

Adults Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 19 March 2024

Attendance

Members of the Adults Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Val Evans (Chair)
Cllr Christopher Haynes (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Linda Leach
Cllr Bob Maddox
Cllr Rita Potter

Witnesses

Emily Haynes	Social Worker
Natalie Simmons	Social Worker

Employees

Courtney Abbott	Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner for Children and Adults
Jennifer Rogers	Principal Social Worker
Andrew Wolverson	Director of Adult Social Care (DASS)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Welcome and Introductions**
Cllr Val Evans, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised it was being live streamed to the press and public. A recording of the meeting would be available for viewing on the Council's website at a future date.
- 2 Meeting procedures to be followed**
Cllr Evans explained the protocol to be followed during the meeting for asking questions.
- 3 Apologies**
Apologies were received from the following:

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Jenny Cockayne
Cllr Rohit Mistry
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Iqra Tahir

4 **Declarations of Interest**
No declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Minutes of previous meeting (20 February 2024)**
Minutes of the meeting 20 February 2024 were approved and signed by the Chair as correct record.

6 **Adult Services Social Work and Wider Workforce Health Check Survey**
The Chair invited Courtney Abbott, Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner for Children and Adults, to present report.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner advised the panel that the report and presentation will provide a summary of the findings of the 2023 social work provider workforce health check survey.

The panel were asked to note and comment on the findings in the report and attached presentation. The panel were also asked to comment and challenge the proposed actions to improve practice conditions for the health of Social Workers and the wider social care workforce.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner advised the panel that the survey is completed every year to check on the health of the social care workforce as part of the adult social care ongoing self-assessment. The report gives an overview of the survey findings and actions to address areas of improvement that have been identified. The survey findings have also helped with workforce development planning that support the continuous improvement of Adult Social Care practice across Wolverhampton.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner gave a short presentation which gave summary of the main findings from the survey and the planned actions.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner commented that in response to previous panel comments that the latest report includes some critical survey responses. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner commented that in response to request from the Chair in November 2023 two social workers Emily Haynes and Natalie Simmons had been invited to share their experiences of working in social services to give some context to the survey findings.

The Chair invited Emily Haynes and Natalie Simmons to contribute to the discussion on Adult Services Social Work and Wider Workforce Health Check Survey report.

Natalie Simmons, Social Worker, advised the panel that she has worked as a social worker in Wolverhampton since July 2023 and qualified as a social worker ten years ago. Natalie explained that she was originally appointed to Wolverhampton as an agency social worker but in November 2023 was appointed as a permanent social worker.

Natalie commented when compared to other authorities she has found the experience of working in Wolverhampton to have been very positive and highlighted the forward-thinking approach taken to support social workers, for example, streamlining work processes.

Natalie also commented on the value of having the strong presence of senior management in supporting social work teams in helping to support this. Natalie concluded by commenting that she would be happy to continue working for the Council and progress further with her social work practice.

The Chair thanked Natalie for attending the meeting and her contribution.

The Chair invited Emily Haynes who was taking part on Teams to contribute to the discussion.

Emily Haynes advised the panel that she has been employed by City of Wolverhampton Council since June 2022 and has been a qualified social worker for five years prior to that in a neighbouring local authority. Emily commented that she was impressed by the support from the senior leadership team who she has met and considered them to be very approachable and keen to see the service improve.

Emily commented that social worker is not an easy job and is stressful but felt supported by direct line managers and the wider management team who were open to ideas about how the service can be improved. Emily shared her positive experience of being involved in a test and learn project focused on people under 65 with a disability looking to return to work. Emily commented on her manager recognising that the topic was a great interest because of her past experience and supported her to get involved in the project.

Emily has recommended City of Wolverhampton Council to friends and encouraged them to apply for social work positions because it is such a great place to work.

The Chair thanked Emily for the comments, which was very much appreciated and commended on the valuable work of social workers in supporting families.

The Chair invited panel members to comment on the report and the presentation.

A panel member commented on the positive experience when in the role as Cabinet Member and praised the professionalism and helpful support received from the senior management team in ensuring that she understood the reports presented. The panel member commented on the positive work of Principal Social Worker and that it was a privilege to be involved in supporting and improving social work practice.

A panel member expressed concern about the low survey response and queried the possible reasons for this. The panel member thanked the presenters and expressed her appreciation of the work being done by social workers. The panel member queried references in the presentation listing comments that suggest that the involvement of social workers and other colleagues was not proper consultation and wanted some reassurance.

The Director of Adult Services invited Emily, who was part of the test and learn project to share her thoughts on the issues raised.

Emily shared her experiences of being involved in the redesign project, which brought professionals to look a problem in a different way and working in a test and learn way.

Emily highlighted the success of recent projects and the value of providing a feedback loop on what is working well and where changes are needed.

Emily commented that there was a lot of consultation and opportunities to get involved and there was weekly discussion with senior management to review progress, who took onboard feedback and asked directly what we wanted the service to look like to improve services for Wolverhampton.

In addition, managers were very supportive of requests to attend these meetings and to take advantage of such opportunities to get involved.

A panel member commented on the small increase in the number of people taking part in the survey compared to the previous years and queried if there were any further incentives that could be offered to encourage more people to complete the form or other creative changes to increase the number of responses.

The Principal Social Worker reassured the panel that the issue is something that service is continuing to work on and commented that there has been a small increase in the numbers completing the form, but acknowledged the concern and agreed that more needs to be done to improve the situation.

The Principal Social Worker highlighted examples of work done to improve the numbers and commented that the survey response rate for social work is good when compared to other regional authorities and better than the social work national survey.

The Principal Social Worker highlighted the stressful nature of social work and advised that it will take time to see the impact of changes in service re-design but was confident that the service was going in the right direction to achieve the aim of wider cultural change and reach colleagues who might be reluctant to take part in the survey.

The Director of Adult Services added the service is aiming to get as many people as possible to get involved in the survey and highlighted the numbers of people reporting that have good ongoing access to senior leaders and managers and therefore may not feel the need to fill in an annual survey. The Director commented that if members of the workforce were unhappy then the expectation is that more survey forms would be completed. The Director commented on further work planned to improve the numbers of forms completed.

A panel member queried the impact of the recruitment strategy on maintaining existing social workers numbers and if there were any issues with people choosing to leave Wolverhampton.

The Principal Social Worker advise the panel that recruitment and retention are with her remit and reassured members that there is a strong strategy and action plan to support this work. The Principal Social Worker added that the turnover rate for Social Workers in Wolverhampton is low, and well below the national average.

The numbers are stable for social workers and wider workforce. The Principal Social Worker commented on progress in successfully recruiting three social work apprenticeships internally from the social care teams. The Principal Social Worker highlighted other examples of progress in recruiting and retaining experienced social workers.

A panel member queried if the Council still participates in the Governments national social work survey and if the local survey forms are submitted anonymously.

The Principal Social Worker advised the panel that when people are completing the survey, they have the option to state the details of the team they work in and the service area, but they are not asked to give any personal identifying details.

The Chair thanked the presenters for their presentation and special thanks to Emily and Natalie for their contributions to the discussion, which was very interesting.

Resolved:

1. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner for Children and Adults to note the comments of the panel on the findings of the adult social work and the wider workforce health check for 2023.
2. The panel support the action plan aimed at improving improve practice conditions for adult social work and the wider workforce as detailed in the report.