

Thank you for your interest in the Director of Adult Social Services post with Shropshire Council. We are aware that you can gain quite a lot of information Adult Social Care from the internet and other sources but that may not fully reflect the experience of living and working here. This is therefore a separate letter to tell you a little more about the County, the Council and Adult Social Care.

Shropshire County is an incredible place; one of England's hidden gems. Here you can find something for everyone. In the South we have the historic town of Ludlow, famous for excellent food, its castle, and Tudor buildings. It, and the surrounding area, are frequently used for film sets. Further north are the Shropshire hills; a place of hill forts, hidden waterfalls, stone circles, wild ponies, wild swimming, gliding, excellent pubs and beautiful views. Travel further north and you will find flatter lands with meres, mosses, and canals; here Woolly Mammoths used to roam, and some of the landscape remains unchanged. Central to the County is Shrewsbury; a historic town which is frequently voted as one of the best places to live in the Country. Our market is famous and has won multiple awards. The town is enclosed by the River Severn, which winds its way to Bridgnorth, through Ironbridge and from there to Bristol. Residents can be found swimming in the river, canoeing down it, paddle boarding, and more. In the Summer the County comes alive with various local and national festivals, the most famous being the folk festival.

Both of us live in Shrewsbury. Neither of us are from Shropshire, but like so many others we arrived and decided to stay. Here we have raised our children, engaged with local activities, and have built a community around us. Shropshire is full of lovely kind people; we feel very lucky and privileged to find ourselves living and working here.

We hope that the kindness which we experience in our day to day lives is reflected in our work within the Council. Performance data seems to indicate that this is the case. Staff seem to stay with us, and when they leave, many return. We have spoken to returners to ask why they came back and we get the same consistent answer; Shropshire felt like a safe environment for them to work in. Our data reflect this; at the time of writing we have just 5 agency workers across all the operational teams, all of our AMHPs are contracted with us (we do not have any agency AMHPs), our vacancy rate is low, and our retention rate is higher than the national average. We have an excellent Social Work Apprenticeship scheme with a 100% completion rate, and a 100% retention rate into the ASYE; in fact, since the scheme started in 2019 just one apprentice has moved away; the remainders work for us, some in senior positions. Our commitment to progression and CPD is evident in our own careers; Tanya started working in Shropshire as a Social Worker in 1998, and Tamsin started as a Newly Qualified Social Worker in 1993.

In 2024 we asked staff to tell us what they were proud about when working for Shropshire. Here are some of the many comments:

'My team makes me proud of the work I do. Every day they face new and persistent challenges and continue to strive to make the best outcomes they can for the individuals they work with and work with them to advocate for their voice.'

'Being able to make a change and advocate for individuals who need it the most is the most rewarding part of this work.'

'We are team Shropshire! We overcome every hurdle in our way and produce fantastic outcomes for the residents of Shropshire every day. We are creative and innovative, ensuring every person we work with is treated as an individual. We pride ourselves on our tech offer and approach to bespoke person-centred support planning. We keep more people at home than most other LAs.'

You will note that in our last CQC inspection we were rated as Good. We believe that this reflects our commitment to excellent practice. As a service Adult Social Care prides itself on our strengths-based practice. There is a practice framework in place which has been co-produced, and this is supported by practice guidance. We have an excellent track record of working with individuals to support them to remain at home (rather than move into residential care), and to maintain their independence. In 2012 we started 'People to People' a Community Interests Company to deliver Social Work Services for us. Over time it became clear that this was not viable, but the innovative way of thinking had influence on the development of the National Team for Inclusion. We continue to think innovatively and are keen to achieve great outcomes for the people we serve.

Co-production is central to our work. On a personal level we expect our staff to co-produce support plans with the people they are here to serve. Staff are encouraged to separate 'important to' from 'important for' and to work with people in a strengths-based manner. Operationally we have a co-production team which provides paid opportunities for people with lived experience to be involved in specific products. As a Council we have signed a co-production charter; demonstrating our commitment.

Recently we have started a large transformation project. We have an aging population, and our forecast is that demand for social care will rise. As such we are working to prevent and delay the development of social care needs. We have several projects in the pipeline including the provision of enablement and TEC for residents who have been referred into service and are in the community, support for self-funders, redesign of day services, redesign of learning disability services and more. We believe that we cannot deliver Adult Social Care without our partners, and we have strong working relationships with Public Health, Commissioning, Housing, Health, the ICB, the Police, the Fire Service, and our Voluntary and Community sector. We are one of the pilot areas for NNHIP, and we are developing community hubs across the county.

Shropshire is not without difficulties. It is the largest inland county in the Country, and its population is relatively equally spaced. Rurality and providing a service in a rural county is a challenge which we recognise. We have a rural proofing tool kit approved by Cabinet for all policies and strategies. We also have local teams, with services provided across the County. Our teams are well equipped to deal with rural issues, from power cuts, flooding, and heavy snowfall. Our social workers have been known to hitch rides on tractors in order to access vulnerable people. Also, within Shropshire we have a high proportion of people who self-neglect, hoard, and have chronic alcohol misuse. The Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership has worked with all agencies to improve our responses in these areas. There is now multi-agency self-neglect guidance in place, we host a MARM (multi-agency risk management meetings), and there is a Blue Light project group in place.

Our relationship with colleagues in Commissioning is excellent. The Commissioning team has recently been expanded and includes Start Well, Live Well and Age Well. We have a good range of providers on our approved providers list, and we do not rely heavily on

international recruitment. The proportion of rated providers who are registered as good or outstanding is 87%; one of the highest in the West Midlands. This is not a coincidence; considerable time has been given to supporting our provider markets.

It is no secret that finances are tight in Shropshire, with Adult Social Care reporting a negative outturn for the last few financial years. We do now have some transformation money which we can pull on and we are keen to push forward with this. Our aim is to deliver good quality care and support leading to good outcomes despite the financial pressure. We can only do this by transformation and innovation which we are heavily committed to.

The service is supported by excellent staff. This has been recognised nationally. In the last 5 years our staff have won the LGC Award for Outstanding Individual Contribution; Silver award for Practice Educator of the Year; Gold for Social Worker of the Year, and Gold for Team Manager of the Year. We have also had finalists for Adult Team of the Year, and for the Social Justice category in the Social Worker of the Year Awards. This year our Anti-Racism Forum is a finalist in the EDI category in the LGC Awards.

As a Service we are committed to developing and growing. We are currently working with the University of Durham on the Moving Social Work project and are developing this through our work with Energise on the Place Universal Offer with Sports England. We have participated in other research projects (such as the LOASCA project with the University of Birmingham) and we are in conversation with the University of Birmingham to jointly bid for research monies through the NIHR to investigate shame in Adult Social Care. This may provide a PhD opportunity for a member of staff. We have also been awarded IMPACT funding and will be working with the IMPACT team, and University of Sheffield to develop our own Social Work and Social Care Academy.

We hope that, through reading this, you gain a sense of our commitment and celebration of this County, the Council and our staff. Shropshire is an excellent place to live and work. Should you wish to have further information on the role, the Council, Adult Social Care, or this lovely County you are very welcome to contact us and we are more than happy to talk things through with you.

Most of all we both aim to ensure that the people we are here to serve, be they adults, carers or families, are enabled to live 'gloriously ordinary lives.'

With best wishes and thanks

Tanya and Tamsin

Tanya Miles – Chief Executive

Tamsin Waterhouse – Principal Social Worker