

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

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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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