

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Adults Scrutiny Panel

19 March 2024

Time 6.00 pm **Public Meeting?** YES **Type of meeting** Scrutiny

Venue Council Chamber - 4th Floor - Civic Centre

Membership

Chair Cllr Val Evans (Lab)
Vice-chair Cllr Christopher Haynes (Con)

Labour

Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Jenny Cockayne
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Linda Leach
Cllr Rohit Mistry
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Iqra Tahir

Conservative

Cllr Bob Maddox
Cllr Udey Singh

Quorum for this meeting is three Councillors.

Information for the Public

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the Scrutiny Team:

Contact Earl Piggott Smith
Tel/Email 01902 551251 email:earl.piggott-smith@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Address Scrutiny Office, Civic Centre, 1st floor, St Peter's Square,
Wolverhampton WV1 1RL

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Agenda

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Welcome and Introductions**
[The Chair to welcome everyone to the meeting.]

- 2 **Meeting procedures to be followed**
[The Chair will explain how the meeting will proceed.]

BUSINESS ITEMS

- 3 **Apologies**

- 4 **Declarations of Interest**

- 5 **Minutes of previous meeting (20 February 2024) (Pages 3 - 12)**

DISCUSSION ITEMS

- 6 **Adult Services Social Work and Wider Workforce Health Check Survey (Pages 13 - 38)**
[Courtney Abbott, Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner for Children and Adults, to present report]

Attendance

Members of the Adults Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Jenny Cockayne
Cllr Val Evans (Chair)
Cllr Christopher Haynes (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Bob Maddox
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Iqra Tahir

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith
Andrew Wolverson

Scrutiny Officer
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 Linda Leach
Cllr Rohit Mistry

Cllr Sally Green substitute for Cllr Linda Leach
- 4 **Declarations of Interest**
No declarations of interest recorded.
- 5 **Minutes of previous meeting (20 November 2023)**
Minutes of Meeting 20 November 2023 were approved as correct record.

6 **Minutes of previous meeting (5 December 2023)**

The Minutes of Meeting 5 December 2023 were approved as correct record.

7 **Wolverhampton Adult Social Care Provider Care and Support Review 2024 - 2025**

The Chair invited Andrew Wolverson, Director of Adult Social Care, to present the report on the Wolverhampton Adult Social Care - Provider Care and Support Review 2024/25.

The Director of Adult Social Care advised that members of the panel were being asked to endorse Option 3 which is the preferred option to support the Council to provide market stability in the adult care sector whilst also being financially prudent.

The Director listed the factors that the panel were also being asked to consider when reaching their conclusions, for example, the cost drivers affecting the adult social care market in Wolverhampton.

The Director gave a presentation which set out the background and context to the Council' legal duties under the Care Act 2014 to promote the effective and efficient operation of the adult social care market in Wolverhampton.

The Director advised the panel of the different types of care and support included in the provider review, for example, Home Care and Residential and Nursing and those out of scope.

The Director presented information in support on Option 3 as being preferred option and referred to details in the appendices.

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

The Chair thanked the presenter for the presentation.

A panel member queried if the Director was confident that both the users of the service and the Council were getting value for money and asked for details of the checks and balances in place to give assurance that residents are getting the care that is being paid for.

The Director advised the panel that an exercise was done over 12 months ago which asked care providers for details of their costs as part of preparation for the Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund. A reference to the findings will be presented to Cabinet Resources Panel tomorrow which will provide assurance about the level of fees paid.

The Director commented that anyone in receipt of funding from the council will have a social care assessment, which is reviewed annually. The service is working to clear a backlog of outstanding reviews.

The annual reviews provide an opportunity to check if the placement is meeting the care and support needs of the individual. If the persons needs are not being met, then the Council can go back to the care provider to discuss this further.

The Director advised the panel that a review is also done within six weeks of a person being discharged from hospital to put together a package of reablement.

The Director added that the Council will reassess the persons ongoing needs after this initial period. In term of checks on quality the review will allow the service to see what the provider is doing in respect of the fees being paid. The annual care review will also provide a check to see if the level of fees is consistent with what is being paid across the Black Country region by other local authorities.

The Director reassured that panel that information about fee reviews is published and shared with colleagues across the region and commented that the level being paid is broadly in line with other authorities. The Director added that the level of fee for residential and nursing market, changes daily depending on the level of demand and the numbers being discharged from hospital or placed into care on that day.

A panel member commented on concerns about examples of poor care and wanted reassurance that the Council would investigate matters, particular for users who were paying for their services.

The Director commented that hopefully the next agenda item would give some assurance to the panel that the Council will act where a care provider is not providing the level of quality expected. The Director advised that Council has closed care homes previously while accepting the difficulties in arranging alternative care arising from this decision.

A panel member commented on the extent in the past to which care homes accepted residents with complex needs due to financial incentives to fill places and then struggled to meet the needs. There was concern that the Council would only become aware of this issue when something was reported to CQC, which itself is based on a assessment of the quality of care provided at a point in time.

The panel member also queried that given some of these concerns the rationale for awarding longer term contracts based on the proposed fee structure to care providers and wanted details about the timetable for introduction and if the aim was achievable.

The Director advised the panel that the expectation that this would be last time that an annual fee review would be done as the plan moving forward is work with care providers who want to look after the residents of Wolverhampton and their aims reflect those of the Council.

The plan will move away from the current transactional nature of the relationship between the Council and care providers to help them see the wider benefits of a longer-term arrangement. For example, support with training for care workers. The aim of the approach will be for care providers to work in partnership with the Council to deliver the best care to the residents of Wolverhampton.

A panel member asked for further details about the disbenefits for Option 3 and the affect this may have in the future. The panel member also queried the future viability of care providers and referenced concern following the closure of home a few years ago and more recently the increases in wages and utilities affecting the sector.

The panel member queried the arrangements for supporting residents following a closure of a home in the future and the role of the Council in assessing the financial viability of care provider businesses.

The Director reassured the panel that the care market has experienced a period of stability during the last 12 months where only 2 or 3 homes have ceased trading.

The reasons for closure were linked to quality of care rather financial. The Director accepted that it could be argued that this factor could link to financial pressures on the care provider.

The Director added that the key issue affecting the care home viability is the challenges presented by the recruitment and retention of registered care managers. The Council is working with care providers to make sure that they have a succession plan in place.

The Director commented that the Council works with providers who may be in financial difficulties and encourages them to have an open dialogue about the issue and will provide support. For example, where the care home has vacancies and needs help address this issue.

There is a recognition that smaller local independent providers may not have access to additional management support to respond to a situation where the Council has had to suspend new placements because of the poor CQC judgement. The Council will work hard with the CQC to help the provider remain financially viable in recognition of the challenges facing the sector.

The Director added that colleagues in personalised support team with responsibility for managing placements will also be working to build a relationship with care providers.

The Director advised the panel that a draft marketing positioning statement is being developed with the longer-term aim of supporting a shift in the market from residential to home care placements. The Director added that the Council has a higher proportion of long-term placements within residential settings compared to our statistical neighbours and there is work to be done to improve this. As a result, there is a need to support current residential provision and to work with care providers to ensure they are sustainable and financially viable.

The Director added that the Council wants to ensure that it is working with the right providers who can offer the best care to people. To support this the Council's Procurement Team runs financial viability checks on businesses and other published market intelligence to see if a company may be showing signs of possible financial stress.

A panel member asked for details of the support offered by the Council to care providers where quality of care is an issue and how it is promoted.

The Director commented that in the past there would be a crisis response from the Council to a poor CQC rating of a care provider, which would involve the management team and internal home care managers supporting the care home manager for a period.

There is an expectation that the care provider would also be taking action to address the issues of concern highlighted. The aim is to make sure the care provider is on the correct path to improving their CQC rating.

A panel shared concerns about the poor quality of care received from personal assistants funded by direct payments and referred from a reputable care agency. The panel member also queried the work done to check the performance of people, details of the process for adding external agencies to the approved list of providers and how feedback is monitored where concerns are reported.

The Director advised the panel any person getting care arranged by the Council will be subject to an annual review. As part of the initial assessment the Council will consider the tasks that the person needs, and this will determine the direct payment amount. The Director explained that the most people use their direct payments to pay for a personal assistant which they can choose to either recruit directly or use the Council services to manage all the employment issues.

The annual review will provide the opportunity for the person to share any concerns with the social worker about the quality of care and can be referred to the members of the Quality Team. The Director reassured the panel that even where the Council has not been involved in arranging the care that it still has a duty to follow up any quality concerns about a provider in Wolverhampton. The Director urged anyone having a problem with their care provider to contact the Quality Assurance Team to investigate.

The Chair thanked the presenter for the report.

The panel accepted the recommendations as detailed in the presentation.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the Wolverhampton Adult Social Care - Provider Care and Support Review 2024 – 2025 to be noted and actioned where appropriate.
2. The panel endorse Option 3 as the preferred option that will support the Council to provide market stability in the care sector whilst also being financially prudent.

8 **Quality Assurance Framework and Suspension Policy 2024 – 2034**
The Chair invited Andrew Wolverson, Director of Adult Social Care, to present report.

The Director advised the panel that the presentation would cover proposed changes to the Quality Assurance Framework and Suspension Policy.

The Director outlined the differences between the current and the new system and the purpose of Quality Assurance Framework. A copy of the presentation is attached.

The Director invited the panel to comment on the draft policy.

The Chair thanked the presenter for the report and invited the panel to comment on the proposed changes.

A panel member expressed concern about proposals to reduce the number of monitoring visits as part of the new working arrangements. The panel member was concerned that care providers under the proposed arrangements would be unwilling to report a serious incident to the Council which could lead to criticism for not taking appropriate early action and suggested this idea should be reviewed.

The Director advised the panel that the Council has been working colleagues in health in developing the plan. The Director reassured the panel that Quality Officers from the Council were not the only individuals responsible for visiting care homes and reporting incidents. The Director commented that the culture does not exist where everyone who visits a care home consider it is part of their responsibility to notice and report issues of poor care quality. The aim of the strategy is to build a relationship with care providers through partnership and cooperation approach.

The proposed Quality Assurance Framework document was developed with partners to look at the number of professionals that visit a care setting and offered them the challenge as why concerns were not raised and reported by colleagues. The launch of the framework is asking partners to think about how they can support identifying issues by providing intelligence about complaints. A new system has recently been introduced to allow people to raise complaints about care providers with the Commissioning Team. The Director highlighted referrals to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) team about safeguarding as another source of intelligence that could be used to identify concerns about a care provider, and this would lead to checks of other information which could suggest that there is a more serious issue to be investigated.

The aim is that future monitoring visits will be more intelligence led and occur when there are either serious concerns or various concerns that cannot be monitored as part of the proposed desktop exercise.

The Director added that a new system has been introduced for people to raise any complaints about their care which is reported automatically to the Commissioning Team.

The Director gave further details about the reasons for the change in approach and the benefits in terms of improved quality of care and early identification of issues with care providers.

A panel member queried the Quality Provider Self Assessments form completed by care providers and the specifically the number of complaints would result in a suspension and how a serious complaint would be treated after earlier complaints have been made. The Director advised the panel that a decision about the suspension would be made on a case-by-case basis which is the current policy that will continue under the new proposed policy.

The Director reassured the panel that the Council would not wait until several complaints have been received before acting. If the findings from the Quality Provider Self Assessments suggested there were any quality issues, then this would be followed up and depending on response from the provider would determine a decision on the suspension process. For example, a partial or full suspension or the suspension of certain types of placements.

The panel member reiterated concerns about the willingness of care providers to share concerns which could lead to a possible suspension when considering the financial costs to the business of such a decision. The panel member suggested that one of the quarterly self-assessments could be done by a Quality Assurance officers to provide reassurance. The panel member queried if there were plans to increase

the number of Quality Assurance Officers from four to ten which was the position in 2022.

The Director accepted that care providers may choose not to provide information and that the role of Quality Assurance officers is to visit care providers as part of a moderation process. The Director reassured the panel that conversations have already started with care providers with a focus on the process in helping the owner to understand what is happening in their care home.

The Director commented on the importance for owners to be aware of any issues before a CQC inspection. The issue is more challenging when the owner is not the registered manager and who may only visit the home every three months. The information from the quarterly self-assessment will help care home owners to prepare and address any concerns before an inspection.

The Director explained that the Council will work with care providers to help provide the best possible quality of care to residents and prevent the home from going into failure. The Director added that it would not be in the Council's interest for a care provider to close when considering the level of resources that would be needed to help address issues highlighted by Care Quality Commission (CQC).

The Director reassured the panel that the Council retains right to do spot checks on care providers and that the self-assessment information will be considered along with any complaints submitted.

A panel member suggested that a recommendation from the panel is that self-assessments should be done in conjunction with the Quality Assurance Manager to help identify early risks.

The Director agreed to consider the recommendation and report back to a future meeting.

The Director advised the panel that staffing levels in the Commissioning Team numbers of Quality Assurance Officers was reduced after a restructure of the service about 12 months ago. As a result, the responsibility for quality checks was shifted from Quality Assurance to the Commissioning Team. The Commissioning Team have responsibility for monitoring the care contract on a regular basis. The Director accepted that while the number of Quality Assurance Officers has reduced the number of people with responsibility for quality improvement has increased and each commissioner has a Quality Officer supporting them. In addition, there are also senior commissioners.

A panel member queried the process for members of the public to report any concerns when they visit a care home.

The Director advised the panel that a campaign is planned in response to such concerns about how a member of public can do this. The Director added that the Council would always encourage anyone to use the providers complaints process first to give the home the opportunity to deal with the matter. However, if the person did not want to do this then they should refer the matter to the (CQC) and the contact details should be on display a part of their registration requirements.

The Director advised that the Council is considering providing something similar for the public to report concerns about the quality of care or safeguarding.

A panel member queried what is planned to encourage other professionals visiting care providers homes to provide feedback information that can be used on the proposed Quality Assurance Dashboard. The panel member also queried how the information will be used to identify lessons and help with decision making about early intervention, how this will be monitored and tracked against performance indicators.

The Director advised the panel that the monitoring of the dashboard would be the responsibility of the Quality Officers who will be checking daily to see what other sources of intelligence from other professionals about the quality and safeguarding issues. The Director added that other professionals can report concerns for example, pressure sores, incorrect administration of medication to the Safeguarding Hub and work is being planned to raise awareness about how such concerns can be reported.

The Director commented that the dividing line between an issue is about quality of care or safeguarding can be challenging and highlighted how small concerns can be escalated to be a safeguarding issue.

The importance of the issue of quality of care was highlighted as an issue for all professionals and not just the Council to report.

A panel member queried what checks are done before a care worker is allowed to visit a person in their home. The Director advised the panel that employment checks are done on everyone that provides care, and this would include a right to work and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) among others.

The panel supported the recommendations as detailed in the presentation.

The Director agreed to provide a response by 8 March 2024 about the feasibility of the proposal from the panel that one of the quarterly Quality Provider Self Assessments should be done in conjunction with the Quality Assurance Manager and the care provider to help identify early risks.

The panel thanked the presenter for the report and the presentation.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the Quality Assurance and Suspension Policy to be noted.
2. The panel comments on the proposed policy to supersede the Policy on Suspension of New Business with Social Care Services (12/10/2015) and Care Provider Failure Procedures (March 2017) for Adult Social Care providers to be noted.
3. The Director of Adult Social Care to provide a response to the panel recommendation for one of the Quality Provider Self Assessments to be done in conjunction with the Quality Assurance Manager and the care provider to help identify early risks by 8 March 2024.

The Scrutiny Officer commented on the draft work programme. The panel were invited to comment on the draft work programme.

The panel thanked the presenter for the report.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.

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Adults Scrutiny Panel

19 March 2024

Report title	Adults Social Work and Wider Workforce Health Check 2023	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Jasbir Jaspal, Adults and Wellbeing	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Becky Wilkinson, Director of Adults Social Care	
Originating service	Adult Social Care	
Accountable employee(s)	Jennifer Rogers Tel Email	Principal Social Worker 01902 553209 Jennifer.Rogers@wolverhampton.gov.uk
	Courtney Abbott Tel Email	Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner 01902 554485 Courtney.Abbott@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report has been considered by	Adult Social Care Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board	1 February 2024 20 February 2024

Recommendations for decision:

The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the findings of the adult social work and wider workforce health check for 2023
2. Provide comment, feedback, and challenge on the proposed actions to improve practice conditions for and the health of social work and wider workforce

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) carries out a survey each year to check the “health” of its social work and wider social care workforce and this forms part of Adult Social Care’s ongoing self-assessment. This report presents an overview of the findings of both surveys and concludes with actions to address the main areas for improvement.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The National Social Work Task Force in November 2009 recommended the use of a framework to assist employers in assessing the “health” of their social work workforce. There was recognition that the whole system impacts on individual social workers and also on the overall quality of social work practice and regular health checks help organisations identify areas of strength and areas requiring greater focus. It also assists with workforce development planning and supports a culture of continuous improvement.
- 2.2 CWC extends this survey to the wider workforce who work directly with adults with care and support needs or manage teams that do, including managers, heads of service, and agency workers. The wider workforce is diverse and is made up of a variety of roles such as social care workers, day opportunities team leaders, reablement assistants, welfare rights officers, direct payments officers and occupational therapists.
- 2.3 A “healthy,” motivated workforce which has good retention rates and manageable workloads has the potential to make a huge difference. For instance, adults and carers will experience fewer changes in worker, and there will be more time for developing relationships and preventative, strengths-based working. Costs, such as that spent on recruitment and agency staffing, will also reduce.
- 2.4 The surveys are aligned with the eight Local Government’s Association (LGA) [Standards for employers of social workers in England](#).
- 2.5 This report provides a summary of the main findings and also any actions that are planned or in progress to address the key areas for improvement.

3.0 Key questions requested by Scrutiny Panel:

- 3.1 How do we compare to other (similar councils)?
- There is a national social work / workforce health check survey which some councils opt into while others prefer to carry out their own locally. The last national survey took place in 2022 and according to the public report, which gives an overall picture of performance against the LGA standards, the lowest rated standard nationally and for the West Midlands was continuous professional development, whereas this was a particularly strong area for CWC in 2022. National findings otherwise generally reflect what was identified locally. The next national survey is taking place in January 2024 so there is no comparable data for 2023.

- 3.2 What areas are of particular concern or challenge?
- No particular area of concern or challenge to note, however some actions will be longer term so it may take time to see progress on areas for improvement
- 3.3 What is the improvement plan for those areas and what resources are required?
- An action plan is developed and overseen by Adult Leadership team to address areas highlighted by these surveys. The action plan is updated regularly and reviewed quarterly by Adults Leadership Team. There are no additional resources required
- 3.4 Is the improvement plan proportionate to the challenge?
- Yes, the action plan is realistic and proportionate to what the workforce has told us needs to be developed further.
- 3.5 When can we expect to see results?
- Actions will be tracked throughout the year to ensure progress is being made and the impact of these will be evaluated by the 2024 surveys, although some actions may take longer to embed and start to evidence progress.
- 3.6 Are there any key financial, legal, equalities, other implications for Scrutiny to be aware of:
- Nothing further to note in addition to comments made in sections 6.0-9.0

4.0 Overview and key findings

- 4.1 The health check was circulated via an online survey between 6 September and 17 October 2023 (the wider workforce survey was extended to 19 October 2023). There was also an option this year to complete it by hand and return to a drop box at 22 different locations across the city.
- 4.2 The social work survey was open to all registered social workers at all levels including managers and heads of service, agency workers, students, and apprentices. The survey was sent to 146 registered social workers and received 78 responses, equating to a 53.4% response rate. This is similar to 2022 when the response rate was 54% (70 of 129). In 2024, the aim is to increase this response rate by at least 5%.
- 4.3 The wider workforce survey had a 38.3% response rate (137 of 358), which is a significant increase from 26% (89/340) in 2022. In 2024, the aim is to increase this by at least a further 5%.
- 4.4 There has been recognition over the past three years that response rates needed to improve to ensure the results are more representative of the wider workforce. To improve response rates in 2023, there was protected time in a September 2023 social work briefing and October 2023 workforce briefing for staff to complete the survey. Team managers also provided protected time in team meetings.
- 4.5 The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner offered to visit team meetings prior to the survey launching to promote the survey with practitioners, share examples of how

their views have made a difference, and answer any questions about the survey, including reassurances of the anonymity of their responses.

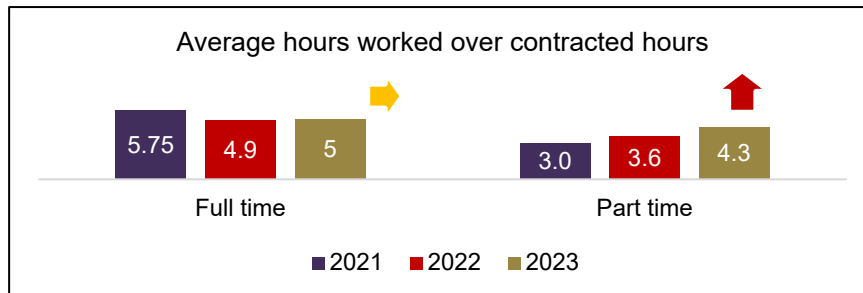
- 4.6 Additionally, a Teams channel was used to enhance communication, allow for discussion, and give easy access to the survey link.
- 4.7 There were also updates about progress on identified actions in the monthly newsletter using a “you said...we did” approach.
- 4.8 Not every respondent answered every survey question. The percentages referred to therefore reflect the percentage of respondents to each question rather than the whole survey. Actual numbers have also been included to provide transparency and comparisons with previous years findings to show trends or impact. This was also a request from Scrutiny Board in previous meetings.

Social Work

- 4.9 Nationally, social work recruitment and retention is a significant challenge and social work is on the national occupational shortage list. Whilst locally the turnover of adult social workers continues to be below the national average, the increasing complexity of situations and demand being seen post covid may start to have an impact.
- 4.10 Adult Social Care has a well-established strategy to attract and retain social workers which includes, amongst a number of other key actions, attendance at recruitment fairs, investment in social work apprenticeships and a strong training and development offer. However, additional actions are being taken this year including exploring the use of staying put interviews, developing trauma informed approaches to support wellbeing and reduce absence rates, and launching a programme for social workers 2 years post qualified, which is a time when social workers are more likely to leave.
- 4.11 The majority of respondents have worked for CWC as a qualified social worker for more than 11 years (24.7%, 19). This is followed by:
 - 1-3 years—19.5% (15)
 - 7-11 years—18.2% (14)
 - 4-6 years—11.7% (9)
 - 12 months or less—11.7% (9)
 - The rest responded “prefer not to say”
- 4.12 Positively more social workers this year are reporting that their workloads are manageable with just over 83% (65) reporting this compared to 73% (51) in 2022. A number of test and learn projects have taken place over the last 12 months as part of the adult’s redesign which has started to reduce demand into social work teams, particularly with the introduction of a Front Door team, which may explain why more social workers this year are reporting manageable workloads.
- 4.13 The percentage of social workers reporting that they never, rarely, or only occasionally experience stress due to their work has also improved this year, with 69% (54) reporting this compared to 56% (39) last year. Also, almost all said that they know where to get

help if they are concerned about their wellbeing and the majority feel able to discuss stressful situations or their workload with their manager and agree satisfactory ways forward.

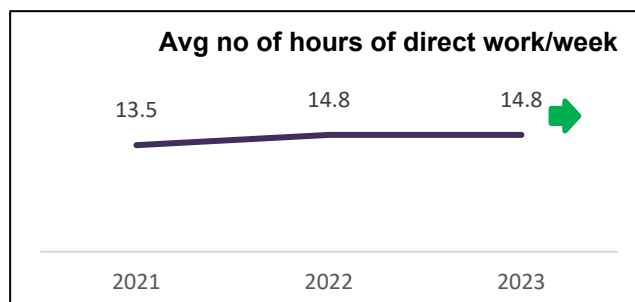
- 4.14 Full time social workers are working on average 5 hours per week over contract (around the same as last year), and those who are part time are working slightly more, averaging about 4.3 hours over each week (3.6 in 2022).



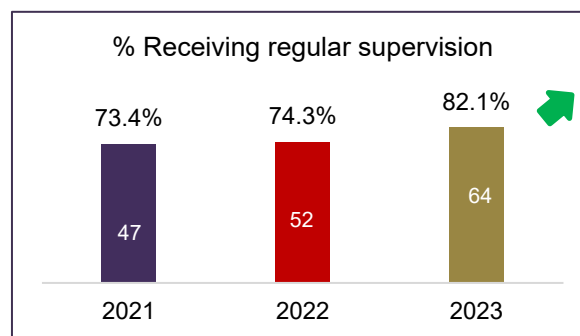
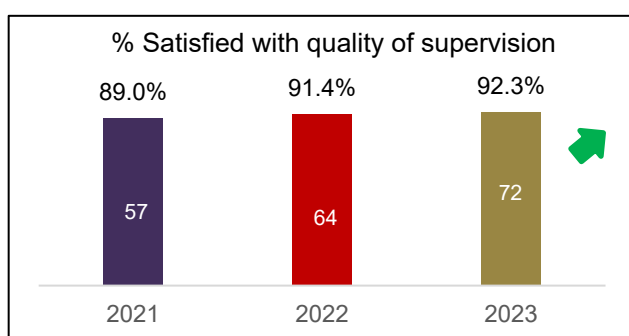
- 4.15 The adults’ redesign, currently in progress, is reviewing demand, workflow, systems as well as workloads and skill mix across the service. This, along with ongoing recruitment and retention activity, should help to further stabilise teams and create even more manageable workloads, which should in turn further address stress levels and reduce hours worked over contract. Additionally, stress is a standing agenda item at quarterly meetings of the Strategic Health, Safety and Wellbeing Board and there is a stress taskforce (including organisational development, human resources, health and safety team) to look at how to address concerns raised.

- 4.16 Additional actions this year to help reduce demand on social work teams includes developing our online offer, which gives people access to information and advice quickly, at a time that suits them, and without them having to wait to speak to someone in a social work team unless they want or need to.

- 4.17 The majority of social workers (79.5%, 62) agree that Wolverhampton has a clear model of social work practice that promotes relationship working and a strengths-based approach to achieve the best outcomes for individuals and families, which is similar to 2022 (80%, 56). Social workers are spending the same amount of time as last year working directly with people, but this is still higher than in previous years (10 in 2018; 14.2 in 2019; 11.8 in 2020).

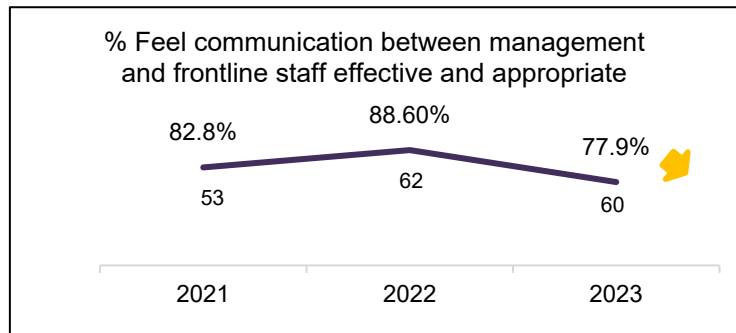


- 4.18 More social workers this year (82%, 64) said they have regular supervision compared to 74% (52) last year and just over 92% (72) are happy with the quality of their supervision, around the same as last year (91%, 64).

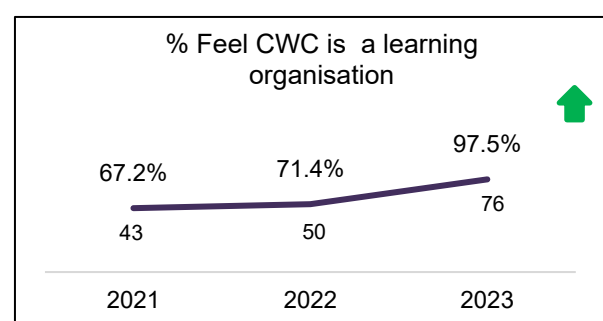
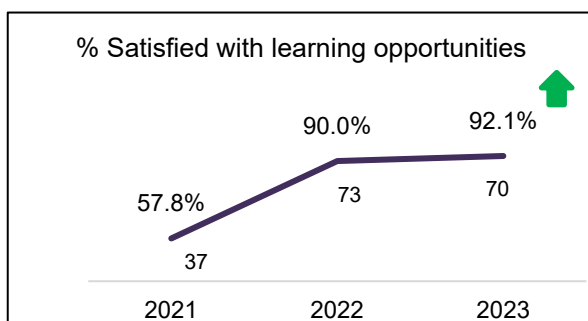


- 4.19 Although the majority (77%, 59) feel they have opportunity within supervision to reflect on how they are meeting professional regulatory standards, it is important for as many as possible to have this opportunity, so the aspiration is to increase this over the coming year. Also, although the majority of supervisions include discussions around equality and diversity, around 9% (7) commented this was not the case so actions have been identified to ensure that all social workers report that these discussions are happening next year. A series of reflective sessions will take place with managers to strengthen their supervision conversations, and this will incorporate the Social GRACES tool.
- 4.20 Actions implemented since the last health check have continued to contribute to the positive experiences of supervision for social workers, including the commissioning of supervision training and the promotion of a first-year management portfolio programme to support new managers across the workforce. The use of weekly huddles, where managers and heads of service meet with practitioners to discuss people they are working with, alongside a revised supervision policy has also supported this.
- 4.21 The majority feel that the way managers, including senior managers, communicate is effective and appropriate. Although this has decreased since last year, with 78% (60) responding “yes” compared to 89% (62) in 2022, no one responded “no” compared to 11% (8) in 2022 as the option to choose “somewhat” was added this year.
- 4.22 A key theme was that social workers wanted improved communication around key changes such as the redesign and there are actions to improve on this in 2024 including identifying some dedicated resource to support communication about key transformational activity.

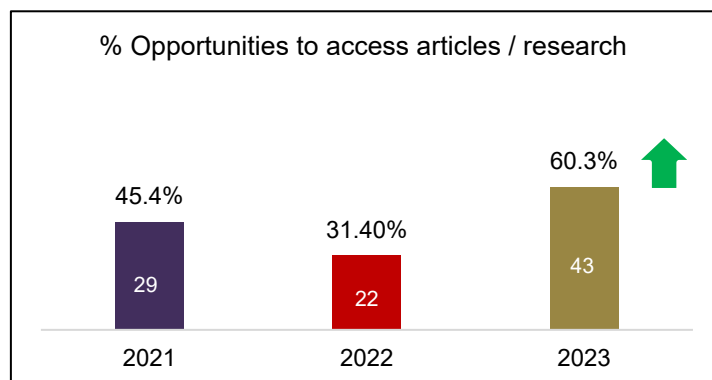
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- 4.23 There was a decrease in the number of social workers who feel that they are or would be consulted about changes that affect their role, with 65% (50), saying this compared to 70% (49) last year. There was, however, also a reduction in “no” responses, 13% (10), compared to 30% (21) last year. The option to respond “somewhat” was added in 2023, which has contributed to this change.
- 4.24 The senior leadership team’s communication and engagement strategy has ensured they have continued to be as visible as possible. A regular presence at team huddles, continued monthly updates via the Adult Social Care newsletter and attendance and participation at regular social work briefings has made a continued difference to this. Additionally, in a direct response to comments made by social workers in the 2023 survey, senior managers have made a commitment to ensuring that important updates and information that is relevant to their teams are regularly discussed within team meetings in addition to via e-mail. The possibility of regular video updates by the Director of Adult Social Care is also currently being explored.
- 4.25 There has been a further improvement in social workers’ satisfaction with learning and development opportunities this year and significantly more feel that CWC is a learning organisation with a positive learning culture. Actions to improve this over the last year has included:
- Organisational Development shares a monthly newsletter which outlines upcoming training and development opportunities and send targeted emails
 - More face-to-face training being offered, including the Joint Adult and Children’s Social Work Conference in November 2023
 - The social work training plan for 2023-2024 incorporated a number of courses prompted by suggestions from the 2022 survey, including trauma informed practice, Mental Capacity Act, Safeguarding Training, Learning Disabilities, Human Rights Act Assessment Training



- 4.26 More social workers this year are accessing research and articles to support their practice and development, with 60% (43) saying that they access these resources and 31% (24) responding “somewhat”. Those saying “no,” (9%, 7), said the biggest barrier to this was time.



- 4.27 Over the last year Advanced Practitioners have supported social workers by identifying and sharing relevant research and articles which has likely helped the improvement in this area. More actions are planned, including developing and trialling Research Circles with a local university to help support social workers' access to relevant research. Additionally, the Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner and Organisational Development team will share information on creating an account with Research in Practice for Adults, in an effort to reach out to those social workers who have not yet signed up to and accessed this resource.
- 4.28 This year, six respondents said that they completed the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) in the last two years, and, on a scale of 'one' to 'five' (with 'one' being not effective and 'five' being very effective), all rated the programme as 3 or above. This is an improvement when compared to 2022 when feedback included that the programme catered more toward social workers in Children's Services.
- 4.29 Over the past year, the ASYE programme has been reviewed and revised in consultation with newly qualified social workers within Adult Social Care. Changes have included a stronger focus on the Care Act and Mental Capacity Act and the introduction of two new Advanced Practitioner posts to support newly qualified social workers, mirroring the offer in Children's Services.
- 4.30 Just under 89% (65) of social workers said CWC makes them feel encouraged and empowered to make time for self-care and wellbeing activities to some extent, which is a slight decrease when compared to last year (93%, 65). However, this year, more social workers feel that CWC recognises the emotional demands of social work and provides the supervision, support and tools needed to deal with this, with 60.3% (47) reporting this compared to 50% (35) last year. Some responses to this question included:
- “There have been some recent discussions around trauma informed supervision, which I would be very interested in, also linked to proper 'debriefs' after particularly challenging situations”

- “I do believe they genuinely care and try; the issue as always is time and pressures from the role itself”
 - “I have been very lucky to have supportive line managers”
- 4.31 Actions taken over the past year to improve in this area has included commissioning trauma informed supervision training for managers, which started in October 2023. However, it is recognised that more can be done, and plans are underway to embed trauma informed practice across the Families Directorate, which will include consideration of how the organisation can be more trauma informed to better support the wellbeing of social workers and all frontline practitioners who are at risk of vicarious and secondary trauma.
- 4.32 Positively, the majority of social workers, 76% (59), plan to stay with the council over the next 12 months, which is more than last year (64%, 45). Just 3.8% (3) stated that they do not intend to stay (1.4%, 1, in 2022). When asked what would influence their decision, the top three responses were supportive managers (although this also has been identified as a strength), workloads, and supportive teams (again, this has also been identified as a strength in other areas of the survey). Based on this, it is possible that some respondents listed what is influencing them to stay, rather than what they feel needs to improve to support retention.
- 4.33 When asked to think back over the last 12 months and state one or two things that they would change about their job if they could, themes included:
- Manageable workloads and reduced demands
 - Review of how teams work and structures, including use of specialist teams
 - More understanding/information about the redesign
- 4.34 Some comments included:
- “Need specialist teams to work with people with learning disabilities, physical disabilities etc”
 - “I would not change [anything] but would value being part of working groups and projects”
 - “Would like to know more about the redesign”
 - “Very happy”
 - “Better buddy system for new workers”
 - “Manageable workloads”
- 4.35 There continues to be a strong sense of pride and positivity about working for the council and 84% of social workers (65), comparable to last year, would recommend CWC as an employer. Some comments that were provided when answering this question included:
- “I would highly recommend Wolverhampton as a place to work, with a supportive culture”
 - “I feel CWC are invested in me; I have been able to engage in various training opportunities which has helped with my career progression”
 - “Feel there is a genuine passion to do well for the people we serve and to be a supportive employer. Lots of training and good pay for social workers compared to

other local authorities. We have a good, supportive team who work hard and always try to go above and beyond regardless of what else is going on around us”

- “Maybe. Depending on the person’s circumstances and what they were looking for”
- “Duty can be stressful and demanding”

4.36 For the third year, almost all felt that CWC was committed to tackling inequality and discrimination in some way, with only 1.3% (1 person) disagreeing (4.3%, 3 in 2022). This positive result is likely due to the strong approach taken by the whole council in addressing equality and diversity issues and is also a key priority for Adult Social Care. Within social work teams there are well established cultural competence champions and training for social workers and managers. However, there is recognition that there is more that can be achieved, and Adult Social Care has a service equality plan to drive this forward over the next 12 months.

4.37 When thinking back over the last 12 months respondents said that a number of things made them feel positive about working in Wolverhampton including:

- “Management has a shared desire to improve the journey for the people we support. They role model value-based social work”
- “Open and supportive environment – a one council approach”
- “How we listen and adapt to provide a better service for residents”
- “Wolverhampton council is caring towards its staff and concerned with their wellbeing”
- “Working with an organisation that provides learning opportunities and promotes reflective practice”
- “Practice Education and condensed hours has enabled me to find enthusiasm for social work again and a better work life balance”
- “Our hard work is acknowledged by senior management”

Workforce

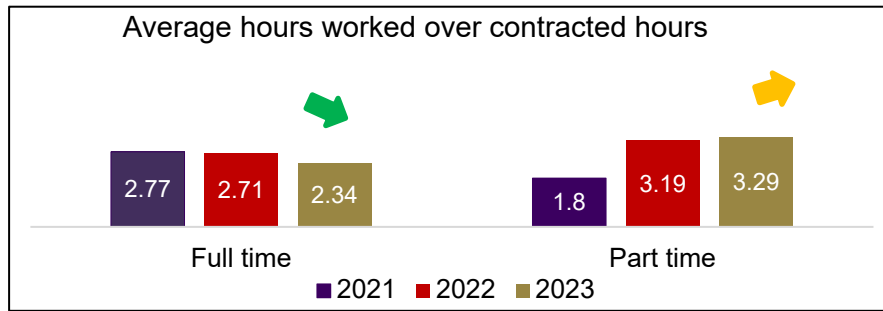
4.38 The vast majority of respondents have worked for CWC for more than 11 years (56.6%, 77). This is followed by:

- 12 months or less—14.7% (20)
- 4-6 years—10.3% (14)
- 1-3 years—10.3% (14)
- 7-11 years—6.6% (9)
- The rest responded “prefer not to say”

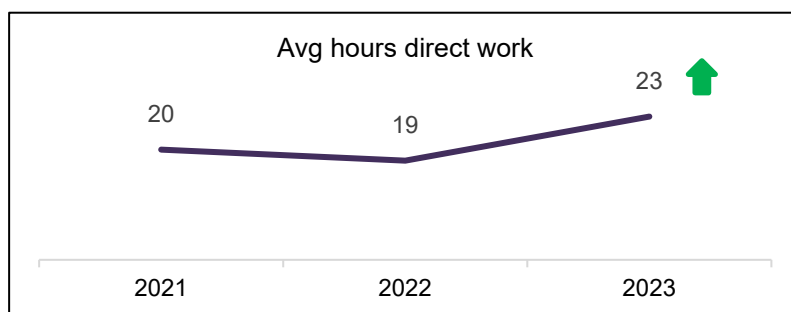
4.39 Positively, the majority feel that their workloads are manageable and that they rarely, never, or only occasionally experience unmanageable levels of stress due to their work. However, there has been a slight reduction in both this year, with about 88% (121) responding that their workloads are manageable compared to 91% (81) last year and 80% (110) saying that they never, rarely, or only occasionally experience unmanageable levels of stress due to work compared to 88% (78) last year.

4.40 The average number of hours full time practitioners are working over their contracted hours has reduced from last year, but those who are part time are working slightly more hours over.

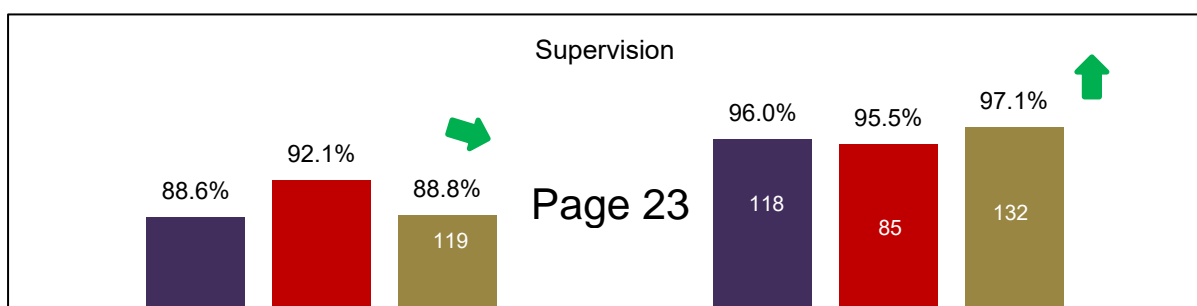
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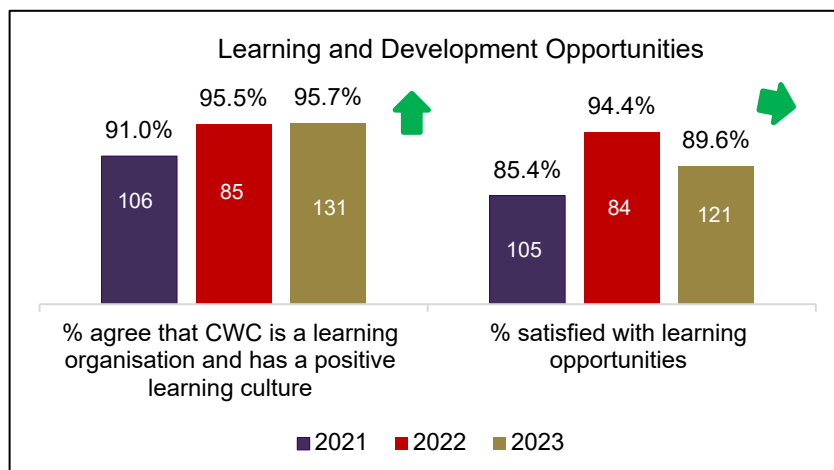
- 4.41 Over the past year, leaders took action to support recruitment and retention, especially within the Occupational Therapy (OT) and Sensory Service where staffing challenges were being experienced, to improve workload manageability, hours worked over and stress levels. However, it is recognised that more actions are needed this year to support a number of teams across the wider Adult Social Care service, including Inhouse Provider Services and OT.
- 4.42 Actions will include exploring reimbursement of professional fees for OTs to attract and retain staff, ensuring stress risk assessments are completed and Heads of Service / Service Managers taking time on a regular basis to speak with teams about how they are feeling and exploring ways forward to address workload issues.
- 4.43 The vast majority of the wider workforce 92.5% (124) agree that Wolverhampton has a clear model of practice that promotes relationship working and a strengths-based approach to achieve the best outcomes for individuals and families, which is more than last year (87.6%, 78).
- 4.44 The wider workforce is also spending more time working directly with people; however, it is important to note that given the diversity of roles there will be differing expectations about how much time is spent working directly with people, so it is difficult to make general conclusions about this.



- 4.45 The frequency and quality of supervision remains high this year. The majority (89%, 119) said that they receive regular supervision, although this is slightly lower than 92% (82) in 2022, and almost all (97%, 137) said that they are satisfied with the quality of their supervision, which is slightly higher than 95% (95) in 2022.

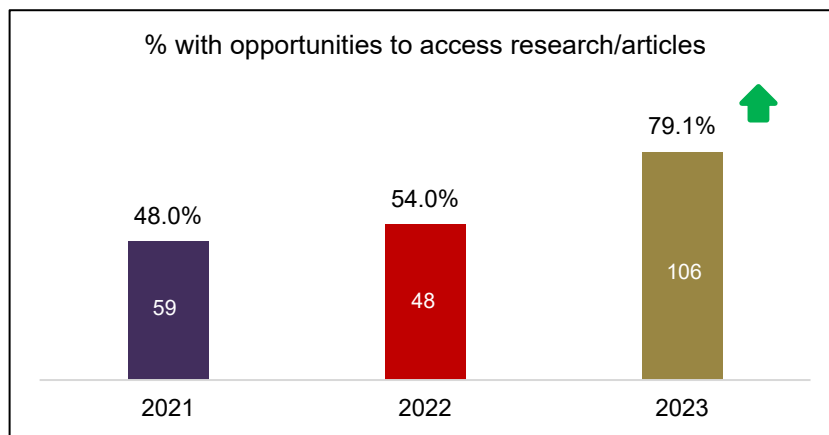


- 4.46 Although the majority of supervisions include discussions around equality and diversity, around 7% (10) commented this was not the case so actions have been identified so that all practitioners should be able to report that these discussions are happening next year. To achieve this cultural competence training will be better promoted across the wider workforce and there will be a session with Adult Leadership team on role modelling the Social GRACES tool in supervision.
- 4.47 Almost all feel that the City of Wolverhampton Council is actively committed to tackling inequality and discrimination in some way, with just one person disagreeing with this. Some of the responses recorded include:
- “Everyone is an individual and from different cultures and CWC employees are always mindful of this”
 - “Absolutely, but still have managers not confident having conversations and willing to be uncomfortable and willing to learn”
- 4.48 Positively, once again, almost all are satisfied with the learning and development opportunities available to them this year, and while there has been a slight decline in those who feel CWC is a learning organisation with a positive learning culture, this is still very high.

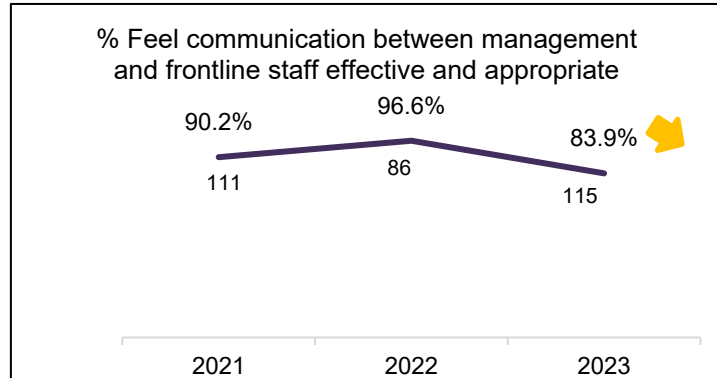


- 4.49 The majority, almost 80% (106) said that they have opportunities to access resources to inform their practice and professional development. Research in Practice for Adults attended the October 2023 workforce briefing which resulted in positive feedback and an additional 118 accounts being registered.

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- 4.50 Once again, communication between senior leaders and frontline staff is considered to be effective and appropriate. Although there has been a decrease in those who responded “yes” this year, the “no” responses remained around 3% (4) due to the addition of the “somewhat” option. Actions to support this has included regular updates via monthly newsletters and a workforce briefing in October 2023.



- 4.51 There was also a decrease in those who feel that they are or would be consulted in changes that affect their role, with 61% (83), saying this compared to 87% (77) last year. The option to respond “somewhat” was added in 2023, which may have contributed to this reduction. Some comments included:
- “There is a new change in October which will impact on our workload; we have been told about this in our team meeting and had a discussion about the impact this will have”
 - “Not always as timely as it could be”
 - “Only after changes have been made”
- 4.52 Actions to address this will include frequent updates on key changes as part of workforce briefings and newsletters and exploring regular video updates by the Director of Adult

Social Care. There has also been a commitment by Heads of Service to share more at team meetings rather than rely on emails.

- 4.53 Most respondents (90.5%, 124) agree that they are encouraged and empowered by the Council to make time for their own self-care and wellbeing activities to some extent, although slightly lower than last year (95.6%, 85).
- 4.54 Almost 70% (90) feel that the City of Wolverhampton Council recognises the emotional demands of the work they do and provides them with the supervision, support, and tools they need to deal with this, although this is slightly less than last year (76%, 68). Work around this has started in October 2023, with trauma informed supervision training and trauma informed organisational approaches as detailed in the social work section of this report.
- 4.55 Just over 90% (123) would recommend CWC as an employer and the vast majority (84%, 115) said that they plan to stay in Wolverhampton for the next 12 months, with only three people saying they plan to leave. The top three factors that would influence them to continue working in Wolverhampton were pay and other benefits, supportive team and training and development opportunities. Comments included:
- “As a new employee to CWC coming from a different Local Authority, the ethos and approachability of all staff, regardless of their role, has been refreshing”
 - “I have been with CWC for some time and always recommend to others as a good employer”
- 4.56 When asked to think back over the last 12 months and state one or two things that they would change about their job if they could, themes included:
- More face-to-face training
 - Workload pressures
 - Opportunities to progress
- 4.57 Some comments included:
- “I would not change anything”
 - “Supported well wouldn’t change anything”
 - “More things to keep my brain active”
 - “Last twelve months have been difficult, lots of changes, lots of new systems, extra work due to sickness, trying to keep on top of everything”
 - “Having more time”
- 4.58 Almost all reported a sense of pride about their job and when asked what made them feel positive about working in Wolverhampton over the last 12 months comments included:
- “I feel listened to”
 - “I feel like everyone does give 100%”
 - “Training and development opportunities have increased this year, which is nice”
 - “I am valued as a member of my team”
 - “A caring culture”
 - “I am overly proud to work for the council”
 - “Managers are very supportive and always take time to listen”

- “Working with a fantastic supportive team”

5.0 Next Steps

5.1 An action plan has been completed as a result of this year’s surveys to address the key areas of development and this is takes a “you said...we did” approach. The Adult Leadership team oversee this quarterly and progress on identified actions will be shared with the workforce during the year.

5.2 Key actions are highlighted within the report, and some are summarised below, along with other additional actions that have been identified:

- Promotion of the 2024 surveys in an effort to increase the response rate further in 2024
- The Adult’s redesign, including the development of a robust families front door, has started to reduce some of the demand on social work teams. More activity is planned to further manage demand and reduce workloads, stress and working over hours with further test and learn projects planned
- There will be regular communication about the adult’s redesign, including an update in an upcoming workforce briefing
- A dedicated Families Stakeholder Engagement Officer post is being developed with a focus on workforce engagement, ensuring that the workforce is informed and engaged with change
- Recruitment and retention strategy and action plan
- Managers will continue to offer flexibility where needed to help people balance their work and home lives to reduce stress levels and working over contracted hours
- Continued offer of stress risk assessments and wellbeing support / resources
- The nature of social work and frontline social care generally means that there is sometimes a requirement to work out of hours or longer hours than usual. When this occurs, managers will ensure that social workers and practitioners have the opportunity to take that time back by leaving work early or coming in late another day or, if more time has been accumulated, taking an extra day off to reduce the time worked over contract
- Continued implementation of trauma informed supervision training
- Creation of a working group from February 2024 to develop a trauma informed action plan to change how we work as an organisation—ensuring to support the wellbeing of social workers and all frontline practitioners, including consideration of vicarious and secondary trauma
- Supporting managers to facilitate discussions in supervision around equalities and diversity, including use of the Social Graces tool
- The 2024-2025 Workforce Development Plan will be coproduced with Heads of Service across all areas of Adult Social Care to ensure the training and development needs of all service areas are met
- Some respondents identified specific training that they would like in the following year to support their practice and their development, and some of these will be taking place in the coming year, including further S42 Safeguarding training, working with

people who have a learning disability, and training for working with people who are autistic

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.
- 6.2 Any costs arising from actions in the work plan and priorities will be funded from within existing approved Adult Social Care budgets. [JC/30012024/Z]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications as a result of this report. [TC/0702/2024]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 Social work and social care is a diverse profession, and the makeup of the frontline teams in Wolverhampton is largely representative of the local community. The Council's approach to fair recruitment is followed robustly for the recruitment of all posts. This includes anonymous application forms, progression of people with disabilities to interview and diverse recruitment panels. The health check survey asks practitioner's views on the council's approach to equality and diversity, and this has been mentioned in the report.
- 8.2 This survey was sent via e-mail and completed via an electronic device, with the option to print (or have someone else print for you) a copy, complete by hand and return to a drop box in one of many offices throughout the city. While attempts are always made to ensure that all members of staff have access to and are able to complete the survey, when feedback from the workforce is gathered, they will be asked if there are any barriers which prevents them from being able to do so in order to ensure support can be provided in 2024 and future surveys. Regular reminders and discussions around support required to complete the survey will also take place while the 2024 survey is open in order to support better access to all who require it.

9.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 9.1 The health and wellbeing of our workforce is a priority for the City of Wolverhampton Council. The purpose of this health check is to get feedback from social workers about how they feel about working for Wolverhampton and how leaders can work to make improvements where necessary to support the wellbeing of the workforce and ensure they feel supported. Actions identified in the report are intended to support the health and wellbeing of the workforce.

2023 Social Work and Wider Workforce Health Checks – Adult Social Care Adults Scrutiny Panel

19 March 2024

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Presenter:

Courtney Abbott
Quality and Improvement
Advanced Practitioner

Jennifer Rogers
Principal Social Worker

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Recommendations for action

The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the findings of the adult social work and wider workforce health check for 2023
2. Provide comment, feedback, and challenge on the proposed actions to improve practice conditions for and the health of social work and wider workforce

Purpose and background

Purpose:

- The City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) carries out a survey each year to check the “health” of its social work and wider social care workforce and this forms part of Adult Social Care’s ongoing self-assessment. This report presents an overview of the findings of both surveys and concludes with actions to address the main areas for improvement.

Background:

- Undertaken annually, via an online survey, with the option to complete by hand, as part of the City of Wolverhampton Council’s (CWC) ongoing self-assessment
- Helps to identify areas of strength and areas requiring greater focus
- Informs workforce development planning and supports the continuous improvement of Adult Social Care practice in Wolverhampton

Key information for scrutiny:

1. How do we compare to other (similar councils)?
 - There is a national social work / workforce health check survey which some councils opt into while others prefer to carry out their own locally. The last national survey took place in 2022 and according to the public report, which gives an overall picture of performance against the LGA standards, the lowest rated standard nationally and for the West Midlands was continuous professional development, whereas this was a particularly strong area for CWC in 2022. National findings otherwise generally reflect what was identified locally. The next national survey is taking place in January 2024 so there is no comparable data for 2023.
2. What areas are of particular concern or challenge?
 - No particular area of concern or challenge to note, however some actions will be longer term so it may take time to see progress on areas for improvement
3. What is the improvement plan for those areas and what resources are required?
 - An action plan is developed and overseen by Adult Leadership team to address areas highlighted by these surveys. The action plan is updated regularly and reviewed quarterly by Adults Leadership Team. There are no additional resources required
4. Is the improvement plan proportionate to the challenge?
 - Yes, the action plan is realistic and proportionate to what the workforce has told us needs to be developed further.
5. When can we expect to see results?
 - Actions will be tracked throughout the year to ensure progress is being made and the impact of these will be evaluated by the 2024 surveys, although some actions may take longer to embed and start to evidence progress.
6. Are there any key financial, legal, equalities, other implications for Scrutiny to be aware of?
 - See sections 6.0-9.0 of the full report for this

2023 survey details and progress since 2022

- Survey live between 6 September to 17 October 2023, extended to 19 October 2023 for the Wider Workforce Survey
- Response rates:
 - Social Work: 53.4% (78/146), similar to 54% (70/129) in 2022
 - Workforce: 38.3% (137/358), significant increase from 26% (89/340) in 2022
- Generally positive and some notable improvement since last year as a result of actions taken, including:
 - **Practitioners have access to research and articles to support their practice and their development**— Research in Practice attended workforce briefing which increased numbers, Advanced Practitioner role started in April 2023 supporting social workers and students in this area
 - **Even more social workers are happy with learning and development opportunities this year**—OD newsletter, more face-to-face (inc. Joint SW Conference), training courses specifically suggested in 2022 survey
 - **Social workers reporting more manageable workloads and less stress**— Recruitment and retention strategy, including incentives such as blue light card and Social Work England fee reimbursement, test and learn projects which have started to reduce demand on social work teams

Areas of strength

- Significant increase in response rate for wider workforce, while social work response rate remained over 50%
- Strong sense of pride – the majority saying they would recommend CWC as an employer
- For the third year, vast majority felt that CWC has a clear model of practice that promotes relationship working
- More social workers and the majority of the wider workforce said that they never, rarely or only occasionally experience unmanageable levels of stress
- More social workers said that their workloads are manageable this year, 83% (65) compared to 72% (52) last year; high numbers reporting manageable workloads in the wider workforce although slightly lower than last year (88%, 121 compared to 91%, 81, last year)
- Frequency of supervision remains high across both surveys
- Quality of supervision has increased across both surveys– >90% for both social workers and wider workforce
- Satisfaction with learning and development opportunities is a continued strength
- Once again, almost everyone said CWC was actively committed to tackling inequality and discrimination in some way
- There is effective and appropriate communication between senior management and staff although recognition more can be done particularly in sharing information about the redesign
- Most feel that the council supports their wellbeing and recognition that emotional demands of the role are starting to be recognised more
- The majority across both surveys plan to continue working for CWC over the next 12 months

Areas for development and key actions

- Although increased response rates for the survey across wider workforce, the aim is to increase further
- Practitioners across both are still working over their contracted hours, with part-time workers across both working slightly more this year than last
- Across both surveys, some practitioners feel that consultation around change could improve
- Although some feel that CWC recognises the emotional demands of their jobs, there is still room for improvement
- Improved discussion needed around equality and diversity in supervision and within teams

Some key actions:

- Improving response rates for the wider workforce survey – e.g. consultation, protected time, “you said...we did” and regular updates
- Adults redesign, more test and learn projects to support workloads, reduce stress levels and hours worked over contract by better demand management and additional recruitment and retention activity across social work and wider workforce
- Dedicated resource to focus on workforce engagement and communication about key transformational activity, ensuring that the workforce is informed about and involved in change
- Continuation of trauma informed work that started in 2023, including a trial of trauma informed organisational approaches and an evaluation of trauma informed supervision training – this should support the wellbeing of practitioners and reduce sickness absence by recognising the impact of vicarious / secondary trauma

What our employees said.....

- “I would highly recommend Wolverhampton as a place to work, with a supportive culture”
- “I feel CWC are invested in me; I have been able to engage in various training opportunities which has helped with my career progression”
- “Management has a shared desire to improve the journey for the people we support. They role model value-based social work”
- “There is a new change in October which will impact on our workload; we have been told about this in our team meeting and had a discussion about the impact this will have”
- “As a new employee to CWC coming from a different Local Authority, the ethos and approachability of all staff, regardless of their role, has been refreshing”
- “I have been with CWC for some time and always recommend to others as a good employer”
- “I am happy to come into the office a couple of times a week while working at home the other days. Seeing my colleagues has been a real positive to my mental health”
- “Would like to know more about the redesign”
- “Last twelve months have been difficult, lots of changes, lots of new systems, extra work due to sickness, trying to keep on top of everything”
- “There have been some recent discussions around trauma informed supervision, which I would be very interested in, also linked to proper ‘debriefs’ after particularly challenging situations”
- “I do believe they genuinely care and try; the issue as always is time and pressures from the role itself”

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