

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

10 March 2021

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

Membership

Chair Cllr Rita Potter (Lab)
Vice-chair Cllr Sohail Khan (Con)

Labour

Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi
Cllr Clare Simm
Cllr Rashpal Kaur
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar

Conservative

Cllr Udey Singh

Cyril Randles Representing the Church of England (Lichfield Board of Education)
Wolverhampton Youth Council

Quorum for this meeting is four Voting Members.

Information for the Public

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the Democratic Services team:

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Tel/Email Tel: 01902 551251 or earl.piggott-smith@wolverhampton.gov.uk
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Agenda

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

- | <i>Item No.</i> | <i>Title</i> |
|-----------------|---|
| 1 | Welcome and Introductions
[The Chair to welcome everyone to the meeting. The Scrutiny Officer will then read out a list of those invited to the meeting to confirm who is in attendance.] |
| 2 | Meeting procedures to be followed
[The Chair will explain how the meeting will proceed, how questions are to be asked and any matters of meeting etiquette.] |

MEETING BUSINESS ITEMS

- | | |
|---|---|
| 3 | Apologies |
| 4 | Declarations of interest |
| 5 | Minutes of the previous meeting (5.1.21) (Pages 3 - 8)
[To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record] |
| 6 | Matters arising
[To consider any matters arising from the minutes] |
| 7 | Minutes of the previous meeting (13.1.21) (Pages 9 - 18)
[To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record] |
| 8 | Matters arising
[To consider any matters arising from the minutes] |

DISCUSSION ITEMS

- | | |
|----|--|
| 9 | Spotlight Review - Supporting the Health and Wellbeing of children and young people (report to follow)
[Andrew Wolverson, Head of Children's Strategy and Partnerships, to present report] |
| 10 | Children's Workforce Health Check 2020 (Pages 19 - 32)
[Courtney Abbott, Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner for Children and Adults, to lead presentation] |
| 11 | 2020 Children's Social Work Health Check (Pages 33 - 44)
[Courtney Abbott, Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner for Children and Adults, to lead presentation] |

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Agenda Item No: 5
Minutes - 5 January 2021

Attendance

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Cyril Randles
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi
Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Clare Simm
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Rashpal Kaur
Cllr Sohail Khan (Vice-Chair)

In Attendance

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
Bill Hague	Head of Business and Support Services
Emma Bennett	Director of Children and Adult Services
Martin Stevens	Scrutiny Officer
Julia Cleary	Scrutiny and Systems Manager

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Welcome and Introductions**

Cllr Rita Potter, Chair, welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting and advised it was being live streamed to the press and public. Cllr Potter 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 Potter 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, confirmed the list of people in attendance at the meeting.

3 **Apologies**

Councillor Beverley Momenabadi declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda 5 as a Governor of Bilston Primary School.

4 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

The following members of the panel declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 5.

5 **The Vision for School Organisation in Wolverhampton 2020-2022**

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, introduced the report and explained that the Local Authority has a duty to provide a sufficient number of appropriate places for all the children who wish to be educated in Wolverhampton. The Cabinet Member commented on the challenges to achieving this as a result of legislative changes which have led to the introduction of free schools, academies schools over the years. As a result, the Local Authority has had to adopt a much more subtle process of negotiation and consultation with the various educational providers working in the City. The Cabinet Member commented on the difficulty in preparing the report and praised the contributions which have required a whole department effort to complete.

The Cabinet Member highlighted the importance of having correct data to inform planning decisions and the document gives the framework needed to ensure that children of all ages and abilities have a school place available to them whilst at the same time helping to maintain a healthy school environment. The Cabinet Member commented on the predicted increase in the demand for school places in the future and work being planned to meet the need for places as detailed in the document.

The Cabinet Member commented on the work done to consult with a wide range of organisations in the preparation of the document that was considered to be fit for purpose to ensure that over the next few years that the Local Authority has the right number of spaces in the right places.

Bill Hague, Head of School Business and Support, introduced the report and briefed the panel on the key points of the report and the main findings from the responses to the consultation. The Head of School Business and Support advised that the document is the latest iteration of the school place planning strategy for the City.

The document was being presented for pre-decision scrutiny and comment before the report is presented to Cabinet for approval at a meeting on 20 January 2021.

Cabinet will be asked to note the outcomes of the external consultation and the impact of demographic uplift on the demand for future school places and the need to identify and develop appropriate solutions to meet anticipated demand. The consultation started on the 18 March 2020 to gather views from key partners.

The Head of School Business and Support advised the panel that the Council is not in full control of all the factors in meeting the demand for school places and commented on the role of Regional Schools Commissioner in the process.

The Head of School Business and Support commented that the strategy also covers the closure of schools as well. The Head of Business Support commented that the strategy will help to deliver an inclusive education system in the City and expressed the commitment to meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities

The consultation received 52 responses which was much higher than the previous consultation which had only 25 responses. The Head of School Business and Support commented on the changes made to the strategy document in response to Government announcements on capital funding for schools rebuilding programmes. The aim is to be in the position where the Local Authority can readily react to any opportunities that may arise to secure funding for either rebuilding existing schools or the building of new schools in the City.

The Head of School Business and Support advised the panel of the plan to publish an annual review of the condition and suitability of temporary accommodation in maintained schools. There is a small number of temporary buildings used for teaching still within the city in varying conditions and some which have fallen into disrepair. The Head of School Business and Support added that while some are relatively new there are some of that will start costing money in order to be kept in an appropriate condition. The plan is to undertake an annual condition review survey of temporary buildings and to use this with information provided nationally by DFE which has a scheduled timetable for undertaking a building condition survey. There was concern expressed about the time taken by Government to produce their report and also that it was considered to be subjective and tended to rely on repairs and maintenance reports.

The Head of School Business and Support commented on the commitment to develop environmentally friendly school buildings and cited examples of eco-friendly primary schools that are more energy efficient. A local primary school is due to open in the City which will be first passivhaus school of this type in the country to be built this way and a good news story.

The Local Authority is keen that any new school builds or any large expansions in the City are also environmentally friendly and developed using modern methods of construction to meet passivhaus standards.

The panel were advised that a new free school is due to open in 2022. This school will be a two-form entry primary school in the Wednesfield South Ward. A meeting has been arranged with Ward Councillors tomorrow just to update them on the proposals

The Head of School Business and Support commented on the need to have strong working relationships between schools and the City and also between the different council services in particular children services.

The panel were briefed on panel on a pilot project which will involve the co-location of social workers in a school which is expected to make better use of land and building assets.

The Head of School Business and Support commented on a recommendation in the document to review the usage of school sites and rationalising the school estate to help the Council meet its climate change objectives. The point was made that the policy would not be about taking land from schools but having professional conversations with schools around land that is not being used and which is over and above what the current guidelines require. This is; however, a longer-term aspiration and will be discussed further with colleagues across the Council.

The Head of School Business and Support commented on charts in the report which showed the movement of pupils between Wolverhampton and areas outside at both primary and secondary school levels. These charts showed a closing of gap in recent years between parent wanting to send their children to schools neighbouring authorities rather than apply to local schools. This change reflects the improving educational performance of schools in the City.

The Head of School Business and Support commented on the graph in the report which shows growth in primary school which will need action being taken in future years to make sure the local authority is providing sufficient school places. The increased demand for primary school places has impacted on the projected demand for secondary school places which peaks in 2022. The Head of School Business and Support commented on the work being done to produce sufficient school places for 2022 and the criteria that would be applied when deciding which schools should be expanded.

The Local Authority has a responsibility for spending public money and it is important to make sure that any schemes provide value for money and are located in areas of high demand and can meet the needs of existing communities and those of emerging communities in the future. The document will be used as a framework for introducing extra school places.

The panel were invited to comment on the report and make any recommendations as appropriate. The panel queried for process for approving the establishment of an academy. The Head of School Business and Support responded that following legislative changes and advised that any schools must either be an academy or a free school and explained the process. The Local Authority cannot build any new maintained schools. In recent years the introduction of new schools has been done with the creation of free schools which are centrally funded. In this situation, local authorities would be expected to find a site for the school

The panel welcomed the focus in the report in delivering quality education and expressed concern about expanding schools that are not performing well and wanted assurance that school educational performance and quality of provision would be among factors considered and not just the opportunity to increase the number of places to meet demand. The Head of School Business and Support reassured the panel of the commitment in the strategy to creating high-quality school places.

The panel welcomed the initiative in the report to co-locate different services and the current pilot to locate social workers in secondary schools. The panel requested a more detailed report to a future meeting of the panel to include feedback from both the social workers teachers and pupils at those schools where the pilots happening to understand the successes and challenges. Emma Bennett, Director of Children's

and Adult Service, agreed to the request and suggested that a report could be presented to the panel in September 2021.

The Director of Children's and Adult Service advised the panel that Wolverhampton was selected as one of number of pilot areas across the country to trial the scheme. In the scheme there are social workers placed in six secondary schools, and then another six schools that will be used as comparators. The scheme has been running since October 2020.

The panel queried the reference in the report about the use of land around schools to build extra provision and the limits that would be applied. The Head of School Business and Support explained the policy and offered reassurance that the policy would not mean using all the available space around a school when planning a school expansion. The overall viability of the proposed expansion would be considered and there is a commitment to maintaining green space areas around schools. There are some sites in the City that have huge amounts of land that are in excess of the school's needs, which could be used other purposes, but any decision would also need to fit with the overall school expansion strategy.

The panel were queried whether the service had employees or external people with the necessary skills and experience to successfully deliver the expansion of school places to meet the expected increase in demand. The Head of School Business and Support reassured the panel that the service has access to the necessary expertise internally and where necessary externally to deliver the programme. The service has successfully provided sufficient school places of high quality in the past.

The panel discussed the issue of the recommendation in the document that a school place is available within a maximum walking distance of two miles (for a child under 8 years old) and up to a maximum of three miles (for a child over 8). To ensure that pupils can access a local school and that travel times are reasonable. The panel queried when decisions are made about increasing the number of places at a school if consideration is given to any transport issues such as the frequency of bus service for children and bus routes available to them that may already be an issue before it is agreed. The Head of School Business and Support reassured the panel the travel and accessibility issues are factors that will be considered when planning for schools and explained the work done to try to ensure that pupils have access to schools within a reasonable distance. The Head of School Business and Support accepted the challenges presented to young people as a result of changes to bus service routes across the City. The ongoing challenge for the service is to have outstanding education for everybody in the City and making what is on offer at primary and secondary levels as good as it can possibly be.

The panel queried the response from schools to the issues caused by the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact on partnership working. The Head of School Business and Support commented on the positive response from schools and the praised how well schools are working together across the City to respond to the various challenges. The Head of School Business and Support commented on the positive partnership working relationships between schools and the Local Authority.

The panel welcomed the report and supported the recommendations detailed in the City of Wolverhampton Education Place Planning 2020-2022' strategic policy document and refer report.

The panel wanted to place on record their congratulations to Cllr Momemabadi on her award as Young Councillor of the Year by the LGIU national award in November 2020.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed that the minutes of the panel meeting be submitted to Cabinet for their consideration.
2. The panel agreed to receive a report on the national project which is trialling the co-location of social workers within schools to a meeting September 2021.

Attendance

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi
Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Rashpal Kaur
Cllr Sohail Khan (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar

Co-opted Members (5)

Cyril Randles Church of England – Diocese of Lichfield Representative
Anna Tabner, Wolverhampton Youth Council
Kiesha Riley, Wolverhampton Youth Council

In Attendance

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member Education
Cllr John Reynolds, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
Julia Cleary	Systems and Scrutiny Manager
Helen Winfield	Head of Community Financial Support
Alison Hinds	Deputy Director of Children's Social Care
Courtney Abbott	Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner for Children and Adults
Emma Bennett	Director of Children and Adult Services

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Welcome and Introductions**

Cllr Rita Potter, Chair, welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting and advised it was being live streamed to the press and public. Cllr Potter 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 Potter 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.

3 Apologies

Apologies were received from the following member of the panel:

Cllr Claire Simms

4 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 Minutes of the previous meeting (11 November 2020)

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2020 be approved as a correct record.

6 Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

7 Spotlight Review - Safeguarding the most vulnerable

Alison Hinds, Deputy Director of Children's Social Care, presented the report about the work done to support vulnerable children. The Deputy Director outlined the response of the service since the 23 March 2020 when the Council workforce including social workers and members of the MASH team were advised to work from home due to national lockdown restrictions. The Deputy Director commented that the majority of staff adapted well to changes. The service has worked closely with partner agencies to support vulnerable children during the period.

The service introduced alternative methods to communicate with children and families such as social media apps. The service had quickly implemented risk assessments of all children registered to help understand where the risk of vulnerability was and their need for safeguarding. All cases were rated according to outcome of risk assessment. The Deputy Director commented that some children liked the option of virtual meetings using either Teams or WhatsApp while others wanted to continue with face-to-face meetings. The service monitors daily performance information to ensure proper oversight and reassurance that children are being seen according to their risk assessment.

The Deputy Director commented on the charts detailing visits made to vulnerable children and changes in performance since the start of the lockdown. The number of visits reduced in March but has improved in later months.

The Deputy Director commented on the work done with parents of children in need of support and the work done to encourage them to send their children to school. The Deputy Director presented a chart on number of vulnerable children attending school. The DFE has offered support to vulnerable children through a rollout of Government laptops loan scheme to allow them to access online learning resources.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that meetings concerning vulnerable children have continued remotely using Teams. The feedback from children and young people has been positive and attendance rates has also improved which has helped to improve multi agency decision-making. The learning from the experience will be used to adapt the approach taken in the future to get the most out of the opportunities when working remotely with children. The service initially suspended face-to-face family meetings at the start of the pandemic but there are now increased opportunity to do this with reopening of the Family Time Centre.

The Deputy Director commented there has been a significant decrease in the number of referrals to the MASH during early stages of the lockdown. The majority of referrals were made by the police and there was a high incidence of referrals involving domestic abuse due to children being at the home. The increase in referrals reflects the situation of what was happening nationally.

The Deputy Director commented on the range of support offered to care leavers.

The Deputy Director commented on improvements in the stability of placements, particularly internal foster placements. The service continues to encourage children to be involved with participation and engagement groups, which have continued virtually. Health assessments for children in care have also continued virtually and the feedback has been positive from children who have liked the feeling of being in more control of the situation.

The Deputy Director explained the changes to the temporary statutory guidance issued in April 2020. Further updated statutory guidance was issued in September 2020 which reduced the use of previous flexibilities for children's social care services. The guidance supported the temporary model of working which had already been implemented. The Deputy Director briefed the panel about the range of additional support offered to families.

The panel thanked the Deputy Director for the presentation.

The panel queried when the extension of Stay Safe Be Kind helpline to families experiencing financial and emotional vulnerabilities would end. The Deputy Director advised the panel that the helpline service will continue to offer families support but other referral pathways have been developed according to need.

The panel wanted to record their formal thanks and appreciation of the work done by children services teams to support families and their commitment to care leavers.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.

8 **Children's Social Care Self Evaluation**

Alison Hinds, Deputy Director, Children's Social Care, presented a report which detailed the findings of a mid-year review of children and young people's services as part of a self-evaluation exercise.

The Local Authority is required to produce a self-evaluation report. The information collected is helpful in understanding how the Local Authority is delivering its services, what is being doing well and what needs to be improved. The information is also a useful source for Ofsted when reviewing the performance of services. The Deputy Director referred to previous comments on the impact of the national pandemic on the service.

The Deputy Director commented on the implementation of a new electronic children's record reporting system called Eclipse. The system went live on 21 September 2021 and enables the service to record the whole of a child's journey to be recorded on one system.

The Deputy Director commented on the successful migration of data from the old to the new system, with only a small number of issues and overall, the whole transition has been really positive.

The Deputy Director commented on demographic profile of the City's population and advised the panel that there are 263,357 people who live in the City, 62,276 of these are children under the age of 18. The Deputy Director provided an analysis of the number of children receiving support as at the September 2020 and commented on the reduction in the number of children and young people in care.

The service is continuing to see a reduction in the number of children young people in care and there is a program of making sure services are directed at the right level to children and families across the City. The service continues to work virtually and monitor children with a Child Protection Plan. The Deputy Director commented on the decrease in the numbers of children in need, which is lower than usual, but this may be due to impact of Covid. The Deputy Director commented on the early provision of services and the work with local partners to offer families professional support.

The Deputy Director commented on the values of the Children Services and gave details about the progress made to apply them in practice. The provision of services for children in need of help and protection The services was last inspected by Ofsted in March 2017. Ofsted made a further inspection visit in September 2018 and the findings highlighted areas for development, which have been included in service improvement plan.

The service is committed to giving children the best start in life. The Deputy Director commented on the key themes in the Plan on a Page 2020-2021 document and highlighted examples of work being done to achieve them.

The Deputy Director commented on the findings from quality assurance work and explained how the service has significantly improved the way in which audit is undertaken and the value of the information collected during the process in helping managers to understand the impact of services delivered to children and families. The feedback from the audit process has been well received by the workforce.

The Deputy Director commented on improvements in the recruitment and retention of children's social workers and that the overall picture was very positive, with the vacancy rate at 15.8 per cent. This compares to 28 per cent vacancy rate in children's social work posts in March 2019. The stability in workforce also helps to create greater stability for children and families.

The Deputy Director commented that the service is working hard to reduce the rate of exclusions from schools in Wolverhampton. The service has introduced the Culture of Belonging programme which is a whole system approach to supporting schools to be inclusive and to provide alternative options to exclusion. The programme is supported by schools and other partners in the sector. The service has increased resource to support children in families where there is a risk of exclusion, if extra help is needed. The Wolverhampton Child Contact Centre has now re-opened and offers a setting for more intensive family support work.

The Deputy Director commented on the range of work being done to support children at risk of exploitation and advised the panel that there will be a review of how existing services respond to reported concerns about vulnerable children. The work will be supported by a programme of training and workshops.

The Deputy Director commented on the number of missing children in Wolverhampton which has increased steadily over the last few months. This is due to the police changing their processes regarding missing and absent classification. The service expected the number of reported cases when schools reopened in September 2020 to surge, but the picture locally and nationally has been instead a small increase in the numbers. The expectation is that the number of missing children will remain stable. The stability of placements has improved during the period of the report.

The Deputy Director commented on the work of Fostering Service and reported that 127 children from across the Black Country were matched to adopters and of these 46 were Wolverhampton children. The Adoption@Heart regional adoption agency which is hosted by Wolverhampton is working well with 51 prospective adopters approved in its first year of operation.

The Deputy Director commented on the data about the health and wellbeing of children in care and the work being done to understand their emotional health and well-being particularly during this period. The service is using regular assessments to gather information and also to meet the Council's statutory responsibilities for reporting on looked after children. The Deputy Director commented on the impact of work done by social workers and other professionals which has contributed to the improved educational outcomes for children and young people.

The rate of school attendance for children in care is high with low levels of persistent absence and there was no one who was permanently excluded from school in the 2019/20 academic year. Furthermore, six Wolverhampton care leavers graduated from University in 2020 and currently there are 26 care leavers in higher education.

The service is working hard to support employment, education and training opportunities for care leavers and is very conscious of the impact that Covid-19 has had on this particular age group.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that care leavers have a choice of accommodation provision including; supported lodgings dependent on their needs, training flats, and independent accommodation for people aged over 18. The Housing Support Service has 33 flats. Each young person living in one of these homes has a designated Housing Support Worker (HSW) who remains with them throughout their time in the service. The level of support varies but there is a

maximum of up to 30 hours available per week. As the young person progresses, the number of hours of support will decrease. The level of support would be set out in an individual support plan for each young person.

The Deputy Director advised the panel of the summary of achievements in 2019-2020.

The panel wanted to record their formal congratulations on level of commitment across the service to support children and young people and excellent progress made as detailed in the presentation.

The panel queried the information on the number of school exclusions and the work of Culture of Belonging programme to provide alternative options. The panel requested more details about the programme. The Deputy Director advised the panel that the programme is a whole system approach which involves working together with school partners to not only reduce the number of exclusions but also to promote inclusivity in schools. There is a focus on supporting the young person with issues and taking a multi-agency approach. The programme is supported by extra workers, who will also be working with the family of the young person.

The panel queried if there was data that could be shared about the impact and effectiveness of the programme in achieving its stated aim. The Deputy Director advised a report could be presented to a future meeting but added the disruption caused Covid 19 which has led to lengthy school closures would make comparison on school exclusions to the previous period difficult.

The Deputy Director suggested than an update on the programme to a future meeting which include information on the success of the programme in reducing the number of school exclusions.

The panel queried how vulnerable children with ADHD or special needs have been affected Covid-19 restrictions and school closures and how they are coping with the disruption caused.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that child assessments have continued since the start of the pandemic and gave reassurance about the work being done to encourage and support vulnerable children to attend school.

The panel queried the support for children with special needs who may be reluctant to attend school and there was concern that issues may not picked up when they are at home. The Deputy Director reassured the panel about the work done with parents and carers to offer continuous support and encouragement to vulnerable children. The service has increased capacity. In addition, the service has increased the capacity in the Attendance Team.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that there was an expectation that attendance would not be high at the start of September but the service provides follow-up support to the more vulnerable children who either were struggling with confidence issues or who had health and safety concerns. The service is also working closely with the increasing number of families who are chosen to home educate their children.

The panel requested that a report which gives details about the use of specialist assessment tools referred to in the presentation to a future meeting. The Deputy Director gave examples of the assessment tools used by social workers and explained that their use would depend on the needs of the family.

The Deputy Director agreed to present a report to a future meeting of the family.

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member Education, praised the dedication and efforts of the employees working in Children Services in supporting families under very difficult circumstances since the start of the pandemic.

The Cabinet Member also highlighted the improved situation in terms of improving outcomes for children and the reduction in the number of children in care compared to that of neighbouring authorities.

Cllr John Reynolds, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People also wanted to formally record his thanks for employees who have contributed to the improvements highlighted in the report. The Cabinet Member also thanked the work of the schools and the partnerships which have contributed to this success.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the progress.
2. The panel agreed that the Deputy of Director, Children's Social Care, to present a report to a future meeting of the panel on the assessment tools used by service when determining the level of support offered to families and their children.

9 **Welfare Rights Briefing**

Helen Winfield, Head of Community Financial Support, introduced the presentation. The Head of Community Financial Support in response to a query advised the panel that there was no news about the continuation £20 weekly benefit increase currently given to people receiving Universal Credit after March 2021. The LGA and other organisations are lobbying the Government to extend the scheme.

The Head of Community Financial Support advised the panel of the structure of the Welfare Rights Team and explained that the service provides advice and information to social workers in order to support families through the benefits claiming process. The service also undertakes complex casework to challenge DWP decisions.

There is a recognition that the need for Council services and resources is often due to financial instability as a result of benefit loss or underpayment. The Head of Community Financial Support commented on the impact of the implementation of Welfare Reform measures on social security benefit claimants.

The underpayment of social security benefit was highlighted as contributing to the issue of financial instability more so than other welfare reform measures such as the benefit. More recently the pandemic has affected people who were perhaps financially secure before with the expectation that as restrictions are relaxed their situation will improve and therefore this will decrease the need for Council services and resources.

The Head of Community Financial Support presented a chart detailing a comparison between the potential and actual benefit and explained the reasons for the decline in gains 2019/2020 compared to previous years. The Head of Community Financial Support added that the service is supporting children and families who need financial support calculations or who going through a process of permanent placements for children and young people in care.

The Head of Community Financial Support advised the panel that CYP Financial Officers have been undertaking Financial Support Calculations (FSCs) for permanent placements for children and young people in care since 2015.

However, in November 2017, the FSC Policy was revised. This resulted in an increased amount of work for the Welfare Rights Officer as the calculations were more complex. As a result of the revised policy there was, and continues to be, increases in revenue gains. However, this has increased the amount of work involved in the FSCs and reduced the Welfare Rights Officer's ability to do benefit maximisation work, hence the decline in benefits gains figures since this time.

The panel queried how the service is promoted to the public who may need help and the referral process.

The Head of Community Financial Support responded that it is second tier service and its primary function is to support social workers and people in the voluntary sector.

If the benefit case becomes complex and representation at a tribunal is needed then there is a referral process for the voluntary sector.

The panel welcomed the report.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.

10 **Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel 2019 20 - Draft Work Programme**

Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, introduced the report and detailed the agenda for the next meeting on 10 March 2021. The Scrutiny Officer advised that the issues discussed at the meeting will be used to inform the work programme.

The panel discussed the issue of the difficulties experienced by children being taught remotely, which has highlighted the digital divide. The panel requested a report to be presented on the work being done to meet different needs and support remote learning. Cllr Beverley Momenabadi, Digital Innovation Champion, advised the panel of sources of help available schools who are struggling with accessing sufficient laptops or mobile devices and other challenges such as the lack of mobile data and broadband or children having to share laptops. The panel were also advised that Councillors can also use their local ward funds to help meet needs from schools. The panel were advised to contact the Councillor directly to discuss the different options available to support schools in meeting their needs.

The panel agreed to receive a report to a future meeting to discuss the issue of the digital divide and the work being done to get children online.

The panel discussed concerns about the mental health impact on young people as a result of the pandemic and also on their emotional wellbeing. The Director of Children's and Adult Services advised the panel that on the agenda for the next meeting is a spotlight on health and well-being. The report will include an update on the emotional well-being of young people.

The panel suggested that an update report on the school improvement strategy which comments on an gaps in provision and also progress made. The panel agreed to add this issue as a future work programme item

The panel discussed the apprenticeships and job opportunities for care leavers, particularly given the challenging employment situation. The panel agreed to add this item to a future work programme.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to update the panel work programme to include the items suggested during the discussion.

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Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

10 March 2021

Report title	Children's Services Workforce Health Check 2020	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Director for Children's and Adult Services	
Originating service	Children and Young People	
Accountable employee(s)	Andrew Wolverson Tel Email	Head of Service 01902 555550 Andrew.wolverson@wolverhampton.gov.uk
	Courtney Abbott Email	Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner Courtney.Abbott@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Children and Young People Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board	4 February 2021 25 February 2021

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the findings of the Children's Services Workforce Health Check for 2020.
2. Provide comment and challenge on proposed actions to improve the health of the children's services workforce.

1.0 Purpose

1.1 The City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) carries out an online survey each year to check the “health” of its social workers. For the second year, the survey was also sent out to the wider children’s workforce. This report presents an overview of the findings of this survey and concludes with areas identified for improvement and to improve practice in the city.

2.0 Background

2.1 Good practice carried out by a “healthy”, motivated workforce can lead to improved outcomes for people and families as well as reduced demand and costs. The national Social Work Task Force final report, published in November 2009, recommended a framework to assist employers and practitioners to assess the “health” of their organisation on a range of issues affecting the workload of social workers and to support the implementation of a set of national Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework.

2.3 The framework identifies five key topics to support organisations to undertake a self-assessment to identify current strengths and areas that require improvement. The five key topics are:

- Effective workload management
- Pro-active workflow management
- Having the right tools for the job
- A healthy workplace
- Effective service delivery

2.4 The survey was sent out to 301 employees between 2 November-14 December 2020. Non-social work qualified employees at grade five and above who work directly with children and young people or manage teams that do were invited to complete the survey. This is a very diverse workforce and is made up a variety of roles such as Educational Psychologists, Family Support Workers, the Virtual School team and Strengthening Families Workers. There was a total of 100 responses (33%) from across all of the service areas.

- Strengthening Families – Early Intervention Team 36.1%
- Specialist Support 16%
- Inclusion Support 14.3%
- Children and Young People in Care 14.3%
- MASH 5.9%
- Youth Offending 4.2%
- Other 4.2%
- Safeguarding 2.5%
- Strengthening Families – Social Work Team 1.68%
- Prefer not to say 0.8

3.0 Overview and key findings

- 3.1 The average number of people being supported (caseload) across all services was 15.5, compared to 27 in 2019. It is difficult to know what a reasonable workload is, however, due to the varied nature of the different roles represented in this survey.
- 3.2 93% of the respondents felt that their workload was manageable and the majority never, rarely or occasionally experience stress. Sickness due to stress at work was not particularly high most said that they have not been required to carry over annual leave due to their workload making leave difficult to take.
- 3.3 There were a number of respondents who stated that they work over their contracted hours to keep up with their workload. Full time workers work an average of 5 hours over their contracted hours, slightly more than the 1.9 hours over they worked in 2019. Part time workers work an average of 3.3 hours over, less than the 6.9 hours they worked over in 2019.
- 3.4 The average number of hours spent working directly with children, young people and families is 17 hours for full time employees and 9.8 hours for part time employees, which is similar to the results of the 2019 survey. Due to the diversity of roles it is difficult to draw conclusions what would be an expected figure for this. However, a number of respondents indicate that they spend a large proportion of their time inputting data onto systems. When asked what they would change about their job if they could common responses included:
- More time for direct work
 - Less paperwork
- 3.5 Almost all respondents said they receive regular supervision and this is an improvement from 2019 (96% in 2020 and 90% in 2019). The vast majority are satisfied with the support they receive from their manager (89.5%) and with the quality of their supervision (82%).
- 3.6 Just under half said that they have had an observation of practice in the past year, less than the almost 64% in 2019. Some workers said that this did not occur because of Covid, moving teams or just coming back from maternity leave. 63.7% of the respondents who said they experienced an audit or observation of practice during practice weeks said this was a positive experience and allowed them to reflect on their practice, develop their skills, and receive independent, constructive feedback.
- 3.7 Most (88%) felt that there is effective and appropriate communication between frontline staff and management and responses indicate that team meetings are generally taking place either monthly or weekly. Almost all said that they felt able to contribute to their team meeting agenda. 28% agreed that they are involved in and consulted about proposed changes and about the same number disagreed with this, with the majority neither agreeing nor disagreeing with this statement.

- 3.8 Until the Covid pandemic began, managers were regularly holding Coffee and Conversation meetings along with attending different team meetings. While senior managers continue to engage with the workforce as much as they can, the Engagement Plan is being revisited in light of restrictions imposed through Covid-19 in order to establish how leaders can reengage with the workforce.
- 3.9 The majority of respondents (more than 70%) said they are enthusiastic about their job, feel their skills are being utilised effectively and are proud to work for CWC. Most (79%) are planning to stay with CWC in the next 12 months. Some comments about what made them feel positive this year included:
- Good learning and development opportunities
 - Flexible working during Covid and smooth transition to home working.
 - Workers have positive impact on children and families.
- 3.10 Almost 65% agreed that CWC is a learning organisation with a positive learning culture and 52% said they were satisfied with the learning and development opportunities available. Only 10% of respondents said they were not satisfied and would welcome more learning and development opportunities and time to undertake training. A significant number (37%) neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 3.11 14.5% of respondents said that they feel that in the last 12 months there have been times when they have been unfairly treated on the grounds of protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. The council is committed to upholding the highest standards of conduct and ethics and has launched a safe space for colleagues to report any serious concerns about any aspect of the Council's work.
- This year, the Council will be commissioning training to support managers to facilitate good conversations around Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion and creating safe spaces within supervisions or individual discussions.

4.0 Recommendations and actions

- 4.1 An action plan has been produced as a result of this survey to address the key areas highlighted in this report. This plan will be overseen and reviewed by the Children's Workforce development board. The findings of the Health Check and actions will be shared with teams and will inform workforce development plans for the coming year. The plan incorporates improvement actions including:
- Although almost all of the respondents said that their workload was manageable, every supervision should include a robust discussion around workload and workload management to ensure workers can be supported before their workload becomes unmanageable.
 - Further training on the new Eclipse system will be offered to ensure that workers are better able to use the resources available that will increase the amount of time they have to spend working directly with children, young people, and families.

- In order to help improve communication between managers and staff, including ensuring that workers feel that they are consulted and involved in proposed changes, the Engagement Plan is being revisited in light of restrictions imposed through Covid-19 in order to establish how leaders can reengage with the workforce. Regular social work briefings will also continue as will practice weeks, although these will need to remain virtual until it is safe to do this in person.
- While stress levels have improved this year, some additional stress is expected due to Covid. Managers will ensure that monthly supervision as well as regular team meetings allow people to talk about their stress levels and seek out support in reducing this stress.
- Managers will continue to offer flexibility where needed to help people balance their work and home lives. The nature of working in Children's Services means that there is sometimes a requirement to work out of hours or longer hours than usual. When this occurs, managers will ensure that workers 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.
- Stress risk assessments are offered when needed.
- 14.5% of respondents felt that there had been times in the past 12 months when they have been unfairly treated on the grounds of protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Senior managers welcome conversations about this and encourage workers come to them if they feel they have been treated unfairly.
- Training is being commissioned to support managers to facilitate good conversations around Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion and creating safe spaces within supervisions or individual discussions.
- Workforce development plans incorporate equalities training this coming year.
- The council is committed to upholding the highest standards of conduct and ethics and has launched a safe space for social workers to report any serious concerns about any aspect of the Council's work. The Council have appointed SeeHearSpeakUp to provide an external and independent confidential reporting service for all colleagues.
- It is important for Panel to note that as Covid restrictions start to relax, the workforce will start to move back toward working in a more "normal" way, including office working at least part of the week. The Council want to assure Panel that the health and wellbeing of the workforce will continue to be a priority and support will continue to be in place to help workers manage workloads, stress and different working and personal responsibilities.

5.0 Update from 2019 survey

5.1 When the 2019 survey was presented, Panel requested an update on what the Council did to ensure action was taken around areas that needed to be improved. The main areas for improvement included:

- In 2019, some workers said that they were working in their own time to keep up with their work and some workers said that they regularly felt stressed. Management responded by:
 - Reviewing the workload dashboard regularly to monitor workloads.
 - Auditing the quality of supervision to ensure workload management and stress levels were addressed and workers were supported and this was backed up by the 2020 findings where more workers said that they regularly discussed workload management in supervision.
 - In 2020, fewer workers said that their workloads were unmanageable so this appears to have been successful. However, workers are working about the same number of hours over their contracted hours so this suggests factors other than workload are contributing to this. It could be that the pressures of Covid are meaning that workers are taking longer to complete tasks while balancing home responsibilities as well (childcare, home schooling, caring for elderly/vulnerable family members, etc.).
- In 2019, some workers said that they spent a lot of time inputting data and completing admin tasks. This continues to be an area of focus from the 2020 survey.
 - Eclipse was expected to reduce this but was only launched in September 2020, just one month prior to this survey being circulated. It is thought that once practitioners get used to the new system this will improve.
 - Workers will have support to fully access the tools available in Eclipse which are intended to save time and reduce duplication.
 - Further training will be provided to support social workers to capture the child's story/journey in a concise and proportionate way which evidences defensible decision making.
- In 2019, some workers wanted more learning and development opportunities. This continues to be an area of focus after the 2020 survey.
 - The Workforce Development team continued to work with Heads of Service to explore training needs.
 - Training opportunities continued throughout 2020, although this was primarily via webinars and virtual learning due to the Covid pandemic.
 - The social work apprenticeship programme continues to offer the opportunity for those eligible to apply to gain a recognised qualification.
 - The wider workforce briefings were re-established and will take place twice each year.
- In 2019, a number of workers said that they did not feel they were consulted and involved in proposed changes. This is similar in 2020.

- An Engagement Plan was developed and signed off by the Children and Young People Leadership Team in June 2019 and is currently being revisited in light of the pandemic.
- Senior Managers, including the Director of Children’s Services, continued to attend team meetings and host regular “coffee and conversation” mornings up until the Covid-19 restrictions were put into place.
- The CYP round-up continued to be circulated, and this highlighted upcoming events and changes.
- Practice Weeks continued which allowed senior managers to visit teams. However, this was completed virtually from March 2020 which meant that workers may not have had an opportunity to speak to or see a senior manager unless they were being audited or observed.
- As the 2020 results were slightly lower, this continues to be an area for development with a particular focus on how communication and engagement can happen during the pandemic.

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 workplan and priorities will be funded from within the Children’s Services overall budget of £52.2 million.
[JB/17022021/C]

7.0 Legal implications

7.1 There are no legal implications arising out of this report.
[SB/14022021/V]

8.0 Equalities implications

8.1 Social Care is a diverse profession and the makeup of the social care teams in Wolverhampton is largely representative of the local community. The diversity of the children that are supported by Child in Need / Child Protection and Children and Young People in Care teams are also largely representative of the diversity of the city as a whole.

9.0 Climate change and environmental implications

9.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising out of this report.

10.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications

10.1 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 the workforce about how they feel about working for Wolverhampton and how we can work to make

improvements where necessary to ensure that the workforce feels that they are happy and supported at work.

11.0 Human resources implications

11.1 There are no human resource implications arising out of this report.

12.0 Corporate landlord implications

12.1 There are no specific corporate landlord implications arising out of this report.

13.0 Covid Implications

13.1 Covid has had an impact on the overall health of the workforce, as evidenced by stress levels reported. Senior managers are aware of the impact this has on workers and continue to support the wellbeing of the workforce in balancing their work and personal circumstances.

14.0 Appendices

14.1 Appendix A: 2020 Children's Services Workforce Health Check Dashboard

Children's Services Workforce Health Check

February 2021

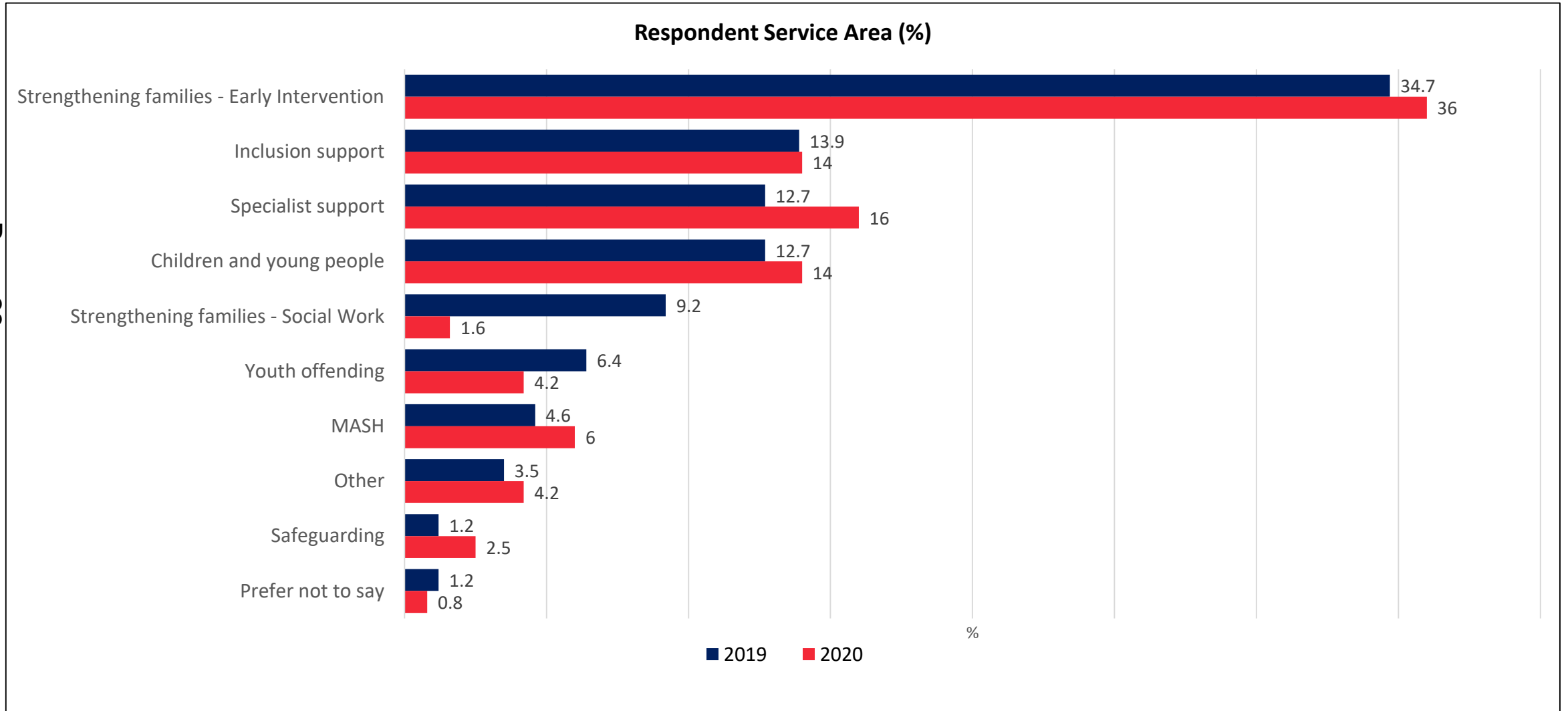
Courtney Abbott

wolverhampton.gov.uk

Children's Workforce Health Check 2020

Effective Workload Management

Page 28

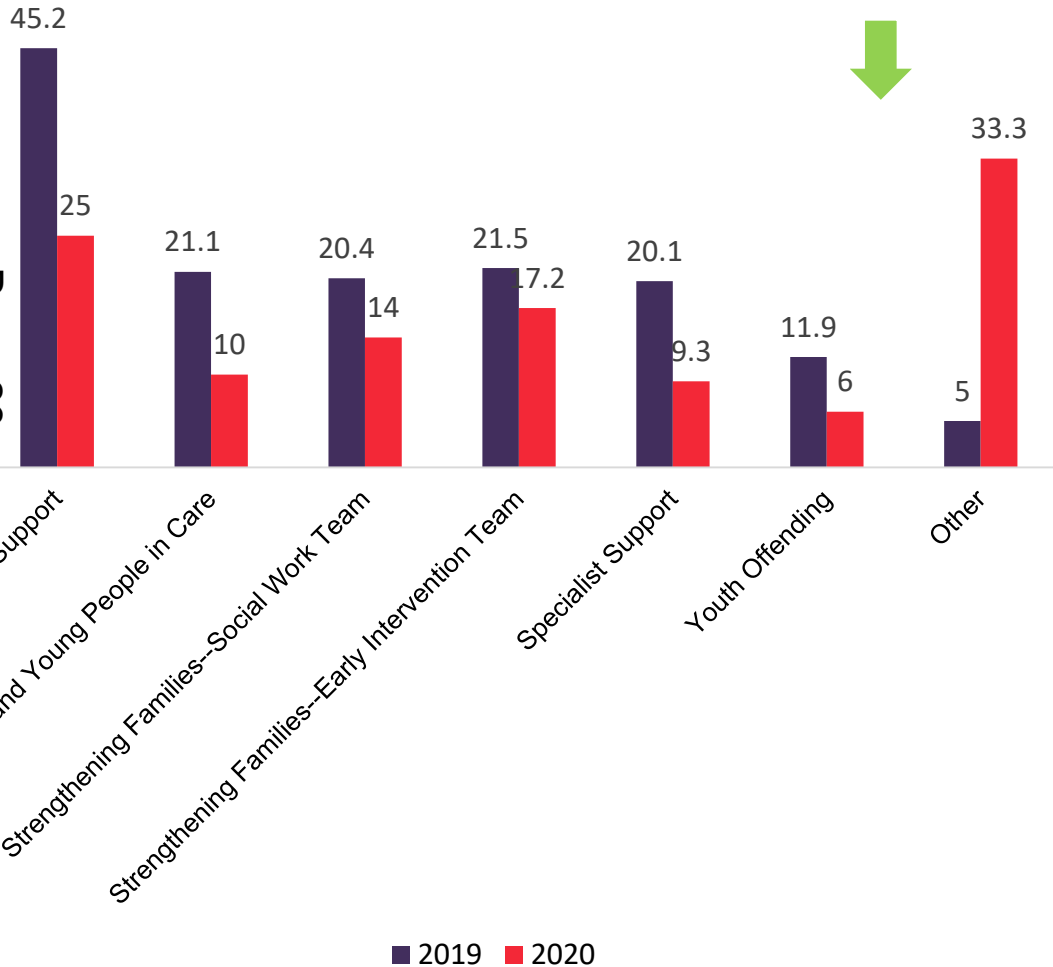


Children's Workforce Health Check 2020

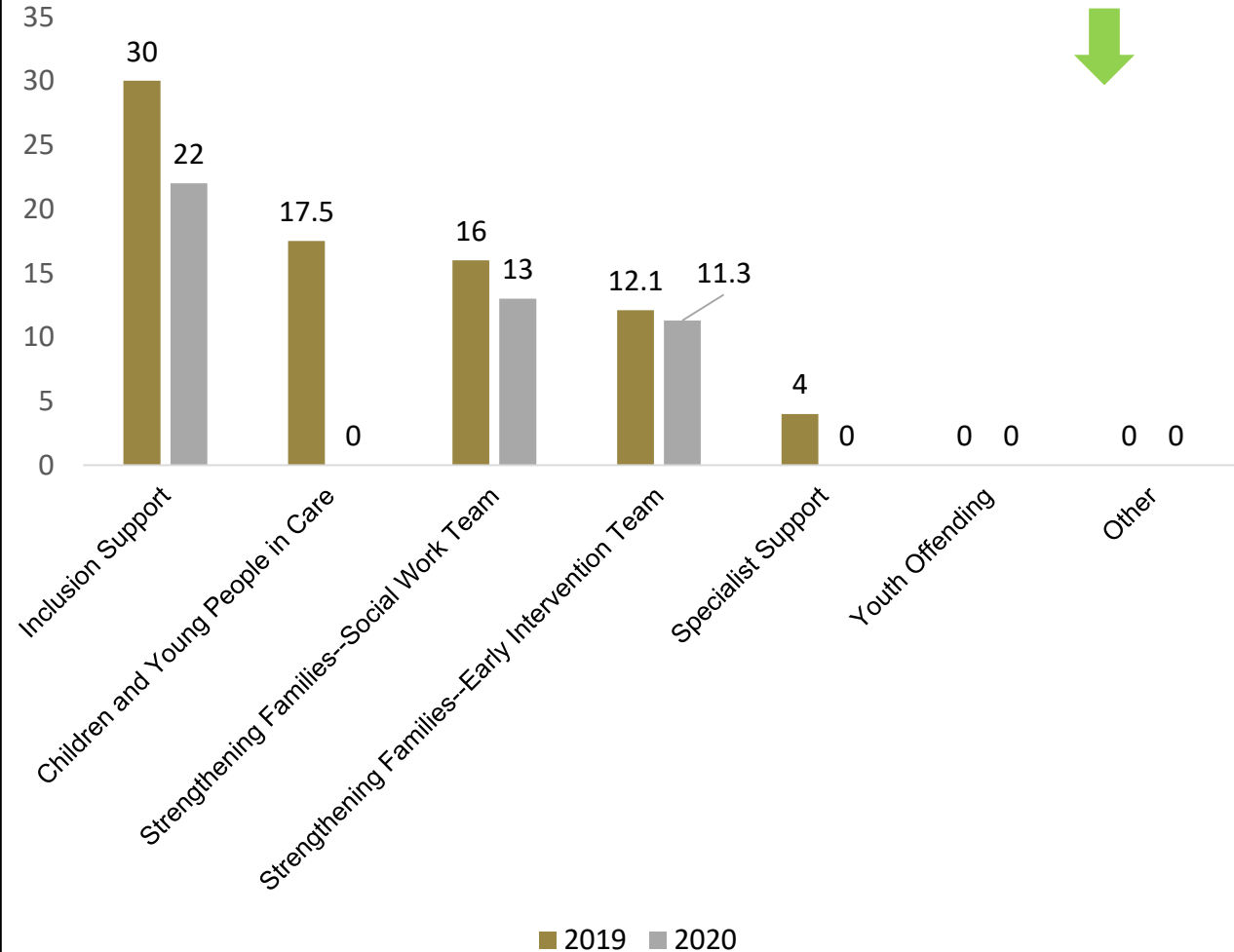
Effective Workload Management

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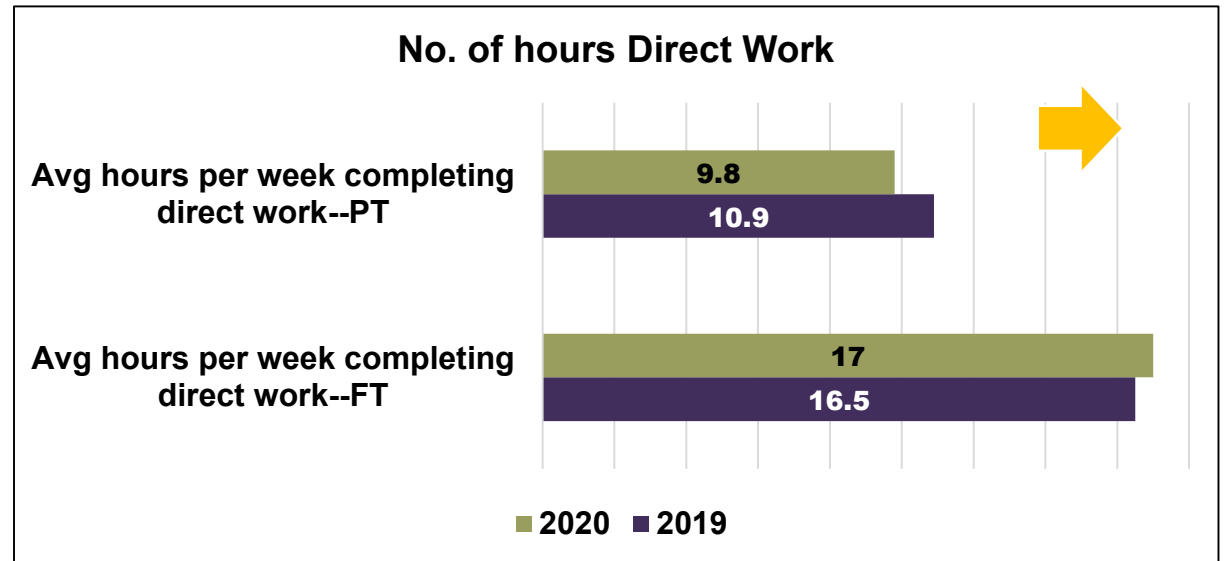
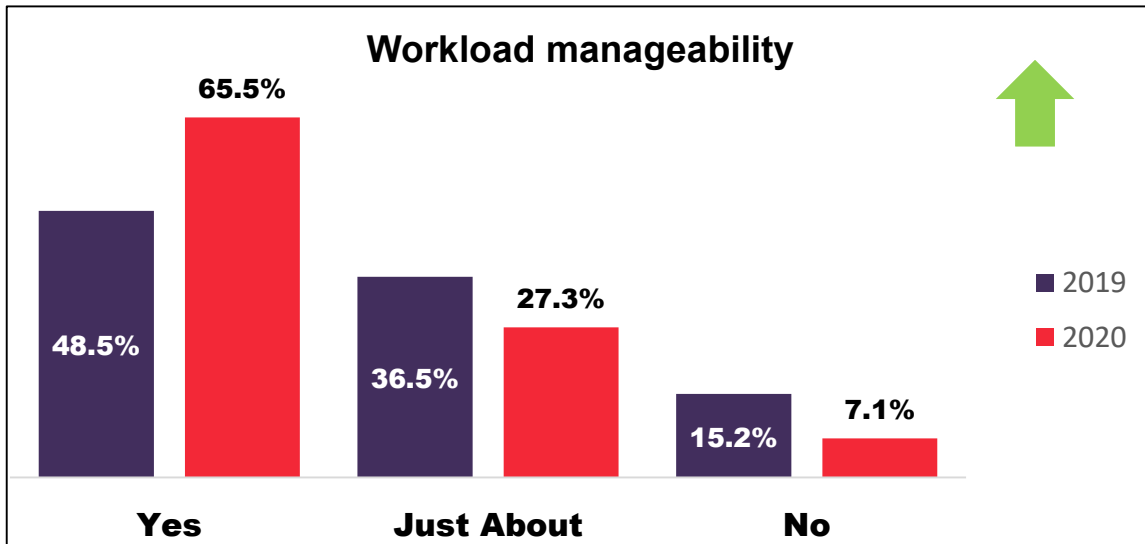
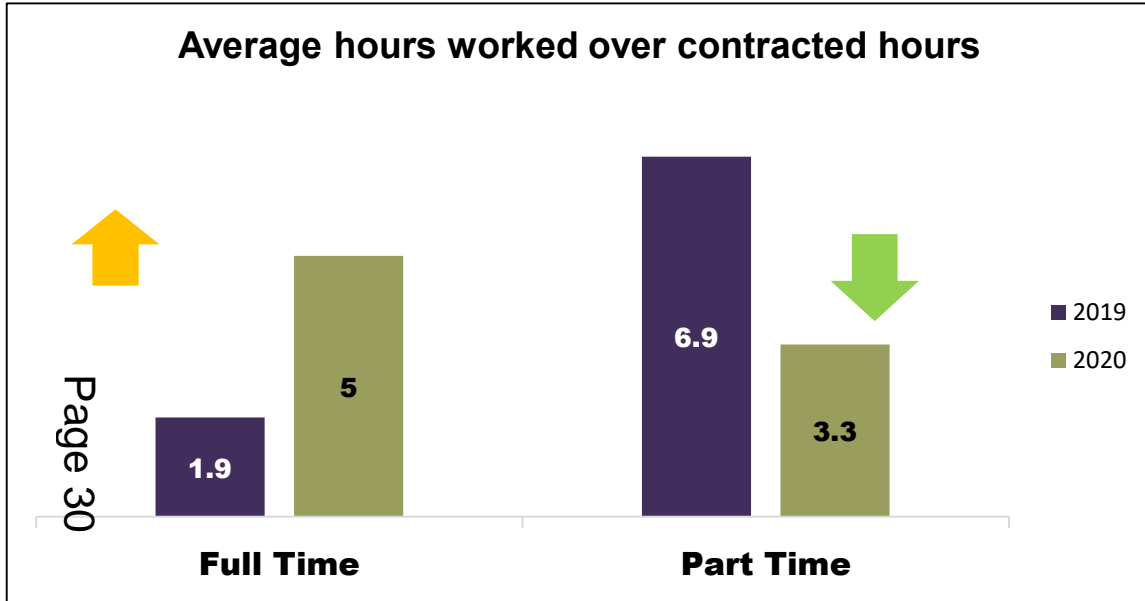
Avg CYP and Families Supported—Full Time



Avg CYP and Families Supported—Part Time



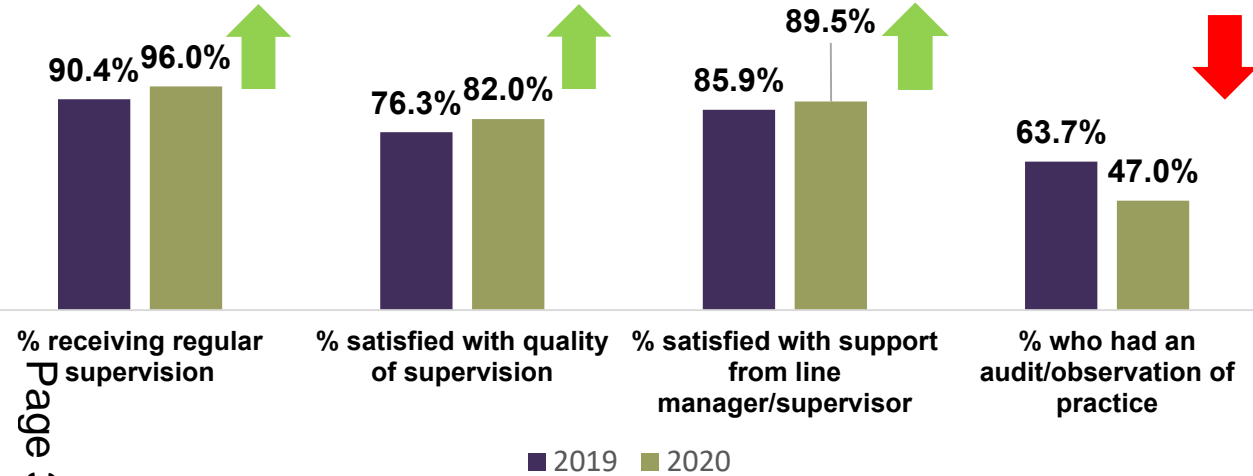
Effective Workload Management



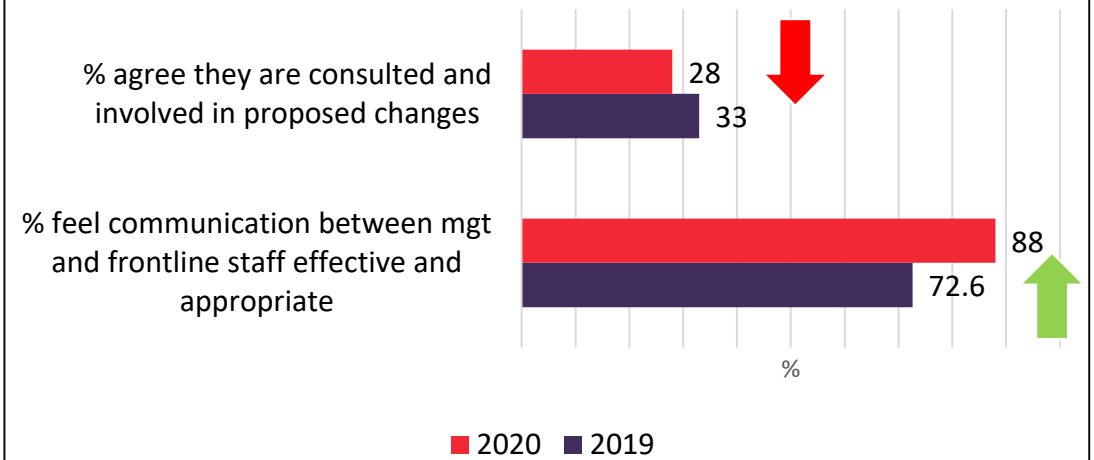
Children's Workforce Health Check 2020

Having the Right Tools for the Job / Healthy Workplace

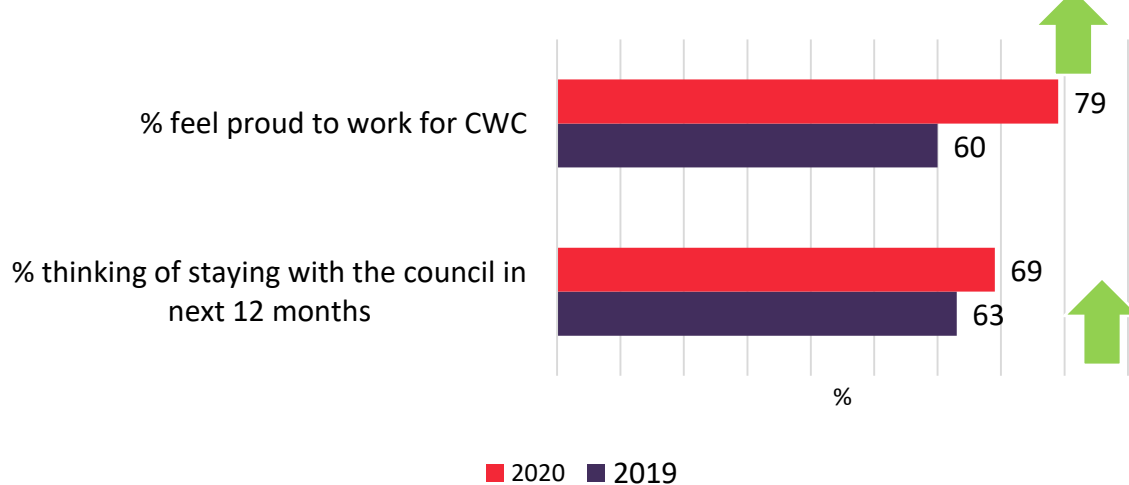
Supervision and Support



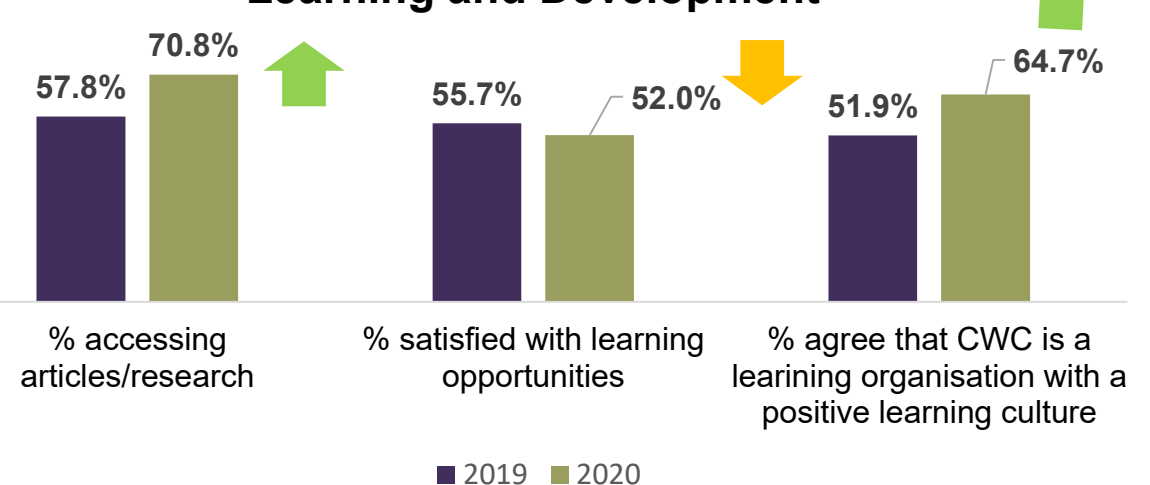
Communication & Consultation



Pride & Retention



Learning and Development



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Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

10 March 2021

Report title	Children's Social Work Health Check 2020	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Director of Children's and Adult Services	
Originating service	Children's Social Care	
Accountable employee(s)	Andrew Wolverson Tel Email	Head of Service 01902 555550 Andrew.wolverson@wolverhampton.gov.uk
	Courtney Abbott Email	Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner Courtney.Abbott@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Children and Young People Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board	4 February 2021 25 February 2021

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the findings of the Children's Social Work Health Check for 2020.
2. Provide comment and challenge on proposed actions to improve the health of the social work workforce.

Purpose

- 1.1 The City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) carries out a survey each year to check the “health” of its social workers. This is part of our ongoing self-assessment in order to inform our improvement journey. This report presents an overview of the findings of this year’s survey.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Good social work practice carried out by a “healthy”, motivated workforce can lead to improved outcomes for people and families as well as reduced demand and costs. This year a range of work has been undertaken to ensure that statutory social work services for children is delivered at the right level, is effective, takes place in a timely way and supports families to make sustainable change. The success of this work is evidenced in the reduction of demand across the Children and Young people service. Children in need numbers have reduced from 1,037 in 2017-2018 to 821 in 2018-2019, the number of children subject to a Child Protection plan have reduced from 379 to 330 and the number of children in care has reduced from 648 to 624.
- 2.2 The national Social Work Task Force final report, published in November 2009, recommended a framework to assist employers and practitioners to assess the “health” of their organisation on a range of issues affecting the workload of social workers and to support the implementation of a set of national Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework.
- 2.3 The framework identifies five key topics to support organisations to undertake a self-assessment to identify current strengths and areas that require improvement. The five key topics are:
 - Effective workload management
 - Pro-active workflow management
 - Having the right tools for the job
 - A healthy workplace
 - Effective service delivery
- 2.4 The key findings are presented from each of the five topics and concludes with areas identified for improvement and to improve social work practice in the city.

3.0 Overview and key findings

- 3.1 The Health Check was circulated to 210 social workers via an online survey between 2 November 2020 and 14 December 2020. A total of 115 responses (55%) were received, although not every respondent answered every survey question. The response rate in 2019 was 60%.
- 3.2 The findings of this year’s Children’s Social Work Health Check is mostly positive, with progress evident in a number of key areas.

- 3.3 Average workloads have slightly increased from 20 in 2019 to 21.6 in 2020. However, this is still really positive and remains below the average in 2017 and 2018.
- 3.4 80% of full-time workers and 90% of part time workers feel that their workload is manageable; this is really positive and an improvement from 2019 when 59% of full-time workers and 5% of part time workers felt this way. However, while the majority of Independent Reviewing officers said their workload was manageable, more respondents from this area said that their workload is unmanageable this year.
- 3.5 In 2020, full time workers said that they worked 9.6 hours over their contracted hours, slightly more than in 2019 when they worked 8.8 hours over. Part time workers said that they worked fewer hours over in 2020, 4.4 hours over compared to 11.7 hours over in 2019. Social work is a notoriously demanding profession which often requires workers to work over their contracted hours. However, managers and workers should be discussing this within supervision to ensure that social workers are taking this time back through additional time off.
- 3.6 More social workers are receiving monthly supervision (77% in 2020 compared to 52% in 2019), are satisfied with the quality of their supervision (82% in 2020 compared to 73% in 2019) and are satisfied with the support they receive from their line manager (84% in 2020 compared to 71% in 2019).
- 3.7 More social workers than ever are regularly accessing research articles. 79% of social workers said that they are accessing research articles, compared to 66% in 2019, 63% in 2018 and 38% in 2017. This is a real positive and will help ensure that children and families in Wolverhampton receive a good quality social work service.
- 3.8 More social workers this year think that CWC is a learning organisation with a positive learning culture and 76% said that they are satisfied with the learning opportunities available, which is an improvement from 2019 when this was 64%.
- 3.9 Most social workers (73%) plan to continue to work for CWC over the next 12 months and 79% feel proud to work for Wolverhampton.
- 3.10 There has been a slight increase in social workers who regularly feel stressed (50% in 2020 compared to 45% in 2019), however fewer social workers have taken sick leave due to work stress. Also, as more social workers feel that their workload is manageable this stress is likely caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the requirement for workers to balance personal responsibilities and working from home.
- 3.11 Fewer social workers have had an observation of practice in 2020, 55% compared to 59% in 2019. While practice weeks have continued, remote working has had an impact on the ability for observations to take place as regularly as usual.

- 3.12 Social workers reported that they spent less time working directly with children, young people and families this year which, again, is understandable due to restrictions in place due to Covid-19. As restrictions are reduced, there should be an increase in the hours that social workers spend working directly with children, young people and families.
- 3.13 Just under 8% of social workers said that they felt that they had been treated unfairly in the previous 12 months on the grounds of protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

4.0 Recommendations and actions

4.1 An action plan has been completed as a result of this survey to address the key areas of improvement. This will be overseen by the Social Work Development Board. The findings will also inform the workforce development plans for the coming year and will be shared with teams.

4.2 Actions include:

- To help reduce the time social workers spend completing admin tasks, teams will have training to support workers around expectations in regard to documenting work and how to use different tools available in Eclipse (such as embedding photos, voice recordings, etc.). There will also continue to be robust workload discussions in supervision.
- Training around positive, proportionate and concise recording will take place in 2021 which should help to increase the amount of time social workers have to work with children, young people, and families and improve the manageability of workloads.
- In order to help improve communication between managers and staff, including ensuring that workers feel that they are consulted and involved in proposed changes, the Engagement Plan is being revisited in light of restrictions imposed through Covid-19 in order to establish how leaders can reengage with the workforce. Regular social work briefings will also continue as will practice weeks, although these will need to remain virtual until it is safe to do this in person.
- Champions are still not being utilised as expected and this role is continuing to be developed. An Advanced Practitioner for Restorative Practice has been appointed and the Champion role in other areas will continued to be developed.
- Stress is higher this year, which is understandable considering how everyone has been impacted by Covid-19. The Leadership Team is committed to ensuring the wellbeing of the workforce as championed by the Chief Executive.
- Managers will ensure that monthly supervision as well as regular team meetings allow people to talk about their stress levels and seek out support in reducing stress, this includes managing time when a social worker has been required to work over their hours.
- Managers will continue to offer flexibility where needed to help people balance their work and home lives to reduce stress levels.
- The nature of social work 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 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.

- Stress risk assessments are offered when needed.
- Some social workers and independent reviewing officers still feel that their workload is unmanageable. Managers are working to fill all vacant post and sickness cover and almost all have been recruited to. If any of these posts continue to be vacant, agency staff will be used until permanent staff can be appointed.
- Every supervision should include a robust discussion around workload and workload management to ensure social workers can be supported before their workload becomes unmanageable.
- Just under 8% of workers felt that there had been times in the past 12 months when they have been unfairly treated on the grounds of protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. This year, the Council will be commissioning training to support managers to facilitate good conversations around Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion and creating safe spaces within supervisions or individual discussions.
- Equalities champions will be identified throughout Children's services in order to help embed good practice both in working with children, young people, and families, but also within teams.
- Anti-racist practice training was commissioned from the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) in January 2021. Actions from this included:
 - Unconscious Bias training for all employees, not just managers, will be offered.
 - Managers are working to ensure that all interviews include questions around Equalities
- Equality and Diversity is a standard agenda item at all team meetings and has been a feature of social work briefings this year.
- The council is committed to upholding the highest standards of conduct and ethics and has launched a safe space for social workers to report any serious concerns about any aspect of the Council's work. The Council have appointed SeeHearSpeakUp to provide an external and independent confidential reporting service for all colleagues.
- It is important for Panel to note that as Covid restrictions start to relax, the workforce will start to move back toward working in a more "normal" way, including office working at least part of the week. The Council want to assure Panel that the health and wellbeing of the workforce will continue to be a priority and support will continue to be in place to help workers manage workloads, stress and different working and personal responsibilities.

5.0 Update from 2019 survey

When the 2019 survey was presented, Panel requested an update on what the Council did to ensure action was taken around areas that needed to be improved. The main areas for improvement included:

- A number of social workers said that their workload was unmanageable and that they were not having regular supervision. Both of these areas have significantly improved in the 2020 survey. Actions taken by Children's Social Care to improve these areas included:

- A workload dashboard was developed and reviewed regularly and managers made sure to discuss workloads during regular supervision.
- The frequency and quality of supervision was monitored through audit several times throughout the year and feedback was given to workers and managers.
- In 2019, team champions were not being utilised to help promote the expertise in teams. Although work was done to promote champions, this remains an area for improvement from the 2020 survey.
- In 2019, social workers said that they spent too much time completing paperwork and admin tasks. This continues to be an area for improvement. Work that started after the 2019 survey will continue into 2021-2022.
 - Eclipse was expected to reduce this but was only launched in September 2020, just one month prior to this survey being circulated. It is thought that once practitioners get used to the new system this will improve.
 - Workers will have support to fully access the tools available in Eclipse which are intended to save time and reduce duplication.
 - Further training will be provided to support social workers to capture the child's story/journey in a concise and proportionate way which evidences defensible decision making.
- In 2019, some respondents felt that communication from management could be improved and 15% felt that they were not consulted or involved in proposed changes. These areas continue to be an area for development in the 2020 survey so steps taken to improve this will continue.
 - Regular social work briefings were held and continued throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. These became virtual instead of face-to-face which increased capacity for attendance.
 - Prior to the Covid restrictions, senior managers, including the Director of Children's Services, held regular "coffee and conversation" mornings and regularly attended team meetings to engage with staff in different teams.
 - Practice weeks, where senior managers spent time in teams auditing and attending visits and meetings with workers continued but became virtual after the Covid-19 restrictions came into place.
 - The CYP Round-Up, which is an opportunity for recognition of excellent practice as well as to share information, continued to be circulated regularly.
 - The engagement plan is being revisited in light of restrictions imposed through Covid-19 in order to establish how leaders can reengage with the workforce.

6.0 Financial implications

6.0 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

6.1 Any costs arising from actions in the workplan and priorities will be funded from within the Children's Services overall budget of £52.2 million.
[JB/17022021/C]

7.0 Legal implications

7.1 There are no legal implications as a result of this report.
[SB/14022021/V]

8.0 Equalities implications

8.1 Social Work is a diverse profession and the makeup of the social work teams in Wolverhampton is largely representative of the local community. The diversity of the children that are supported by Child in Need / Child Protection and Children and Young People in Care teams are also largely representative of the diversity of the city as a whole.

9.0 Climate change and environmental implications

9.1 There are no climate or environmental implications.

10.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications

10.1 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 we can work to make improvements where necessary to ensure that the workforce feels that they are happy and supported at work.

11.0 Human resources implications

11.1 Senior managers are working to fill vacancies as soon as they are able, even if with agency workers, in order to help keep workloads manageable for social worker.

12.0 Corporate landlord implications

12.1 There are no corporate landlord implications.

13.0 Covid Implications

13.1 Covid has had an impact on the overall health of the workforce, as evidenced by stress levels reported. Senior managers are aware of the impact this has on workers and continue to support the wellbeing of the workforce in balancing their work and personal circumstances.

14.0 Appendices

14.1 Appendix 1: 2020 Social Work Health Check Dashboard

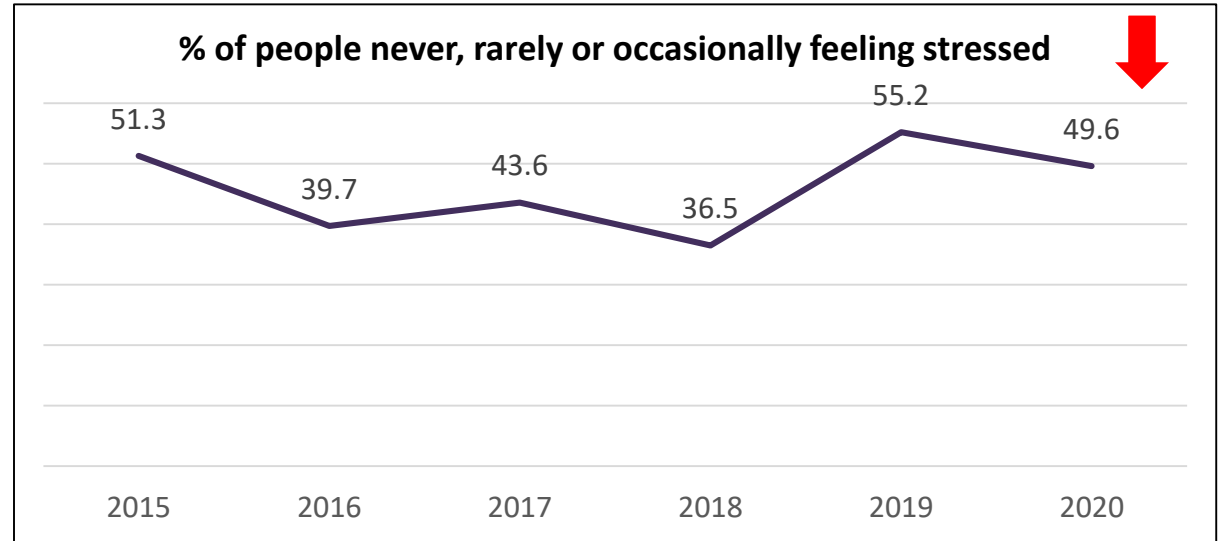
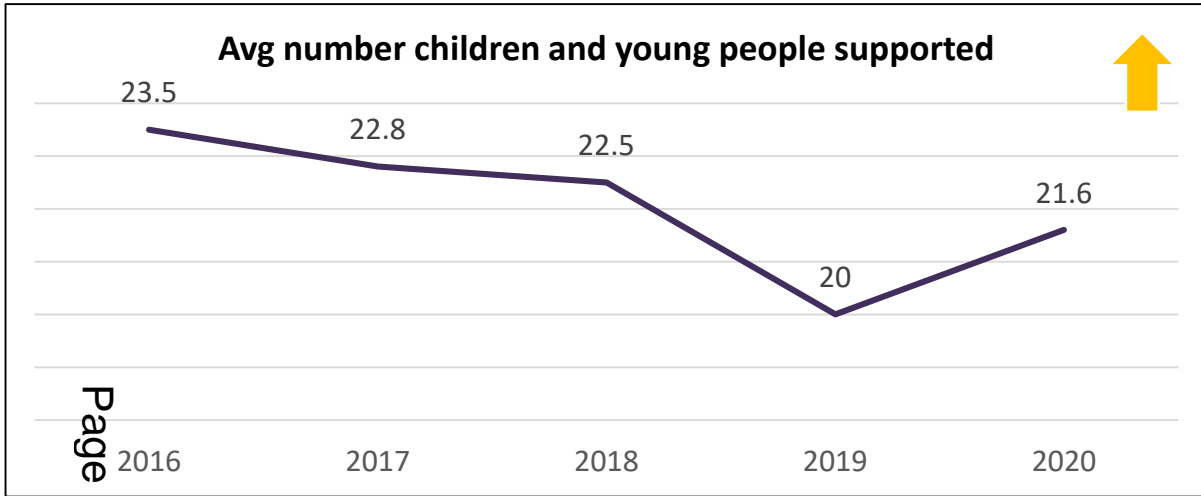
Children's Social Work Health Check

February 2021

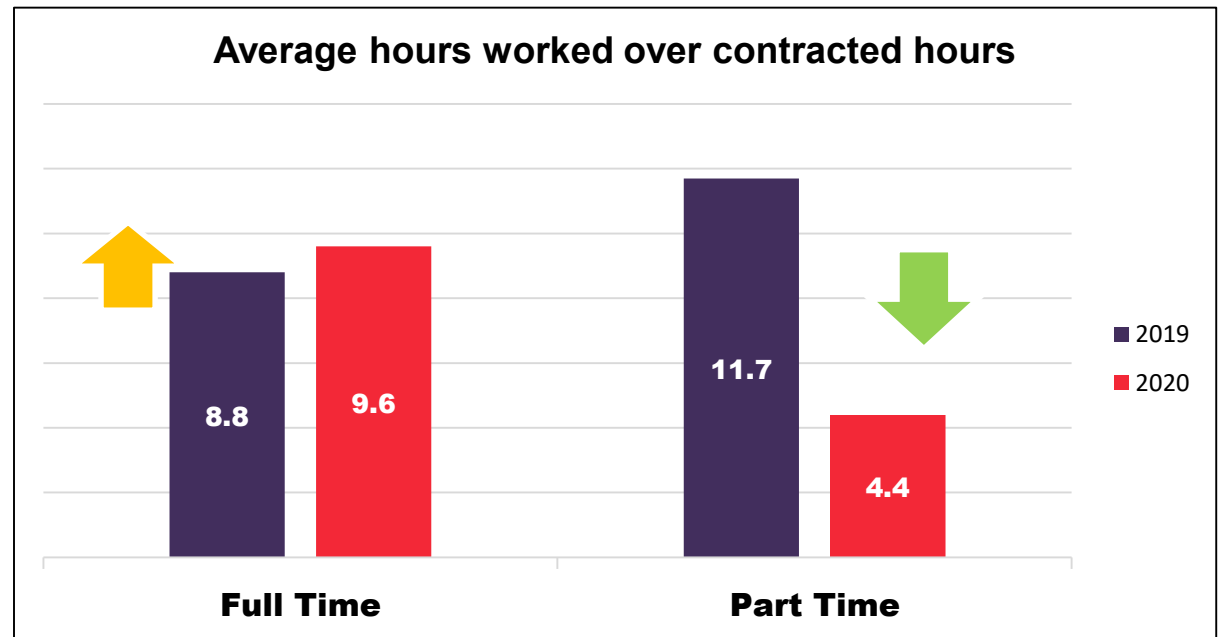
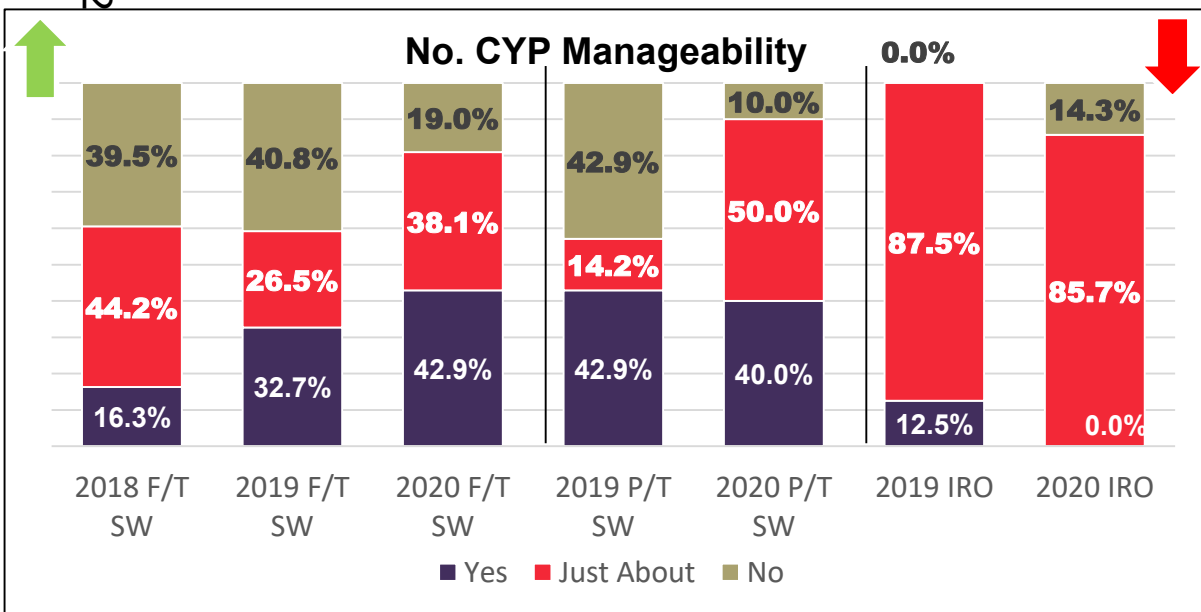
Courtney Abbott

Children's Social Work Health Check 2020

Effective Workload Management



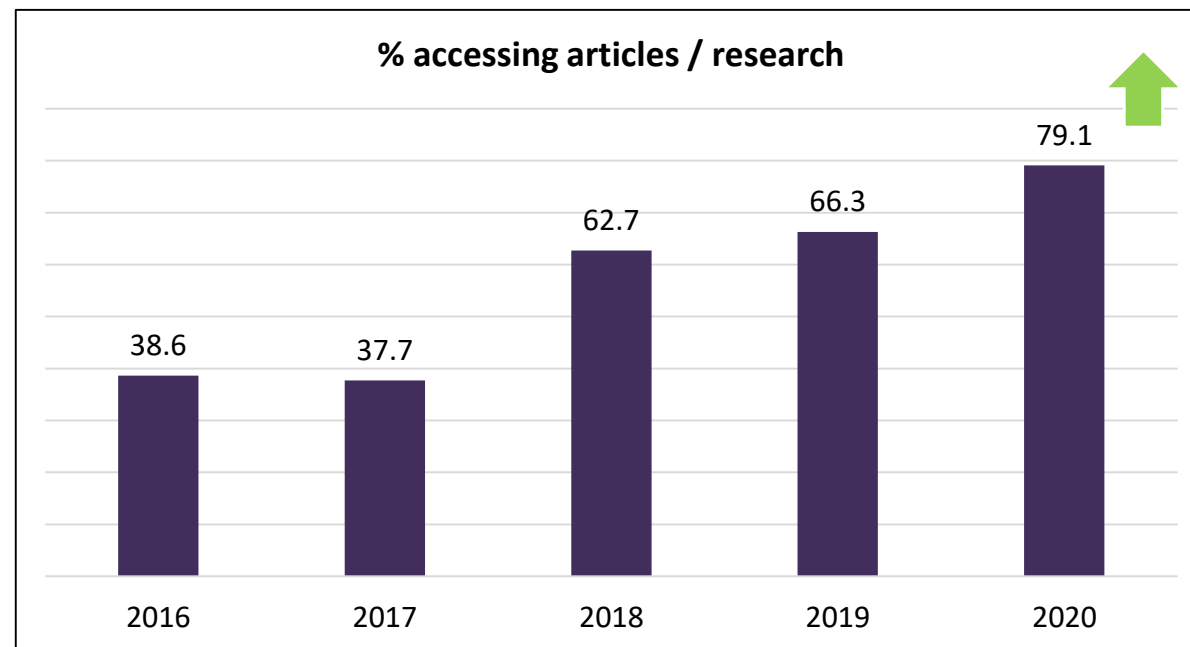
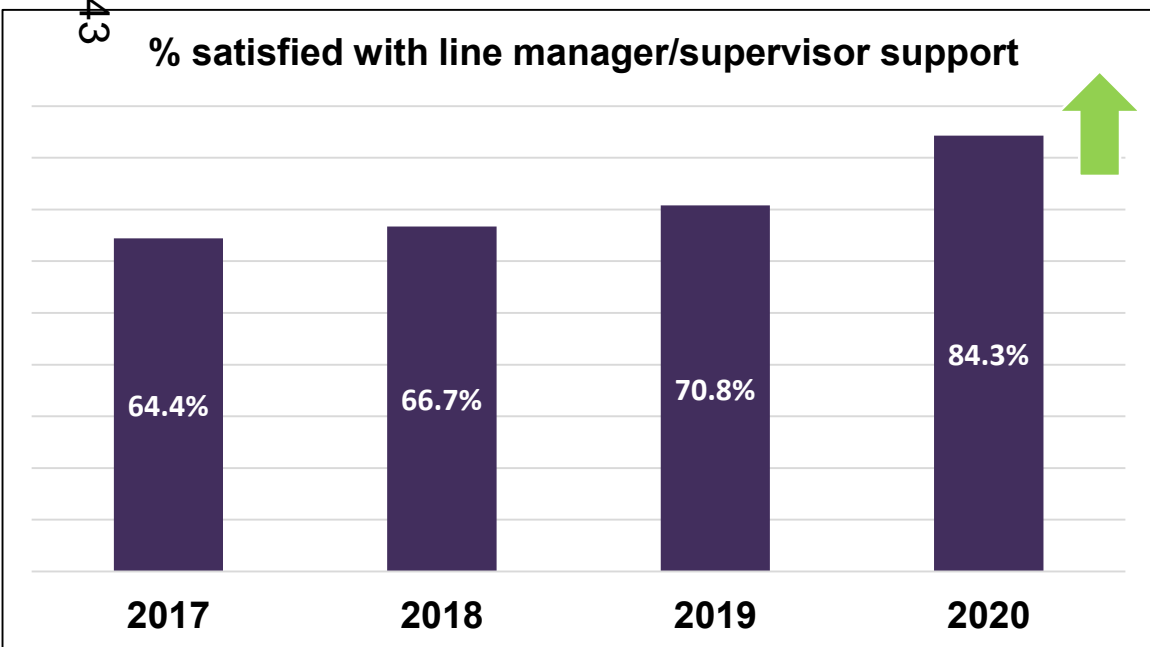
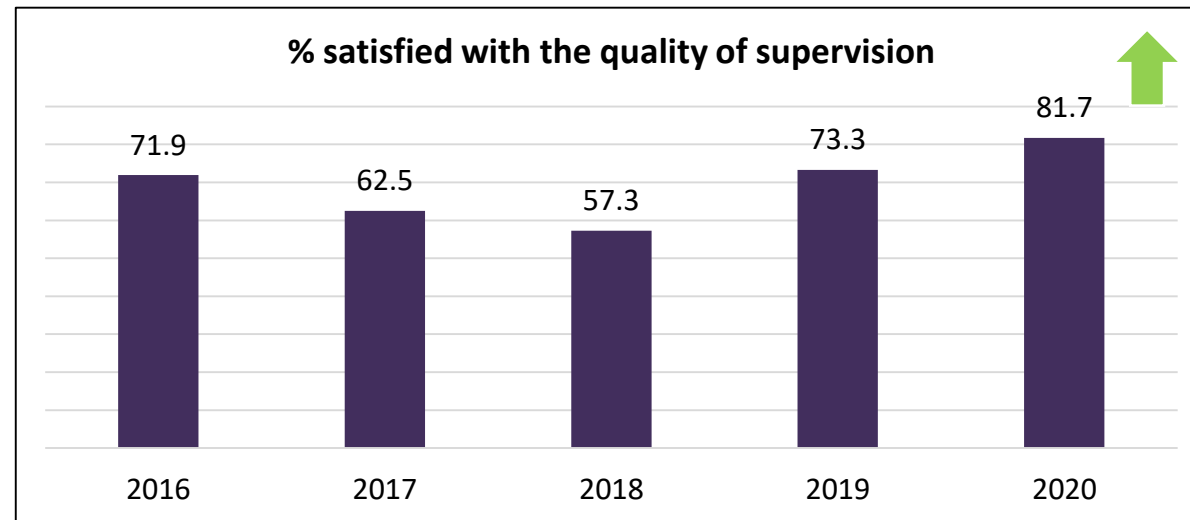
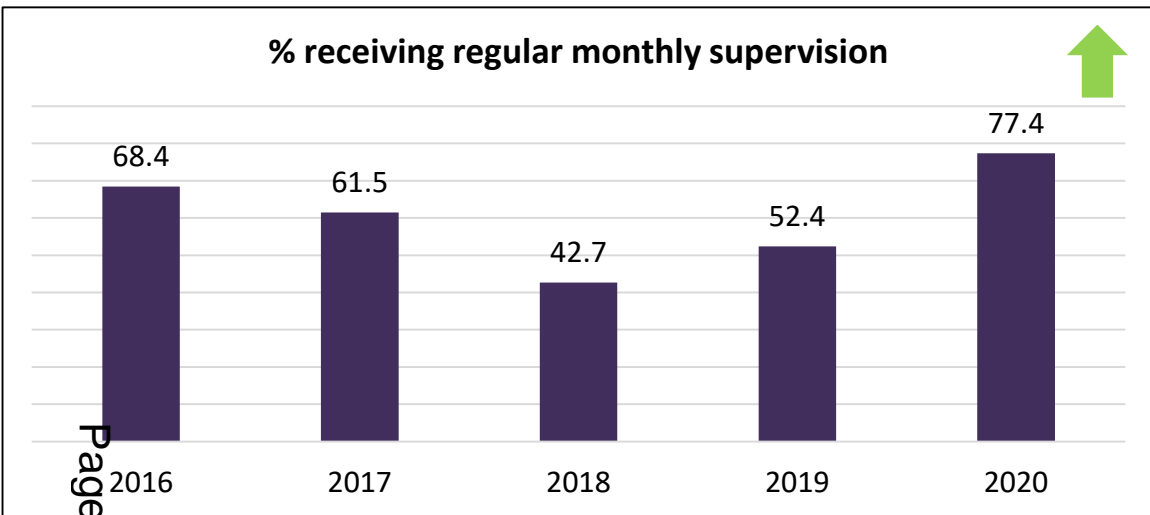
* Note - prior to 2019, the question referred to caseload rather than number of people



* Breakdown for years prior to 2018 not available

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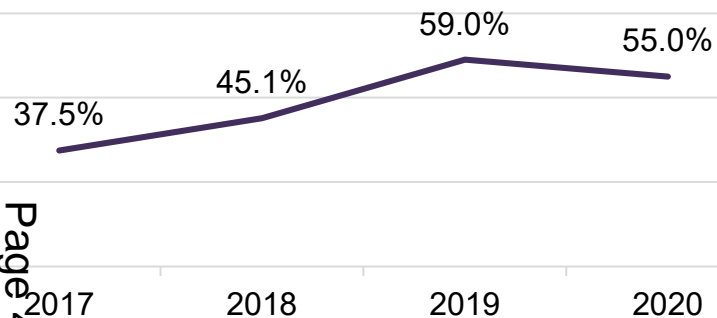
Effective Workload Management / Having the Right Tools for the Job / Healthy Workplace



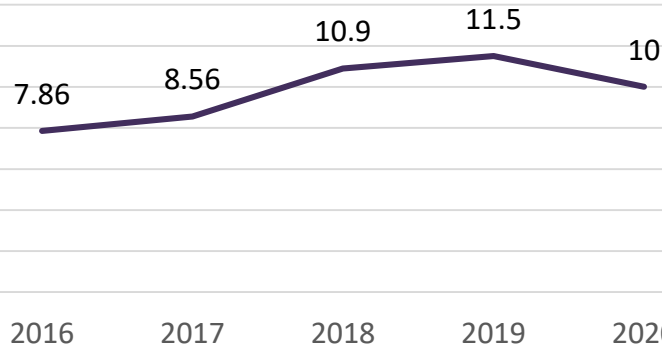
Children's Social Work Health Check 2020

Having the Right Tools for the Job / Healthy Workplace

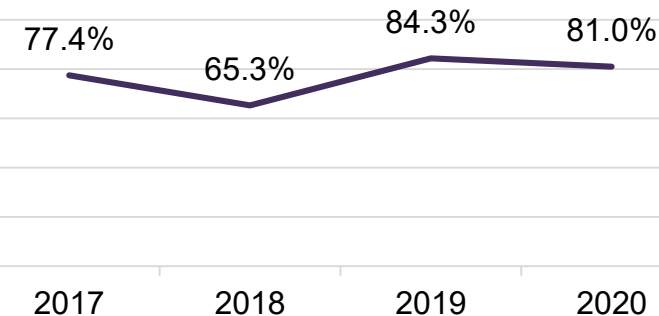
% who have had an observation of practice



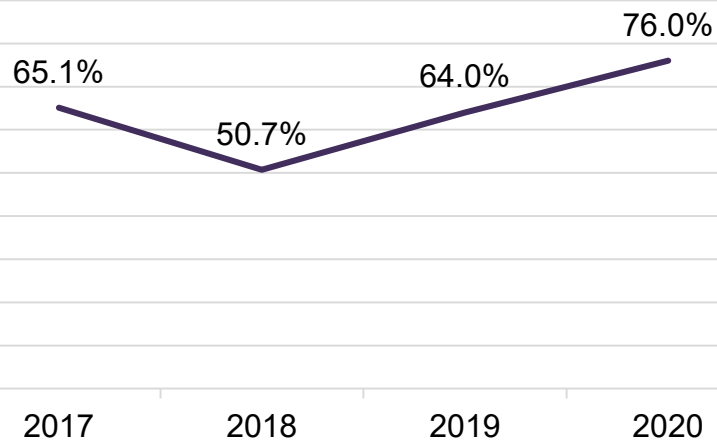
Av no of hours per week direct work with families



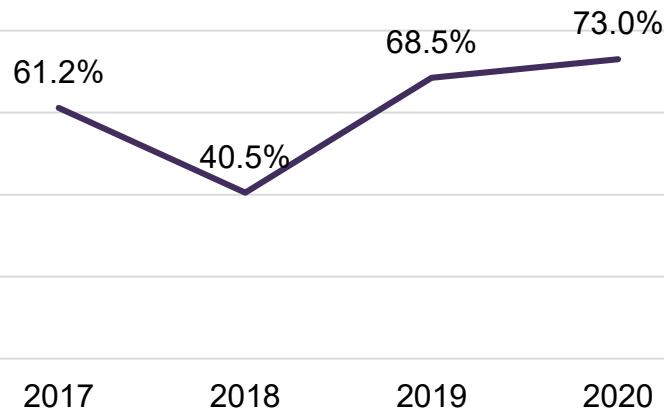
% feel communication between management and frontline staff effective and appropriate



% satisfied with learning opportunities



% planning to stay with the council in next 12 months



% feel proud to work for CWC

