

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

24 March 2022

Time 6.00 pm **Public Meeting?** YES **Type of meeting** Scrutiny
Venue Council Chamber - 4th Floor - Civic Centre

Membership

Chair Cllr Rita Potter (Lab)
Vice-chair Cllr Adam Collinge (Con)

Labour

Cllr Clare Simm
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Chris Burden
Cllr Val Evans
Cllr Jaspreet Jaspal
Cllr Asha Mattu
Cllr Gillian Wildman

Conservative

Cllr Stephanie Haynes
Cllr Mak Singh

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

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Welcome and Introductions**
[The Chair to welcome everyone to the meeting.]
- 2 **Meeting procedures to be followed**
[The Chair will explain how the meeting will proceed, 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 (2 February 2022)** (Pages 3 - 14)
[To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record]

DISCUSSION ITEMS

- 6 **Local Area Special Education Needs and Disabilities Written Statement of Action (WSOA) - verbal update**
[Brenda Wile, Deputy Director Education, to present update]
- 7 **Supporting our vulnerable adolescents at risk of exploitation** (Pages 15 - 26)
[Rachel King, Head of Childrens Service- Specialist Support and Sandra Ashton Jones ,Head of Adult Service- Mental Health, to present report]
- 8 **Children's Health Check survey - Social Work and wider workforce 2021** (Pages 27 - 36)
[Jennifer Rogers, Principal Social Worker, to present report]

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Agenda Item No: 5
Minutes - 2 February 2022

Attendance

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Clare Simm
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Chris Burden
Cllr Adam Collinge (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Stephanie Haynes
Cllr Gillian Wildman

Co-opted Members

Wolverhampton Youth Council
Cyril Randles Church of England – Diocese of Lichfield Representative

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel in attendance via Teams

Cllr Mak Singh
Cllr Val Evans
Cllr Jaspreet Jaspal
Cllr Qaiser Azeem

In Attendance

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Work

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith
Emma Bennett
Alison Hinds
Rachel King
Steven Larking
Phil Leivers
Darren Martindale
Brenda Wile

Scrutiny Officer
Executive Director of Families
Deputy Director of Children's Social Care
Head of Vulnerable Children
Lead Commissioner for Children's Services
Head of Education Excellence
Service Manager – Vulnerable Learners
Deputy Director of Education

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Welcome and Introductions**

Cllr Rita Potter, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised it was also 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.

3 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the following member(s) of the panel:

Cllr Asha Mattu

4 **Declarations of interest**

Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families, declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 10.

5 **Minutes of the previous meeting (13 October 2021)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2021 be approved as a correct record.

6 **Minutes of the meeting (6 January 2022)**

The panel agreed the following amendments to the draft minutes 6 January 2022

1. To note that due to a technical fault panel members taking part via Microsoft Teams and also the public were not able to hear or add to the discussion in the meeting room. A separate meeting was arranged for panel members to be briefed by the Deputy of Director of Education on the main points of the presentation.
2. The panel endorsed the procurement of preferred IT solution to enable collaborative electronic EHC plan process and the other proposed improvements to the wider IT platforms and the website.
3. The panel discussed the proposals for improving the planning and support of transitions both within statutory school age and from statutory school age to post-19 and post-25 and highlighted the importance of working in collaboration with all interested groups
4. The attendance list to be amended to show the Cllr Burden took part via Microsoft Teams.

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2022, subject to the agreed changes, be approved, as a correct record.

7 **Children's Residential Provision Review - pre-decision scrutiny**

The Chair invited Rachel King, Service Manager, to present the report to the panel.

The Service Manager advised the panel that the presentation will give an overview of the work done to develop options to create a new restorative practice, multi-agency children homes in Wolverhampton. The proposals will be presented to Cabinet Resources Panel on 23 February 2022 for discussion and approval of the draft recommendations.

The Service Manager outlined the background to the proposals. A residential review started in July 2021 led by the Children's Commissioning Team to initially look at the sufficiency of residential placements for children and young people with complex care needs.

The Service Manager added that there is a small cohort of vulnerable young people with very complex needs who the Council have not always been able to find suitable placements. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there are enough residential places to meet the needs of such young people. The service aims wherever possible to make sure that children are placed either with foster care or with connected family members before this option is considered. Residential placements in children's homes are regulated through the Ofsted inspection framework.

The Service Manager advised the panel that the number of children needing specialist support has reduced every year. The Service Manager added that in response to concerns about the findings from national reviews about the growth of private residential care home providers, the quality and cost of provision and the barriers to the new providers entering the market the Council decided to look at different options for meeting the needs of young people needing a residential placement.

The Service Manager advised the panel that a Residential Review Project Group was set up to develop the options detailed in the report.

The Service Manager outlined the merits of the different options proposed by the group as detailed in the report.

The group recommended that Option 5 (to continue using spot purchases and framework placements alongside the establishment of a new restorative practice, multi-agency home within the City) was the preferred option. The Service Manager commented that this option would help to build strong working relationships with key providers of external provision and support some internal provision.

The Service Manager advised the panel that the report will be presented to Cabinet Resources Panel on 23 February 2022 to approve the recommended option and the allocation of £35,000 to develop an overall business case. A further report would be presented to Cabinet Resources Panel in June 2022 for consideration and approval.

The panel were invited comment on the report and the proposal to recommend supporting Option 5 as detailed in the main report.

The panel thanked the presenter for the report and welcomed the focus on offering restorative practice to young people to help break the cycle of behaviour, which is often generational. The panel support combining Option 1 and Option 4 into Option 5 as it will maintain flexibility and provide a long-term solution to the issues highlighted in the report.

The Service Manager agreed that Option 5 will provide the flexibility needed and the blended approach was supported by the project group. The Service Manager added that several young people in care have experienced significant levels of trauma and a restorative approach can help to repair this damage and provide a good level of care.

The panel welcomed the comments from the Service Manager about the importance of building strong relationships with care providers. The panel highlighted the importance of offering a consistent level of quality of provision to a young person, regardless of where a young person is placed that meets their needs. The panel suggested it would be helpful to review progress of the preferred option, if supported, to see if the Council is achieving the best outcomes for children wherever they are placed.

The panel suggested that it would be helpful to see the detail of the business case for the proposal at a future date.

The panel queried if the timescale for the expected completion in June 2023 was realistic and expressed concern about the possible delays arising from the planning application process. The Service Manager confirmed that the aim is to have the scheme in operation within the 12 months while accepting that there was a risk of delay for reason given. The proposed feasibility study will provide more details about the options which will help inform the timetable for implementation. The Service Manager commented that the time taken to complete will be longer if a build option rather than leasing option for an existing building is agreed.

The panel queried the financial viability of a residential care home supporting only a maximum of two children and asked for more details about why the costs would be higher in this situation, also why this would still be economical. The Service Manager advised the panel that a key challenge in meeting the needs of young people with complex needs, is safely managing the level of risk with the home.

The Council is governed by the regulator Ofsted who want to make sure that when young people are being placed together in a setting together it can be done safely with the right staffing ratio. The Service Manager added that a larger facility with more beds will make it harder to run the home safely because of the risk of placing too many young people together who may not be compatible or a home that does not meet their needs.

The home will provide specialist support to young people who have experienced a significant amount of trauma and the focus will be on trauma recovery.

The Service Manager added that the preferred option while not the cheapest is the safest way for meeting the complex needs of young people in a multi-agency supported children's home setting within the City with the appropriate level of staffing.

The panel commented on the importance of consulting with local communities about the plan to develop a new residential home and the need for early engagement with them and respond to any concerns about the proposed location of a children's residential home. The panel highlighted the difficulties in the past where plans for children's residential homes has been proposed but not supported by residents. The panel commented that based on recent experience many of the concerns of residents were unfounded after some time. However, the public reaction may be different when a new build home is being proposed rather than a conversion to an existing building, which may attract more attention.

The Service Manager reassured the panel that residents will be consulted about the plans and the issue would be reviewed as part of one of workstreams for the agreed option.

The panel welcomed the report and endorsed the preference for Option5 (to continue using spot purchases and framework placements alongside the establishment of a new restorative practice, multi-agency home within the City).

Resolved:

1. The panel support Option 5 and the development of a full feasibility business case to create multi-agency children home(s) in the City.
2. Cabinet Resources to consider the comments of the panel on the options being considered to meet the needs of young people with complex care and support needs at the meeting on 23 February 2022.
3. The panel agreed to receive updates from the Service Manager on progress of the project after a full business case is submitted in June 2022 to Cabinet.
4. The Service Manager to share a copy of the final business case with the panel when published.

8 **Virtual School Head Annual Report 2021**

The Chair invited Darren Martindale, Service Manager, to present the report.

The Service Manager outlined the structure of the Virtual School Head Annual Report 2021 and explained that the presentation would focus on five key themes.

The Service Manager commented on the profile of children and young people in care or previously care covered by the report.

The Service Manager highlighted the educational achievements and the progress of children, young people in care and the efforts made by schools and the local authority and partners to support them. The Service Manager commented on the school Ofsted ratings attended by children and young people care and reported that 85 per cent of children are attending schools rated as either Good (69%) or Outstanding (16%) which is in line with what was expected and an improvement on the previous year's results. The Service Manager added that some of the schools are awaiting outcomes of inspections by Ofsted which could affect the results.

The Service Manager commented that one percent of children and young people are in schools rated by Ofsted as being 'Inadequate' and explained the reasons for this could be that either the rating of the school was changed following an inspection, or a judgement was made that at the time it would not be in the child's best interest to move them to a different school.

The Service Manager reassured the panel that every effort is made to ensure that children and young people are attending the best educational provision that is available to them.

The Service Manager explained that it is a statutory requirement of local authorities to have an update Personal Education Plans (PEP) for children and young people in care. The Service Manager gave a breakdown of the PEP completion rates at the end of June 2021. The Service Manager advised the panel that an estimated 80 per cent of children and young people in care have an up-to-date completed PEP based on the monthly analysis of the figures.

The Service Manager commented on the findings based on an audit of 235 PEP plans which reported that 84 percent had SMART targets, an increase of three per cent compared to the figures for 2020. There are ongoing efforts to make sure that all children have a quality PEP. The Service Manager commented that attendance at schools for children in care overall remain high and the aim is to see a slow incremental improvement every year.

The Service Manager commented on the work done to monitor attendance by Virtual Schools team by all children and young people, with half-termly reports being checked, and action taken where issues have been highlighted. The Service Manager commented about the concerns about the level of persistent absence (pupils with less than 90% attendance) after schools re-opened on 8 March 2022.

The Service Manager commented on the challenges presented by Covid 19 and the range of work being done to promote good school attendance. The figures nationally for school attendance report similar results as Wolverhampton, which showed an increase in non-attendance rates in the first two years of the pandemic, before levelling off.

The Service Manager commented on the issue of school inclusion rates and reported that there had no permanent exclusions for children in care during the academic year and the service is working hard to avoid children being excluded. The Service Manager added that there had been no permanent exclusions in either of the previous two academic years and that this very positive as children in care are three times more likely than their peers to be excluded.

The Service Manager briefed the panel on GSCE and post 16 attainment results. The Service Manager highlighted details of the percentage of pupils achieving grade 4 and above and grade 5 in core subjects at GSCE in 2021 and added that primary school validated results were not available for Covid related reasons. The Service Manager advised the panel that there had been an improvement in number of the children and young people in care achieving grade 4 and above, and that the figure of 30 per cent is the highest since 2014. The Service Manager commented that the change to teacher graded assessment rather than exams may partly explain the improved results. The service is working hard to ensure that children and young people are as prepared as possible for summer exams which are expected to replace teacher assessments.

The Service Manager commented on the post 16 educational achievements to children and young people and reported good progress. The Service Manager also reported the best results among the 40 young people who were in further education and the highlighted the success at University level with three care leavers graduating with degrees and two were awarded a first and a first-class honours degree. The Service Manager praised the achievement of the young people and the progress made at post 16 level.

The Service Manager advised the panel that DfE issued details of funding and non-statutory guidance in June 2021 which extended the responsibility of the Virtual School Head to include all children with a social worker or who ever had a social worker. This change has been welcomed and is expected to benefit more vulnerable children and young people. The Service Manager advised that the details for this group will be included in the next annual Virtual Head report.

The panel were invited to comment on the report. The Chair thanked the presenter for the report.

The panel welcomed the progress and educational achievements detailed in the report and commented on the importance of efforts to improve outcomes for children and young people in care. The panel praised the progress of young people in care going to University and suggested that more young people in Wolverhampton should encouraged to consider this option and highlighted the important role of Wolverhampton University.

The Service Manager thanked the panel for the comments and added that the Council has been working with the University through the Aspire Project where 30 young people receive support through the virtual school and the results have been positive.

The panel queried the reasons for the change in the grade for age related expectation for cohort groups for children in Year 9 for English (57%) which then increased to 100% for children in Year 10, who were predicted to achieve a Grade 4 or above at GSCE. The Service Manager commented that the change may be due to the small number of the children and the impact that small changes in results can have on the overall results. The Service Manager reassured the panel there were no concerns about this issue and that the performance of young people is closely monitored.

The panel welcomed the successful educational results for children and young people at post 16 but queried the reasons why only 40 young people achieved one more qualification and specifically the reason why 16 young people in year 12 and 13 were not in education, employment, or training in 2021.

Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families, responded that there were no specific reasons for the issue highlighted and added that these were young people with complex needs, and some would have a background of experiencing trauma, which presents a challenge when trying to engage with them and to consider possible education, employment, or training opportunities.

The Executive Director of Families added that the Council is continuing to work with young people aged 16 and above to offer the support needed. The panel discussed the impact of the pandemic on the number of work experience and apprenticeship opportunities available.

The panel commented on the positive educational achievements for young people in care and queried the impact on future exam grade performance when results will be based on exams rather than teacher assessments.

The Service Manager agreed with the view that the expectation is that GSCE exams pass rates are likely to be lower than the current figure of 30 per cent to about 16 per cent with the change in the method of assessment. The Service Manager advised the panel that the service is working with young people to prepare them for exams and offer a range of support for example, one to one tuition.

The panel wanted to formally put on record their congratulations to education achievement of all the children and young people in care.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the report and record their congratulations on the educational achievements of children and young people in care.
2. The panel comments on the draft Virtual School Head Annual Report 2021 to be considered by Cabinet.

9 **Annual Report on Schools' Education Performance**

The Chair invited Councillor Dr Mike Hardacre, Cabinet for Education, Skills and Work, to make some introductory comments on the report.

The Cabinet Member advised the panel that because of the changes made to the exam assessment arrangements it will not be possible to compare current educational performance with previous years.

The Cabinet Member commented on the extent of the disruption to children's educational because of the pandemic and added that this should be considered when future reports on educational performance are presented to the panel.

The Cabinet Member commented on the important role of school governing as they are responsible for the vision and strategic direction of the school, the proper and effective use of the school's financial resources among other responsibilities. The Cabinet Member highlighted the limited ability of the local authority to intervene where there are concerns about the performance of academies and this should be noted when commenting on the report findings.

The Chair invited Brenda Wile, Deputy Director of Education, to present the detailed report to the panel. The Deputy Director of Education commented that the performance of schools in 2020 and 2021 should be seen in the context of the impact of measures introduced in response to Covid 19 during this period.

The Deputy Director of Education commented on the different periods when schools were either closed or pupils attending had to meet specific criteria during the pandemic and advised the panel that they were only reopened fully in March 2021. The majority of pupils were either educated at home or taught remotely prior to this period.

The Deputy Director of Education commented that the number of Covid 19 cases in school remain high and is most prevalent amongst young people, which has significantly impacted on their education, during the last few weeks.

There are signs however that the situation is improving but some schools have reintroduced remote learning for some groups where there was insufficient staff available either because they tested positive or were isolating.

The Deputy Director of Education praised the response of teachers and schools in providing remote learning opportunities and commented on how well children embraced and adapted to different ways of learning. The Deputy Director of Education commented on how some children have benefited from the experience of remote learning and added that this will help them become more flexible learners in the future. The learning from providing remote teaching during the pandemic will also enable schools to offer support for children who cannot attend school due to health or other reasons.

The Deputy Director of Education advised the panel that the DfE suspended all public examinations and assessments for the 2019/2020 academic year, and last year, replaced GCSE and A levels with teacher assessed grades. The Deputy Director of Education advised the panel that safeguarding inspections were maintained if concerns were raised.

The Deputy Director of Education advised the panel that the report does not contain individual school level results as the information legally can only be published if they have been validated and with the agreement of the school.

The Deputy Director of Education added that all schools were visited during the autumn period and there were discussions between school leaders and members of the school improvement or education excellence team. The panel were reassured that there was rigorous scrutiny of teacher assessments. The Deputy Director of Education gave an overview of how Wolverhampton schools performed against the West Midlands and England averages, in terms of the GCSE results and advised the panel that there was a slight improvement on the results from previous years.

The Deputy Director of Education commented on the post 16 education results and in response to concerns a wholesale review of post 16 provision across the city is planned. The Deputy Director of Education suggested the review may conclude that there is a need to offer young people a broader range of A Level subjects, but accepted this provision demands a high level of teaching commitment but was confident that this could be done. The review will also include reviewing the college offer. The Deputy Director of Education advised the panel that the plan is to bring together a group of headteachers to work together to review post 16 provision across the City with the aim of preparing young people to be employed in the jobs that are expected to be available in the future.

The Deputy Director of Education briefed the panel about the main findings of Ofsted judgements as of January 2022 and reported that 95.85 per cent of Wolverhampton schools were judged to be either Good or Outstanding and no schools were rated as Inadequate.

The Deputy Director of Education gave details of the range of strategies used to support schools. The education excellence team visit schools at least once a year as part of a service level agreement, which may also include providing extra support. The level of support offered is proportionate to the need of the school.

The Deputy Director of Education briefed the panel about recent changes to the school improvement expenditure grant which will end from the start of financial year 2023-2024.

To allow schools to adjust the change the grant will be reduced to fifty per cent of the current amount on a per school basis in 2022-2023. The Deputy Director of Education added that a consultation with maintained schools is planned on the changes.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Work commented on the issues caused by late notification by Government of the decision to reduce the current grant by £80,000 before a meeting with members of the Schools Forum.

The Cabinet Member supported increased choice for young people at post 16 to pursue their preferred interests and highlighted the importance of quality provision.

The panel expressed concern that the use of average attainment score per pupil may overlook areas requiring attention and support. The Deputy Director of Education agreed with the concern of the panel and offered reassurance that work is planned to get more details from schools to help develop better measures of educational attainment and an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of pupils.

The panel welcomed the performance of young people at Key Stage 4 and wanted to record their congratulations on the results for Wolverhampton achieving better scores compared to West Midlands and England averages.

The panel queried the reasons for reduction in the proportion of pupils achieving grades 9 – 5 pass in english and maths compared with the results for England and the West Midlands average and the lower scores English Baccaureate (EBacc).

The Deputy Director of Education advised that the results are based on information collected over the of the autumn term and in-depth analysis has not been done to understand the reasons for the lower scores for english and maths. The Deputy Director of Education offered to attend a future meeting of the panel to give a more detailed explanation of the results in response to the concerns raised.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Work thanked the panel for the comments about the report and offered his thanks and congratulations to teachers, schools, parents, and young people about how they managed the disruption to the education sector caused by the pandemic.

The panel thanked the presenters for the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to endorse the report detailing progress made to improve the educational performance of schools in Wolverhampton.
2. The panel wanted to formally place on record their congratulations to everyone involved in achieving the results detailed in the report.

10 Member visit to The Way 14.9.21 - update

The Chair invited Cllr Collinge to give the panel an update on the visit to The Way in October 2021.

Cllr Collinge referred to the notes from the visit and advised the panel that the presentation would provide an update on issues highlighted at the time. Cllr Collinge recommending panel members should take the opportunity to visit The Way to see the facilities and meet the young people.

Cllr Collinge commented on the range of facilities and the current offer to children and young people and highlighted the services offered to children and young people with special needs. Cllr Collinge briefed the panel on the range issues discussed with the Chief Executive of The Way, for example, the gap in provision for young people aged 13 to 14 years and the different figures for usage of the site based on an analysis of postcode as areas of concern. Cllr Collinge welcomed the response to the Chief Executive and the changes made to address these and other issues.

Cllr Collinge commented on the safety concerns of some parents travelling to The Way and wanting to have access to local facilities where possible. Cllr Collinge commented on the opportunities for partnership and outreach work to build on the services offered by The Way.

The panel thanked Cllr Collinge for the presentation.

The panel queried the postcode data which suggested higher numbers of young people were willing to travel The Way in post codes WV11 and WV10 compared to areas closer to the site but with lower numbers attending. The panel suggested that the reasons for this should be investigated further. The panel suggested the review should also include membership compared to levels of attendance.

The panel discussed the possible impact of Covid -19 on future attendance numbers

The panel commented that the venue also hosts work coaches from the Job Centre and members of Wolves at Work and the positive feedback from young people to have a neutral space to talk about employment opportunities.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the presentation.

11 Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel 2021-2022 Draft Workplan

The Chair invited, Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, to present the report.

The Scrutiny Officer briefed the panel on the agenda for the next meeting. The meeting would focus on safeguarding issues. The panel were invited to comment on the draft report.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.

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Supporting our vulnerable adolescents at risk of exploitation

Rachel King

Head of Childrens Service-
Specialist Support

Sandra Ashton Jones

Head of Adult Service- Mental
Health



What is exploitation?

- Exploitation is a form of abuse where someone is forced or coerced into doing things for the benefit of others
- Exploitation can take many forms, in a range of situations, and can involve many groups of people.
- **Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking-** having control or ownership over another person and using this power to exploit them. Modern slavery can include human trafficking, enslavement, domestic servitude and forced labour.
- **Sexual Exploitation** - a form of sexual abuse where people are encouraged, manipulated or forced to participate in sexual acts. They may be threatened with violence and may be groomed by offers of affection, money or gifts.
- **Criminal exploitation-** being forced to take part in criminal activities such as transporting or selling illegal items (e.g. drugs) This can involve **county lines** activities (where drug gangs transport drugs to towns and cities along 'deal lines'). Drug trafficking can also be a form of modern slavery and human trafficking if people are forced to travel to take part in the transportation and sale of drugs. Can also include **cuckooing-** where the person's home is being used by others without informed consent, including for illegal purposes

Tackling Violence and Exploitation Strategy

- **Partnership Vision**
- Working together to strengthen the visibility,
- early identification and partnership response to
- prevent violence, reducing the risk of
- exploitation and its associated harms.
- **Outcomes**
- Strengthened knowledge and understanding of professionals to better identify those at risk
- Reduction in young people becoming involved in violence
- Improved integrated support pathways out of violence and exploitation
- Reduced harm to families and increased
- community resilience and awareness
- Improved information flow and use between agencies and communities
- Increased targeted intervention to protect people from violence and exploitation
- Reduce the level of risk and exploitation of young people
- Robust enforcement to tackle Organised Crime Groups
- Strengthened and supportive offender management

Partnership response to exploitation

- October 2019 – review undertaken to look at how partners were working together to address all forms of exploitation
- Outcome of review – work required across the whole system to improve identification, strengthen pathways of support, increase early intervention work and improve the co-ordination of the partnership response to exploitation
- Key developments – new exploitation screening tool, comprehensive training package for all professionals, join up between children and adult services, early intervention offer of support for low risk young people
- February 2021 – Partnership Exploitation and Missing Hub went live

Overview of Partnership Hub

- The hub brings together professionals from services that have contact with children and adults who are at risk of or are being exploited
- It facilitates the consistent and systematic sharing of relevant and appropriate information so that there is a comprehensive understanding of risk, threat and harm from all forms of exploitation and informs a balanced risk assessment and in turn appropriate interventions and disruption planning.
- Representation in hub includes: Children's Services including (Exploitation Hub Manager; Partnership Strategic Exploitation Co-ordinator; Missing Returns Officer; Early Intervention; Youth Offending Team; Education Inclusion Service; Partnership Exploitation Information Analyst); Adult Social Care; Police including Locate and Public Protection Unit.
- Stronger links are also being developed with Force CID, Offender Management, Neighbourhood Policing Unit and Health colleagues.
- The Hub covers all age groups – children and adults

Daily Briefings

- A briefing meeting takes place every morning and are chaired by the Exploitation Hub Manager.
- The purpose of the daily briefing is to review all overnight missing episodes, ensure that the Hub is aware of anything significant that may have occurred the day before or overnight; facilitates multi-agency information sharing and gathering; decision-making; disruption planning; and intervention/support required around those children/places whereby the concerns are around exploitation.

Supporting those at risk of exploitation - Power2 team

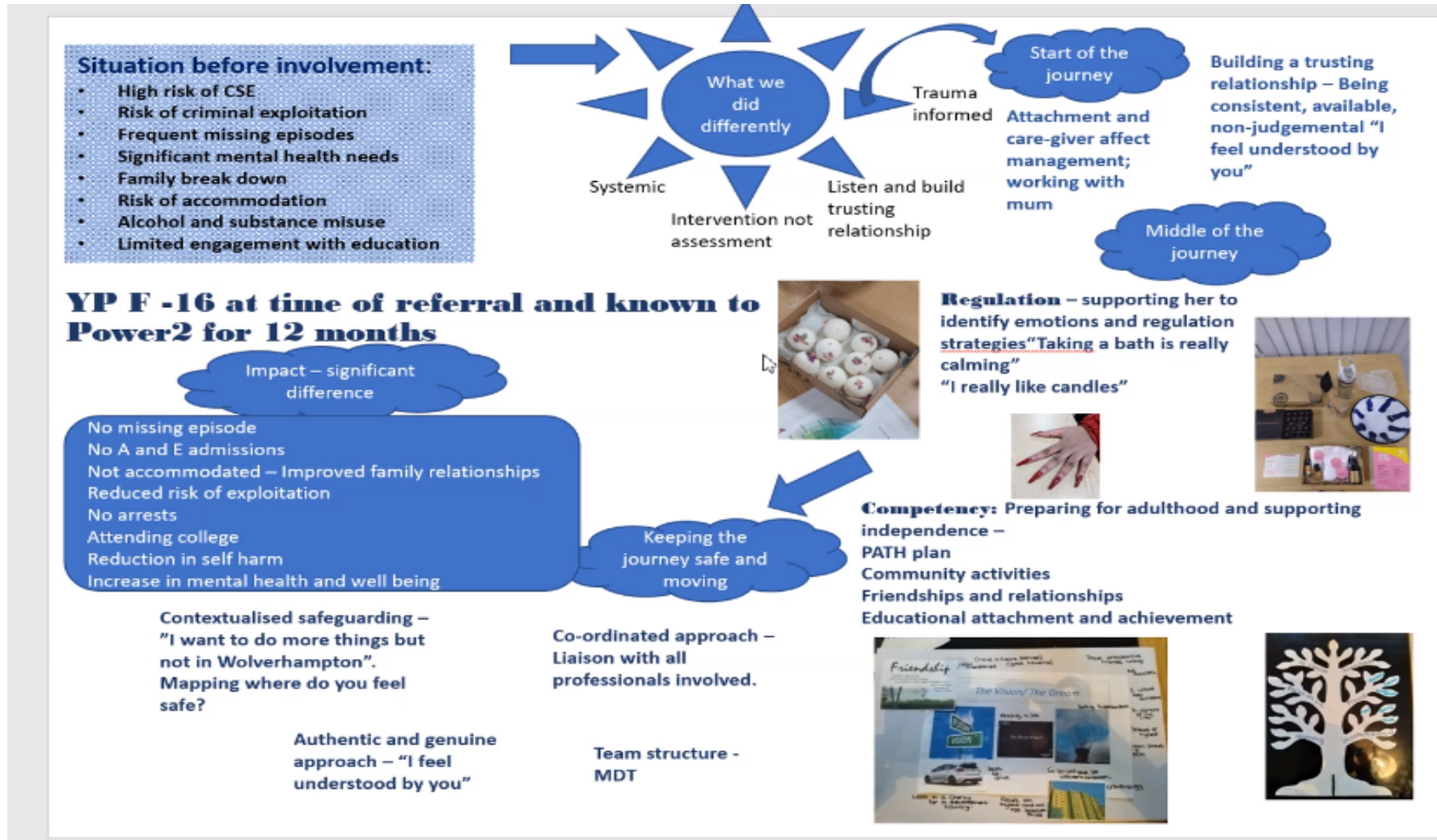
- The Power2 team is a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency partnership between Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care, Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning Group, Public Health and the Voluntary Sector.
- It supports vulnerable young people aged 11-25 at risk of exploitation and family breakdown.
- The service provides a trauma informed approach enabling vulnerable young people and adults to develop a consistent, non-judgemental, one to one relationship with a case/key worker with the relationship being built on trust and stability

Impact and Benefits of the Hub and Power2

- Multi- agency working across children , young people and adult services, including transitional safeguarding
- Increase in the number of exploitation screening tools being completed by professionals. This indicates increased awareness and earlier identification
- Number of young people requiring a Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meeting to co-ordinate a support plan has increased – this is due to better sharing of information and intelligence
- A shared commitment across the partnership to tackling exploitation across the city
- Improved outcome for young people and adults e.g. reduction in missing episodes, reduction in exploitation risk, re-engagement in education employment and training

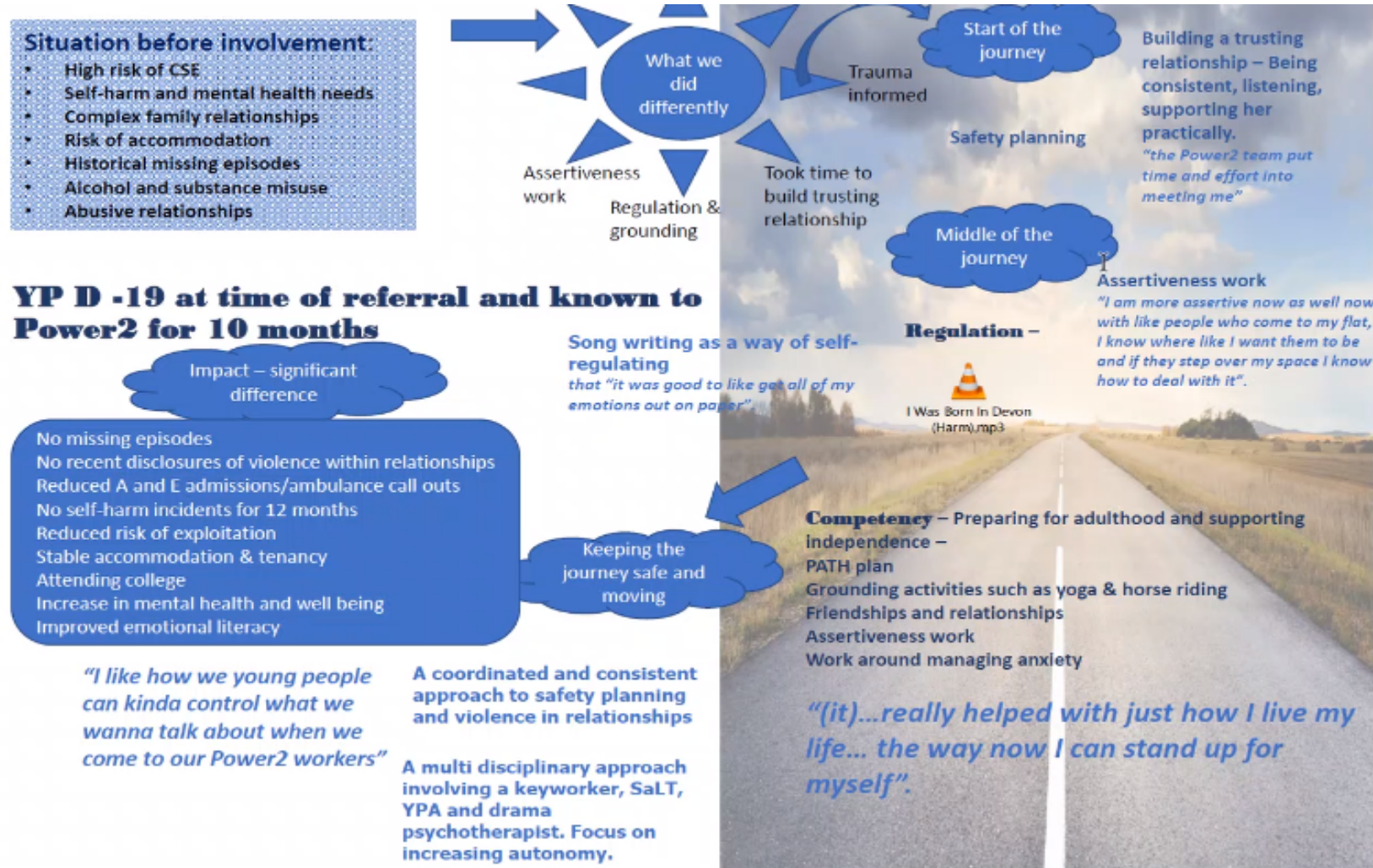
Story of difference – 16 year old young person

Page 23



Story of difference- 19 year old young adult

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Story of Difference- 63 year old adult

- 63 year old retired male
- Drug dealers and sex workers cuckooed property
- Forced to work for drug dealers to pay drug debts, self harming and suicidal
- Joint work to safeguard via Exploitation Hub incl. Police, Recovery Near You, Wolverhampton Homes and Adult Social Care
- Moved to emergency place of safety following drug raid at property
- NRM completed due to Modern Slavery
- Rehoused permanently out of city in different part of country due to significant risks

Any Questions?

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Thank You





Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

24 March 2022

Report title	Children's Social Work and Workforce Health Check 2021	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Beverley Momenabadi, Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Executive Director for Families	
Originating service	Children's Service	
Accountable employee(s)	Jennifer Rogers	Principal Social Worker
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Report to be/has been considered by	Social Work Development Board	11 January 2022
	Leadership Team	20 January 2022
	Strategic Executive Board	10 February

Recommendations for decision:

The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the findings of the Children and Young People's Service's social work and wider workforce health check for 2021.
2. Provide comment, feedback, and challenge on the proposed actions to improve the health of the social work and wider workforce and conditions for practice.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) carries out a survey each year to check the “health” of its social workers and this forms part of Children’s Services ongoing self-assessment. For the last three years a survey has also been circulated more widely to include all the frontline children’s workforce within the council. This report presents an overview of the findings of both surveys, progress since last year and concludes with actions to address the main areas for improvement.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Health checks were a key recommendation of the National Social Work Task Force, which was set up by government after the death of Baby P. There was recognition that the whole system impacts on individual social workers and on the overall quality of social work practice and regular health checks help organisations identify areas of strength and areas requiring greater focus as well as assisting with workforce development planning and supporting the continuous improvement of social work and wider support for children, young people, and families.
- 2.2 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. This year services and teams across Children’s Services have continued to ensure that statutory social work and wider support services for children and families are delivered at the right level, effective, take place in a timely way and support families to make sustainable change. The success of this can be seen by the reduction over a number of years of the number of children receiving statutory support in the city, particularly those children subject to child protection planning and children and young people in care.
- 2.3 The surveys have been refreshed this year and aligned with the Local Government’s Association (LGA) Standards for employers of social workers in England and has also taken into account the questions asked in the national health check survey.
- 2.4 This report provides a summary of the main findings, including areas which have progressed as a result of actions taken over the last 12 months, and also any actions that are planned or in progress to address the key areas for improvement.

3.0 Overview, key findings, and key actions

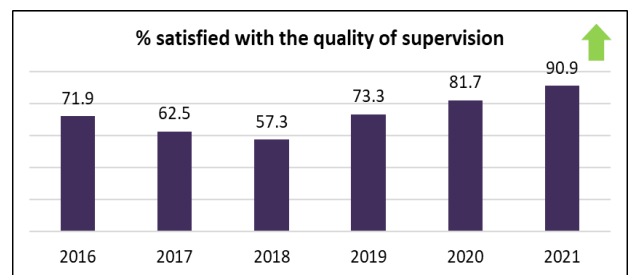
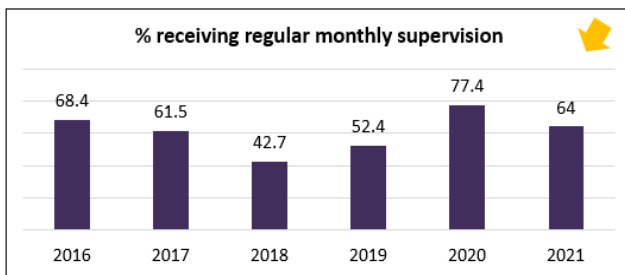
- 3.1 The health check was circulated via an online survey between 14 September to 1 November 2021. The link was sent to 255 social workers and 250 non-social work qualified employees at grade five and above who work directly with children and young people or who manage those teams. The wider workforce is very diverse and is made up a variety of roles such as educational psychologists, family support workers, the virtual school team and strengthening families workers.

- 3.2 Response rates for both surveys were lower than in previous years with a 44% response rate for social workers (compared to 55% in 2020) and 34% in the workforce (39% in 2020). However, it is important to recognise that this may reflect the challenges teams are facing and pandemic fatigue. To improve take up and ensure responses reflect the views of the workforce more reliably next year, there will be protected time at a briefing to ensure workers can complete the survey if they wish to, as well as continued protected time in team meetings. There will also be a revised approach based on the “you said...we did” format which will help to show the difference the survey has made to the workforce.
- 3.3 The findings of this year’s health checks are mostly positive, with improvement evident in a number of key areas as a result of actions being taken by the service.

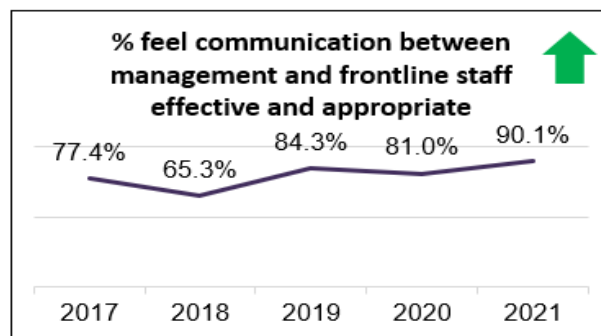
Social Work

- 3.4 Nationally social work recruitment and retention continues to be a significant challenge and social work is on the national occupational shortage list. Wolverhampton’s Children’s Services has a well-established and effective recruitment and retention strategy which includes, amongst a number of other key actions, the investment in a mixed economy of routes into social work including Frontline, Step Up and apprenticeships and a strong social work training and development offer, which this year has included PhD sponsorship opportunities. An additional action identified in the last three months to support social work retention is the creation of a new peripatetic team, which will have eight additional permanent social workers to provide support when social work vacancies arise across the service. This will help to stabilise teams, limit reliance on agency staff, reduce workloads and hours worked over contract and should consequently support social worker wellbeing and further improve stress levels and retention rates.
- 3.5 In this year’s social work health check three quarters of social workers (full and part time) are reporting that their workloads are manageable. Although slightly less than last year, this is still much higher than in 2019 when only around 59% (full time) and 57% (part time) of social workers were reporting manageable workloads. There has also been a small increase in the number of hours social workers work over their contracted hours. Covid will have affected this, but it is also recognised that staffing challenges, some of which are due to secondments which are a great way for staff to develop and progress, are impacting on workloads across the service. The new peripatetic team is a keyway in which this will be addressed, and recruitment is well under way. To further reduce the impact of vacancies there will also be a streamlined recruitment approach piloted so that social work posts can be filled more quickly.
- 3.6 However, positively the number of those who always and often feel stress due to work has decreased since last year and the vast majority report they are able to discuss their stress, wellbeing and their workload with their manager and agree satisfactory ways forward.

3.7 Although frequency of supervision has reduced slightly this year, it is still higher than in 2019 and 2018. The majority (96%) said that they were satisfied with the informal support they receive from their manager, which suggests that there is readily available support when social workers need it most. There has also been a significant increase in those reporting that their supervision is of a high quality with 91% reporting this compared to 82% in 2020, and 73% in 2019. This positive upwards trend has been due to the actions taken since the last health check which has included commissioning training for managers in supervision and leadership skills, as well as a whole service commitment to restorative approaches led from the top down.

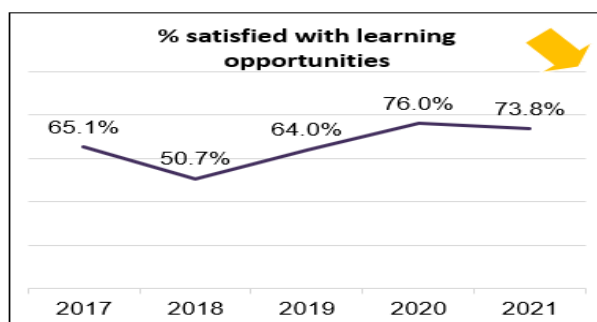


3.8 There has been continued improvement in communication between senior managers and frontline teams which is largely due to the actions taken by the senior leadership team to build on their communication and engagement strategy over the last 12 months following the last health check. This has ensured the service has continued to be as visible as possible despite the challenges of virtual working. Regular communication such as the monthly newsletter and practice weeks (where social work leaders meet directly with workers as part of audits) have made a difference in this regard as well as regular social work briefings.



3.9 Almost all, 90%, said that CWC has a clear model of social work practice which promotes relationship working and a strengths-based approach to achieve the best outcomes for individuals and families. This high response rate is due to a number of factors, but mostly because of the work carried out over the last 12 months by the dedicated Senior Restorative Practice Lead who has further embedded Restorative Practice into everyday practice and has also worked with multi-agency partners to start to share this approach more widely.

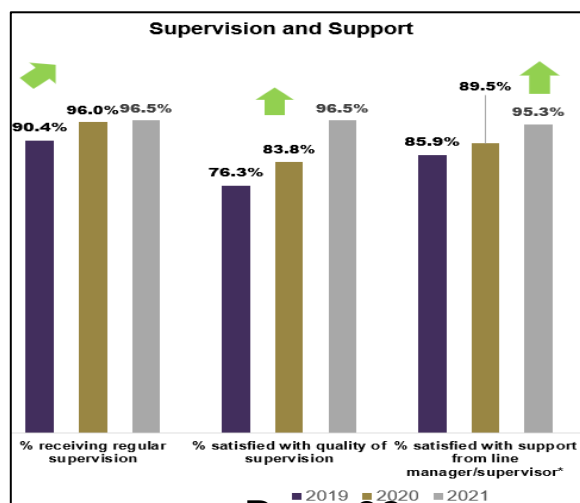
- 3.10 The majority of social workers report they are satisfied with learning and development opportunities and believe CWC is a learning organisation with a positive learning culture. There were some who felt additional training could be considered and this included more opportunities for career progression and alternatives to the traditional management progression offer. This is currently being explored by Children's Services and two social workers have already been sponsored to complete a PhD part time whilst still in employment as a way of progressing their skills and career outside of current pathways.



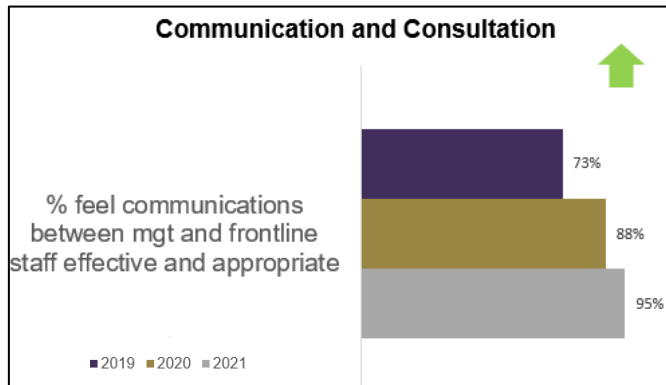
- 3.11 Positively most social workers plan to continue working for the council for at least the next 12 months, but more manageable workloads would influence those who are unsure about staying. Just over 75% would definitely recommend CWC as an employer to friends. Some comments included: "this is a listening organisation...I am keen to stay here for some time"; "I am proud of the restorative approach"; "We know where we are, where we are going and how to get there, employer and employees together"; "I feel that we are local leaders for other authorities...I am proud that our leaders know our children and families"; "there is a real commitment to learning and development."
- 3.12 The majority, over 88%, of social workers said CWC makes them feel encouraged and empowered to make time for self-care and wellbeing activities and there has been a real commitment over the past 12 months to supporting wellbeing across Children's Services and this was an action from last year's health check. Wellbeing has been a standard feature at briefings, in the monthly newsletter, in inductions and in team meetings. A wellbeing framework is also being developed and this year's joint social work conference will feature workshops related to this topic.
- 3.13 Almost all felt that CWC was actively committed to tackling inequality, which is likely due to the strong approach taken by Children's Services this year in addressing equality and diversity issues, reflecting the whole council's approach. This includes the creation of a cultural competency champion role, cultural competency workshops for staff as well as managers and also a joint social work conference in October 2021 which focussed on the theme of celebrating diversity; challenging inequality which featured a variety of speakers with lived experience of discrimination and oppression.

Workforce

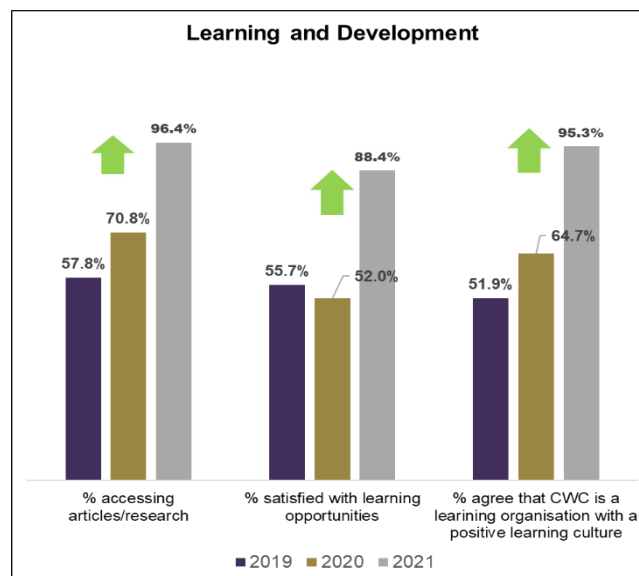
- 3.14 The wider workforce is very diverse and is made up a variety of roles such as educational psychologists, family support workers, the virtual school team and strengthening families workers so workloads will vary across the service. The vast majority, over 82%, feel that their workloads are manageable. This is slightly lower than last year (92%) although still high. Children's Services will be taking this opportunity to review workloads with teams and explore with them where the pressures points are so that specific actions can be put in place where needed.
- 3.15 Slightly more hours are being worked over contracted hours than last year, but part time workers are reporting working slightly less. It may be that continuous home working has created some 'work creep' with some feeling the need to always be 'on' answering calls or emails well after work hours compared to previous years. However, those reporting they always or often feel stress due to work has reduced this year.
- 3.16 It is clear that the continued challenges of Covid are having more of an impact this year. This year a common theme is that the workforce would welcome more of a balance between working from home and in the office. A service operating model is currently being consulted on so that when it is safe to do so Children's teams can start to use offices more. This may include for example for supervision, collaboration time, team meetings and to support those workers who may be feeling isolated and struggling with their wellbeing, or who are new in post. The wellbeing framework that is being developed will also support workers and managers who are struggling with working from home and may find it difficult to "switch off".
- 3.17 However almost 90% know where to get help within the council if concerned about their wellbeing and around the same number stated that they felt encouraged and empowered by CWC to make time for self-care and wellbeing activities. Over 80% said they could discuss their wellbeing, stressful situations and their workload with their supervisor / manager and agree satisfactory ways forward, with only 4.7% of respondents saying this wasn't the case.
- 3.18 The frequency and quality of supervision has also improved year on year, with 97% this year receiving regular supervision and 97% happy with the quality.



3.19 As with social workers, the wider workforce reported that there is effective communication between senior managers and frontline staff with 95% agreeing with this, which has increased over the last three years. There has been a significant increase in those who feel involved in or consulted about any proposed changes, with 73% agreeing this was the case compared to just 28% last year. Again, the leadership’s team commitment to visibility and a communication and engagement strategy which includes workforce briefings twice a year and a monthly newsletter have been key to improving this over the last 12 months since the last health check in 2020.



3.20 There has also been a significant improvement in the number of workers who are satisfied with the learning opportunities available to them with 88% saying this compared to 52% last year. An action from the last health check was for a renewed focus on training and development opportunities for the wider workforce which has included a continued commitment to offering three Social Work apprenticeships a year, which generates a lot of interest. This year some are missing face to face training, and this will be supported for a proportion of briefings / courses when safe to do so.



3.21 Over 85% said that they would recommend CWC as an employer to a friend and more (over 74%) this year plan to continue to work for CWC over the next 12 months.

Some comments included: “I feel valued”; CWC is forward thinking and willing to make changes to improve services”; “I am trusted”; “recognition of equality and diversity has increased.”

3.22 As with the social work survey, the vast majority of respondents felt that CWC is actively committed to tackling inequality and discrimination. Only 2.3% said this was not the case.

4.0 Other notable progress and actions since the 2020 survey

4.1 As well as the progress and actions taken since the last health check that are noted above, there was acknowledgement last year that more needed to be done to reduce the amount of time social workers spend recording or completing paperwork. A key action was to develop training which would support social workers develop skills of recording in a succinct and proportionate way and help social workers to make better use of their time. Workshops have been offered this year and also support has been provided by Advanced Practitioners to improve practice in this area and audits have shown an increase in the quality of recordings rated good or above during 2021. In this year’s health check the amount of time social workers say they spend working directly with children has increased slightly, but overall, this is an area that will continue to be focussed on this year.

4.2 Proportionate recording is now part of the newly developed Aiming for Excellence Plan which aims to improve consistency of practice in six key areas to ensure a skilled and confident workforce and there will be more activity to support this area over the coming year. The six areas are: meaningful direct work and life journey work; purposeful and succinct recording; reflection on practice; succinct, analytical, and timely assessments, meaningful plans that evidence progress and building relationships with parents and carers.

5.0 Next Steps

5.1 An action plan has been completed as a result of these surveys to address the key areas of improvement. This will be overseen by the Social Work Development Board and Joint Leadership team. The findings will also inform the workforce development plans for the coming year and will be shared with teams. Progress on identified actions will be shared with the workforce during the year.

5.2 Key actions are highlighted within the report and are summarised below, along with other notable actions:

- Continuation of robust recruitment and retention strategy including investment in social work and wider workforce training and development offer and a mixed economy of routes into social work
- Creation of a peripatetic social work team to support teams across the Children’s and Young People’s Service, which will help reduce workloads and working hours
- Pilot a more streamlined recruitment process so that social work and social care posts can be filled more quickly

- Finalise post Covid operating models to support a hybrid approach and provide more flexibility for teams to enable them to have a better balance between home and office working
- Managers will ensure that monthly supervision takes place
- 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 and frontline social care generally means that there is sometimes a requirement to work out of hours or longer hours than usual. When this occurs, managers will ensure that social workers and practitioners have the opportunity to take that time back by leaving work early or coming in late another day or, if more time has been accumulated, taking an extra day off.
- Stress risk assessments to be continued to be offered when needed
- Every supervision should include a robust discussion around workload and workload management to ensure social workers can be supported before their workload becomes unmanageable

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.
[JG/01022022/S]

7.0 Legal implications

7.1 There are no legal implications as a result of this report.
[SB/27012022/U]

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 support the wellbeing of the workforce and ensure they feel supported.

11.0 Human resources implications

11.1 Senior managers are working closely with Human Resources 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 arising from this report or the recommendations.

13.0 Covid Implications

13.1 Covid has had an impact on the overall health of the workforce over the last two years. At present this survey suggests that there is now a real desire to have a better balance between home and office working. Sickness absence related to Covid, or due to the requirements to self-isolate, has created even more challenges for Children's Services. Contingency plans are being implemented as and when needed and longer-term actions being taken. As previously stated, this is a national issue and social work is on the national occupational shortage list. Senior managers are aware of the impact Covid continues to have and are prioritising employee wellbeing and offering support in helping them balance their work and personal circumstances.