorts and workshops attended by practitioners. This was a great time to reconnect and support one another with positive wellbeing. The Children Social Care Conference has grown in strength with positive feedback from our workforce celebrating across the full directory of Education and Social Care to bring together learning and shared experiences of positive practice.

