

Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 16 March 2021

Attendance

Members of the Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Olivia Birch
Cllr Val Evans (Chair)
Cllr Sohail Khan
Cllr Asha Mattu
Cllr Lynne Moran
Cllr Anwen Muston
Cllr Zee Russell

In Attendance

Cllr Linda Leach

Cabinet Member for Adults

Employees

Courtney Abbott

Quality and Improvement Advanced
Practitioner for Children and Adults
Director of Children and Adult Services
Scrutiny Officer
Scrutiny Officer
Scrutiny and Systems Manager
Principal Social Worker (Interim)
Deputy Director Adult Services

Emma Bennett
Earl Piggott-Smith
Martin Stevens
Julia Cleary
Jennifer Rogers
Becky Wilkinson

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Welcome and Introductions**

Cllr Val Evans, Chair, welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting and advised it was being live streamed to the press and public. Cllr Evans advised that she was not expecting any exempt or restricted items on the agenda. 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 and reminded everyone that microphones should be muted and cameras off, unless they have been invited to speak. Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, invited all attendees to introduce themselves to confirm they were present at the meeting.

Please note that the following officers and presenters were also in attendance at the meeting

Emma Bennett
Becky Wilkinson
Jennifer Rogers
Courtney Abbott
Martin Stevens
Earl Piggott Smith
Julia Cleary
Cllr Linda Leach - Cabinet Member for Adults

3 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the following members of the panel:

- Councillor Rupinderjit Kaur
- Councillor Simon Bennett

4 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Minutes of previous meeting (19.1.2021)**

The panel members voted and approved the minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2021 as being a correct record.

6 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

7 **Adult Social Work Health Check 2020**

The Chair invited Cllr Linda Leach, Cabinet Member for Adults, to introduce the agenda items 7 and 8. The Cabinet Member wanted to formally record her thanks to all social workers and social care staff on the World Social Work Day who worked so hard during the pandemic. The Cabinet Member praised their dedication and efforts to support families.

The Chair invited Courtney Abbott, Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner for Children and Adults, and Jenny Rogers, Principal Social Worker Adult Services, to give their presentation and report to the panel for pre-decision scrutiny.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner gave an overview of the background to the findings of the Social Work Health Check survey annual report 2020. The health check survey is done annually as part of Wolverhampton Council's ongoing self-assessment. The survey is completed online.

The findings from the health check will inform Workforce Development Planning and also support the continuous improvement of Adult Social Work in Wolverhampton. The survey allows social workers to have their say on different aspects of what it is like to work for the City of Wolverhampton Council. The presentation would focus on findings from three key areas – workload manageability, staff wellbeing, an equality and diversity and panel would be invited to comment on these areas.

The panel were advised that the survey took place between 2 November and the 14 December 2020, which coincided with the start of the second national lockdown which may have affected the response rate. The survey was open to all registered social workers and social work students working in a social work capacity with an

adult services include agency workers as well. In total 65 responses were received, which is a 52% response rate. The response rate was slightly lower compared to the previous year when the rate was 65%.

The panel were advised that deadline for submitting responses was extended and employees were encouraged to take the opportunity to complete the survey form if they wished.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner advised the panel that in terms of workload manageability it was reported that overall case workloads decreased slightly since last year and according to local information the average casework is 20. The number of session workers who said their workload is unmanageable has slightly increased by 3% when compared to the previous year survey findings. The increase was considered to be due to the impact of Covid 19 and the challenges that this has posed to the workforce.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner advised the panel that there had been a considerable increase in the number of social workers who reported having regular supervision sessions. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner commented that a concern highlighted about the quality of supervision related to the career development.

The issue will be addressed through the introduction of professional conversations and the new supervision policy, which was introduced in February 2021. The updated policy details the issues managers need to consider within supervision sessions, such as workload manageability. The panel were advised of other measures to respond to the concerns about workload and the highlighted the importance of regular supervision in ensuring the social worker workloads are manageable.

The implementation of a new social care system called Eclipse later in the year is also expected to help streamline current processes and reduce the amount of time that social workers spend completing forms.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner commented on the responses to issues related to equalities and diversity and the number who reported that there had examples of where they felt unfairly treated on the grounds of the protected characteristics. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner commented on the key actions to aimed at addressing this issue, including the commissioning of training to support group conversations around issues of equality, diversity, and inclusion.

In addition, the Council is also commissioning No offence training sessions, which will be supported by promotion of the safe space workers so they can report any serious concerns in confidence. The service is also recruiting equalities champions within each social work team. In January 2021 there was specific training for social workers on anti-discriminatory practice and a further session on anti-oppressive practice will be commissioned for later in the year.

The panel thanked the presenters for their presentation.

The panel queried about the wellbeing and mental health support offered to social workers and the level of take-up of current support services. The panel were

concerned that some social workers may be reluctant to raise issues or ask for help because of stigma attached to mental illness.

Jenny Rogers, Principal Social Worker, advised that she does not have numbers on the take up of services, this might be available from HR. The Principal Social Worker advised the panel that the issue of wellbeing is a key part of the work being done to support social workers, such as the promotion and activities linked to World Social Work Day. There is a commitment from the Director to managers to support social workers and also encouraging people to take screen breaks and hopes that people feel able to ask for help with a mental health issue. There is an acceptance however, that more work the service can do to promote the range of support available and include the issue of wellbeing in everyday conversations to reduce stigma about the issue.

The panel asked the work being done to review and refresh the range of help available to assess what works and what does not work and also new ideas such as mindfulness courses. The Principal Social Worker responded that the service is constantly reviewing the take up of wellbeing sessions. The panel discussed the take up of support from the Employee Assistance Scheme.

The panel queried the reported increase in the number of part time social workers working more than 10 hours over their contracted hours on average.

The Principal Social Worker responded that managers have been made aware of the importance of discussing workload issues in supervision meetings and suggested that issue could be added as a question to next year's survey as it would be interesting to know the reasons why people are working more than their contracted hours.

The panel commented that it would be difficult to get an overall view of what social workers experiences with a low response rate of 52% and suggested that more positive engagement is needed to encourage more people to complete the survey and to see it is a priority for the service. The panel highlighted the importance of getting more responses to future surveys.

The panel queried the survey finding that 26% of social workers reported that there were not satisfied with the quality of their supervision. The panel welcomed the measures outlined in the introduced to respond to this issue.

The Principal Social Worker welcomed the feedback and acknowledged that there was room for improvement and in particular to get more social workers to complete the survey form, while at the same time recognising the challenges of remote working. There was a commitment to increase the survey response rate, for example encouraging managers to allow social workers to leave meetings early in order to complete the survey form and reviewing the numbers of questions.

The panel thanked the presenters again for the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel endorsed the comments of the Cllr Leach Cabinet Member for Adults about the professionalism and dedication shown by the social workers during the pandemic.
2. The panel agreed to receive a progress report on the impact of planned and current actions in response to the issues highlighted in the survey findings to a future meeting of the panel.

8 **Adult Social Care Workforce Health Check 2020**

Courtney Abbott, Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner, presented the findings from the survey of adult social care workforce. The panel were advised that the survey is done annually looking at different areas of practice, how improvements can be made and also what is being done well in regard to social work practice in Wolverhampton.

The survey was extended this year to include the wider workforce of non-Social Work qualified workers as part of efforts to support the continuous improvement of Adult Social Care in Wolverhampton.

The panel were advised that they would be asked to comment and ask questions on three specific areas from the survey findings – workload management, staff wellbeing and equality and diversity. The survey was undertaken between 2 November and 14 December 2020 and all grade five and grade six non-Social Work qualified staff, working directly with people with care and support needs, were invited to take part.

The Advanced Practitioner advised the panel that there was a 33% response rate to the survey, which was slightly lower than last year. In total 100 responses were received. The Advanced Practitioner gave a brief summary of the findings from each of the three areas to the panel and added that information has given a much more rounded picture of adult services as a whole.

A decision was made last year to continue doing a separate survey in recognition of the different roles, but many of the actions and findings are similar to the previous report.

The panel thanked the presenter for the report.

The panel queried the details about workforce retention figures for the service and if there was a view of what good in this situation would look like. The panel also queried if there was a target set to measure progress of the service that would provide a 'barometer' about what was working well. The panel suggested a target would be helpful in understanding this issue better and assessing progress over time.

The Advanced Practitioner accepted of the value in having a better understanding of what a good service looks like and discussed of useful benchmarks for the service that would show this. The Advanced Practitioner gave the example when thinking about supervision and wishing to see 100 % of people getting regular good quality supervision. This would be a challenge to achieve as the nature of social work practice may mean the planned supervision sessions may have to be cancelled or rearranged to meet the needs of the service or in response to a crisis. A figure of 90% would be perhaps a more realistic target. The Advanced Practitioner agreed to

discuss this further with neighbouring authorities to see if there was any consensus about the issue and how it could be quantified.

The Principal Social Worker added that there are regular meetings with other principal social workers in the region, which provide opportunities to share good practice across the region and also to create resources, such as health checks. The benefits of comparing performance locally and nationally and sharing learning was highlighted, but also there was acknowledgement of not wanting to lose local intelligence provided from the annual social work surveys.

The panel commented on the positive benefits of working directly with colleagues in a face to face situation which provides a good source of support and networking opportunities which can help address some of the issues highlighted in the survey responses.

The Cabinet Member for Adults wanted to formally record her thanks for the work and support provided to her by the Principal Social Worker and Advanced Practitioner.

Emma Bennett, Director of Children and Adult Services, endorsed the comments and also highlighted the work done to support them both presenters in their respective roles. The Director welcomed the focus on the issue of health and wellbeing across the Council especially during the pandemic and commented on the work planned to social work staff in the future. The service is looking at developing a wellbeing framework to support all social work staff.

The panel thanked the presenters for their report.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.