

West Midlands ADASS: A regional approach to supporting the workforce Case Study for Department of Health and Social Care (July 2026)

Executive Summary

Workforce sustainability is a strategic priority for WM ADASS and key part of the region's Improvement for All programme. Over the last three years, West Midlands ADASS has built a strong workforce foundation through connected programmes including:

- The West Midlands International Recruitment Programme (supporting workforce supply and ethical employment);
- The Adults Memorandum of Commitment (MoC) on agency workforce management (providing insight into workforce stability);
- The Skills for Care workforce and market intelligence programme (helps build the evidence base for workforce planning, supported by the WM ADASS Data Hub, which brings workforce and market data into a single regional resource).

We agreed to move workforce from a set of individual projects to a coordinated regional workforce partnership, aligning supply, intelligence, practice and reform activity within one approach.

This is complemented by wider regional workforce activity through the WM ADASS Workforce Network, including sharing best practice, strengthening professional networks and collaborating with people with lived experience and partners on workforce priorities across the West Midlands.

The scale and complexity of workforce challenges mean many issues can be more effectively addressed regionally, enabling councils to share intelligence and develop common approaches while retaining local flexibility and ownership.

Strategic Context

Adult social care in the West Midlands faces significant workforce challenges, including:

- Recruitment and retention pressures
- Reliance on agency staffing in key professional roles
- Increasing demand for care and support
- Market sustainability challenges
- Emerging national workforce reforms

Long-term projections indicate that the region could require approximately 40,000 additional adult social care workers by 2040 to meet future demand.

The Challenge / Problem Statement

Workforce supply pressures: Councils and providers were experiencing recruitment difficulties across the sector, particularly within regulated professional roles such as social workers, AMHPs and occupational therapists.

International recruitment: International recruitment has played an important role in bringing much-needed skills and capacity into social care. As the formal DHSC-funded programme enters its fourth and final year, we recognised the need to build on its success through a wider workforce lens.

Agency workforce dependency: Building on approaches in children's services, we wanted to better understand and manage the use of agency workers in adult social care through transparency and collective action.

Fragmented intelligence: Workforce information existed across multiple datasets but was not routinely brought together to support regional planning, risk identification and forecasting.

Future workforce uncertainty: The region lacked a shared mechanism to understand future workforce demand, market sustainability risks and the implications of national reform.

Intervention / Actions Taken

1. Establishing workforce as a strategic regional priority

We agreed to move from individual projects to a coordinated regional workforce partnership. Workforce is now a strategic regional objective, agreed by all Directors and supported by a lead DASS Sponsor.

This sits alongside the WM ADASS Workforce Network, made up of workforce leaders from all 14 local authorities. The Network shares learning, develops collective approaches, exchanges best practice and oversees a broad programme of workforce initiatives.

2. Delivering the Adults Memorandum of Commitment

Through our partnership with West Midlands Employers, we developed a Memorandum of Commitment to improve transparency and management of agency worker use in social care. We are one of the only regions with this voluntary improvement arrangement in adult social care.

3. Developing a regional workforce intelligence capability

We invested in the Data Hub, supported by our successful Skills for Care Impact Fund bid, to strengthen workforce and market intelligence. This aims to move the region from retrospective reporting towards predictive intelligence, early-warning indicators and workforce forecasting.

4. Building on the International Recruitment (IR) Programme

The region has delivered a successful international recruitment programme supporting councils, providers and overseas care workers. Support has included ethical

recruitment, safeguarding, provider engagement and pastoral support through individual, collective and self-serve approaches.

This has been enabled through effective partnerships with organisations including West Midlands Employers, West Midlands Care Association, Bridgit Care and Lifted.

As funding ends and the programme transitions, we will use the learning, infrastructure and partnerships developed to support our broader workforce agenda.

5. Shaping workforce reform and policy

The programmes, activities and partnerships above equip us with knowledge and experience to stay close to, shape and influence relevant policy and reform.

Results and Impact

Reduced agency dependency

During the first year of the MoC agency:

- Agency workers have reduced from 596 to 425 across the region and in some areas, converted to permanent workers.
- Fewer workers are being paid above the agreed pay cap, showing stronger compliance and improved regional grip on cost control.
- The first year has demonstrated reduced regional spend on agency workers.

Improved workforce intelligence

- The WM ADASS Data Hub provides stronger regional oversight, enabling better workforce planning and earlier identification of workforce risks.
- New Data Hub functionality, including the International Recruitment Dashboard and Memorandum of Commitment Dashboard, gives greater insight into the impact of our work. We have also supported local, regional and national organisations through this functionality.
- Our successful Skills for Care Impact Fund bid is helping develop our workforce and market intelligence capability and supports our ambition to move from retrospective reporting to predictive intelligence.
- By combining workforce, market, demographic and population data, we will better anticipate future demand, identify risks and opportunities, and support long-term workforce and market sustainability planning across the West Midlands.

International recruitment

- Mobilised regional infrastructure across all 14 councils, West Midlands ADASS, care provider organisations, the voluntary and community sector and delivery partners.
- Placed over 600 displaced international care workers into new, ethical employment
- Provided practical information and resources on international recruitment to almost 19,000 people via our International Recruitment Hub

- Provided one-to-one legal and HR support to thousands of displaced care workers and/or care providers.
- The International Recruitment Dashboard has enabled local authorities to identify at-risk providers, understand the impact of sponsor licence revocations, support continuity of care and coordinate redeployment of displaced international care workers. This intelligence has been shared with DHSC and used nationally to help mitigate international recruitment risks across England.

Stronger regional collaboration

- All 14 councils contribute to shared workforce initiatives, strengthening the evidence base and enabling the region to respond collectively to workforce pressures.
- This is enabled through our Regional Workforce Network and new Workforce Partnership Group.
- Our approach enables us to coordinate rapid, informed regional responses to complex policy issues and national consultations, drawing on expertise and lived experience. Examples include our regional responses to the Fair Pay Agreement and Earned Settlement consultations.

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

- Sector-led improvement has greatest impact when it invests in regional capacity, enabling councils to work together on shared priorities.
- Regions can develop practical and impactful improvement activity and mobilise innovative partnerships with local and regional organisations (for example, with the voluntary and community sector to support international recruitment).
- Workforce development requires more than a focus on recruitment alone; it must include retention, career pathways, wellbeing, market oversight, intelligence and awareness of relevant policy.
- Shared regional intelligence, combined with national workforce, market and demographic data, gives better visibility of emerging risks and enables earlier, more targeted intervention.
- Infrastructure developed through time-limited programmes, such as international recruitment, can be successfully repurposed to support longer-term workforce priorities.

The next phase will build on these foundations, moving from individual workforce projects to a coordinated regional partnership focused on sustainability, reform readiness and long-term workforce planning.