



Adult and Safer City Scrutiny Panel

17 September 2019

Report title	Adults Social Work Health Check 2019	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Linda Leach Cabinet Member for Adults	
Wards affected	All	
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Report has been considered by	Adult Services Management Team	9 July 2019
	Social Work Development Board	12 July 2019
	SEB	13 August 2019

Recommendation for action:

The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the findings of the Adults Social Work Health Check for 2019
2. Provide comment and challenge on proposed actions to improve the health of the social work workforce

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) undertakes a full Social Work Health Check every year to assess the “health” of its social workers and forms part of adult services’ ongoing self-assessment. This report presents an overview of the findings of this year’s survey and concludes with actions to address areas for improvement.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Good practice carried out by a “healthy” and 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 social work practice for adults is delivered in a timely way to promote resilience and increase independence. This includes the work currently being undertaken with 3 Conversations which has evidenced that less new people needed formal support because of the more relational and strengths-based approaches being used as people are better connected to their communities and other informal resources.
- 2.2 The Health Check survey has been particularly important this year because of the introduction of this new approach from May 2018. This new way of working replaces the default ‘contact, divert, triage, reablement, assessment for services’ process with a dynamic asset-based approach to listening to people, aimed at supporting independent lives, and reducing the need for dependence on formal services. It supports frontline employees to have three distinct and specific conversations which focus on people’s resources as well as that of their local community. Not only has this resulted in improved outcomes for people and families, but it has also had a positive impact on employee’s job satisfaction, whilst also increasing their productiveness. However, studies of organisational change indicate that change in the workplace can be difficult. Effective change management is essential in reducing the negative impact on employees. For this reason, all teams that have been testing out the new approach have received support and coaching. However, the findings of this year’s Health Check may reflect the uncertainty that can emerge as part of any organisational change.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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

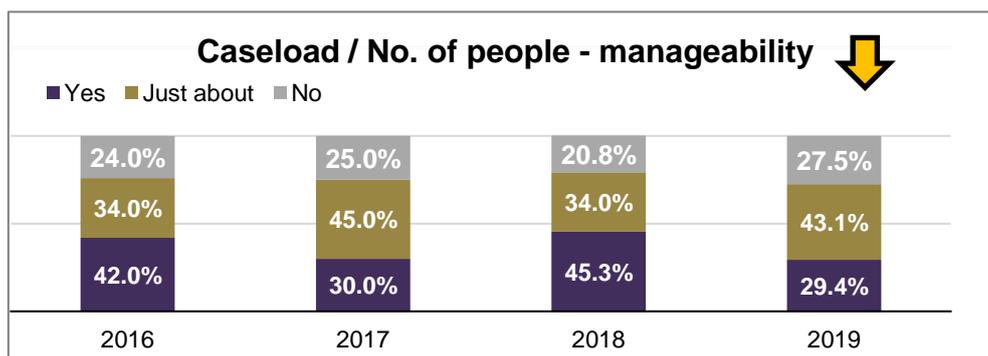
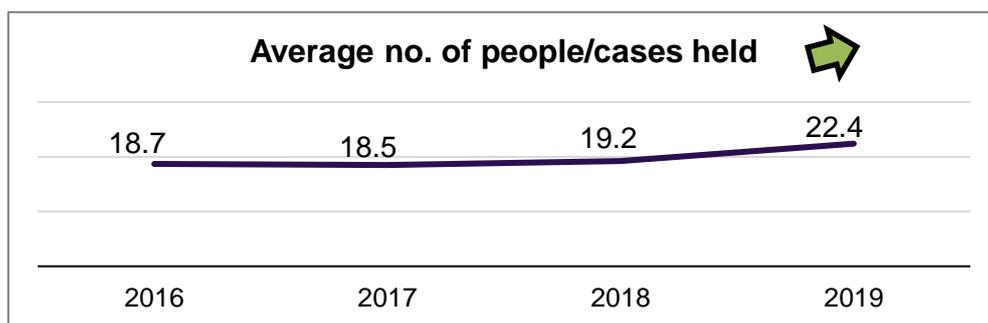
2.5 The Health Check was circulated via an online survey between 1 April and 15 May 2019. All registered social workers were invited to complete the online survey.

2.6 The survey was distributed to 118 registered adult social work staff. There were 77 respondents to the survey (65%). This is about the same as last year's response rate of 67%.

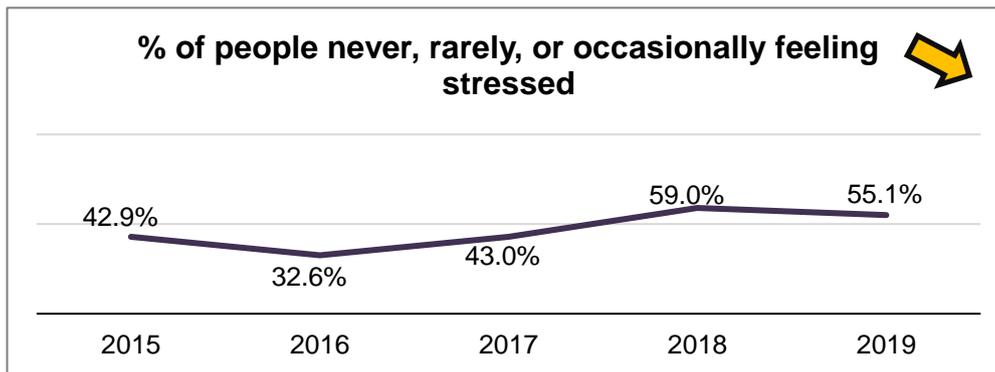
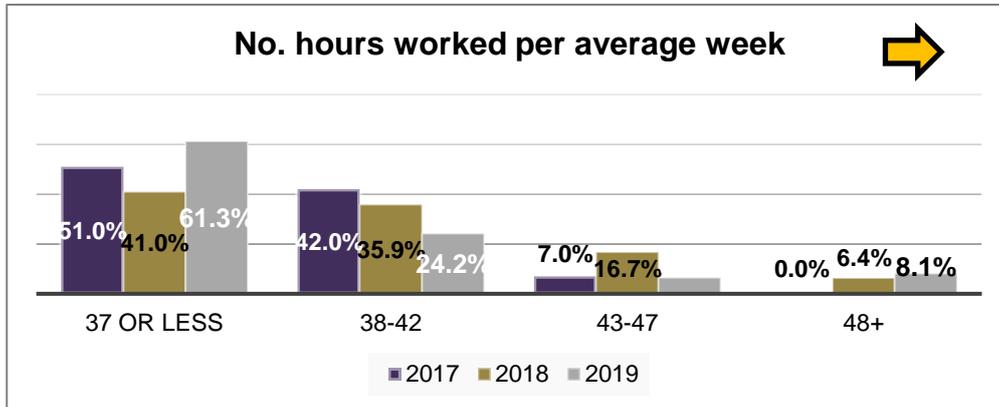
3.0 Overview and key findings

3.1 The findings indicate that while caseloads for full time social workers have increased slightly, it continues to be a reasonable average. It is important to acknowledge however that it is not just the number of cases that are important when considering caseloads, but also the complexity of each situation. This is always monitored during supervision and the skills / experience of workers taken into account.

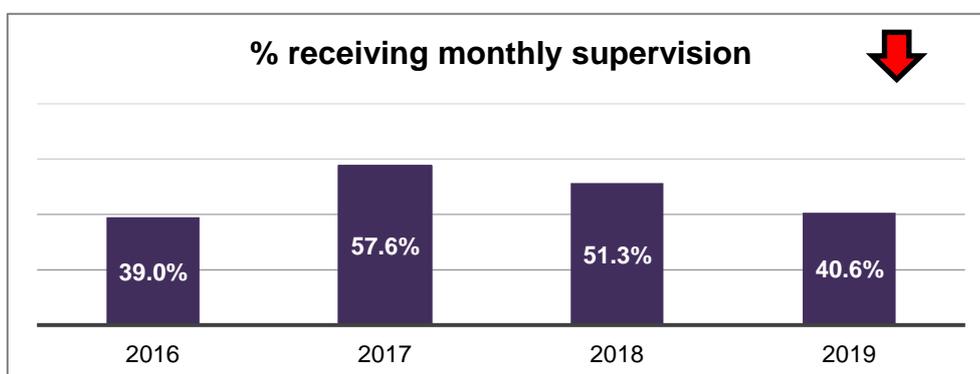
3.2 However there has been an increase this year in the number of social workers who said that their caseloads are not manageable and there has also been a rise in the number saying they are "just about" managing. In contrast no part time social workers said that their caseloads were not manageable, which is a positive change compared to last year when 20% said this was the case. The new way of working under 3 Conversations is faster paced due to the removal of waiting lists and allocation systems. This may have resulted in a perception that workloads are less manageable and could be part of the reason for this increase. More people with care and support needs have been seen in the new way of working compared to last year. Managers have reported that some employees have needed support to help them adapt to the change in pace and to refine skills such as time management.



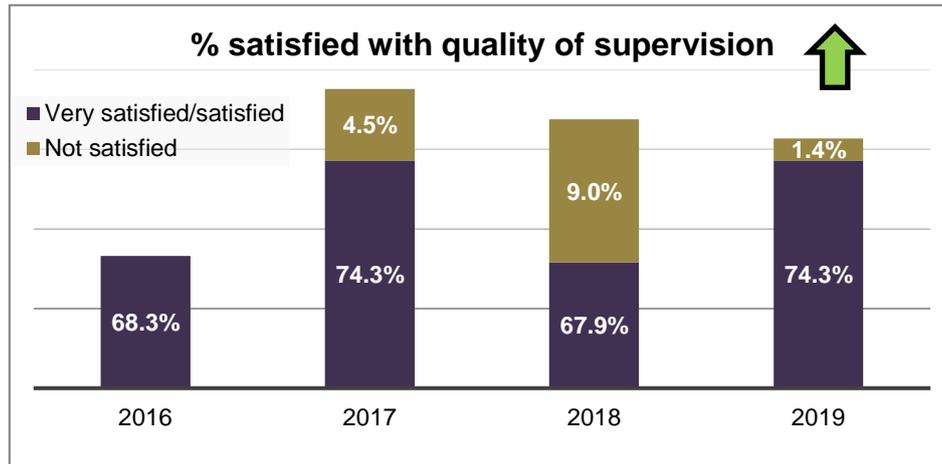
3.3 The survey reveals that there are less full-time social workers working between 38-47 hours compared to last year and more working 37 hours. Around 8% of social workers say they work 48 hours or more, but the general trend suggests that employees are working fewer hours over their contracted hours on average than last year. The number of respondents who never, rarely or occasionally feel stressed was 55% which is slightly less than last year, but still an improvement on previous years.



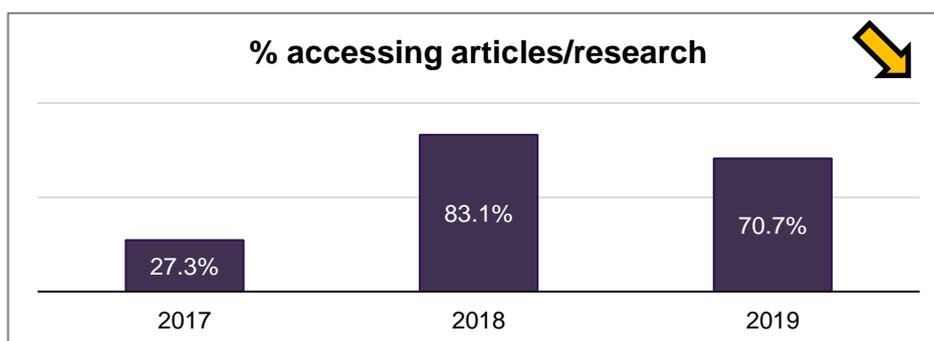
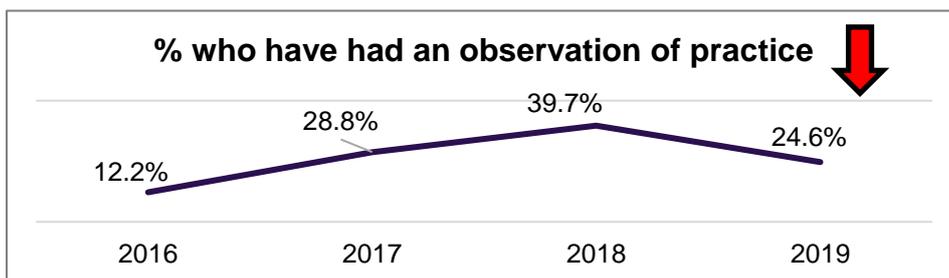
3.4 The number of respondents who receive monthly supervision has decreased in the last two years. However, the quality of supervision has improved and is high, with less than 2% stating they were very dissatisfied with supervision discussions. 73% were happy with the support they receive from their manager with complex pieces of work including risk and / or safeguarding. There has been an increase in the number of social workers this year saying they were able to access support to make an important decision when they needed to with 76% agreeing with this compared to 67% last year. This may suggest that while formal supervision may not be as regular as expected, there is still good access to management support and informal supervision when required. Consultation will take place with social workers at the next adult social work briefing to discuss these findings, particularly in regard to the frequency of supervision.



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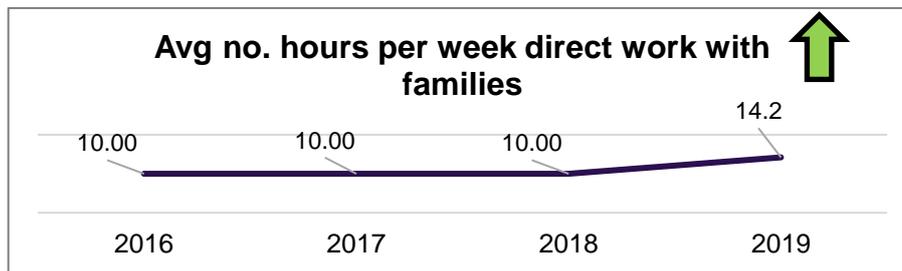


3.5 The number of respondents who have received an observation of practice this year has decreased, but senior managers have all spent time in 3 Conversations teams observing reflective discussions (huddles). Slightly fewer social workers have accessed articles and research this year, but the number is still high when compared with 2017 figures.

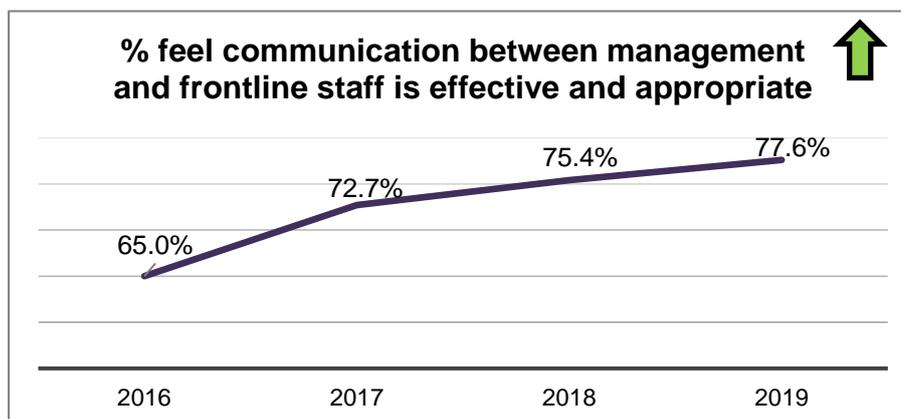


3.6 There has been an increase in the average number of hours social workers are spending working directly with people and families. They are now spending just over 14 hours a week compared to 10 hours. The findings also indicate that social workers are starting to spend less time inputting data onto systems, for instance 41% spent between 50-75% of their time on this task compared to just over half of respondents last year. These positive changes are likely to be attributed to the new way of working under 3 Conversations. When asked what they would change about their job if they could some common themes included:

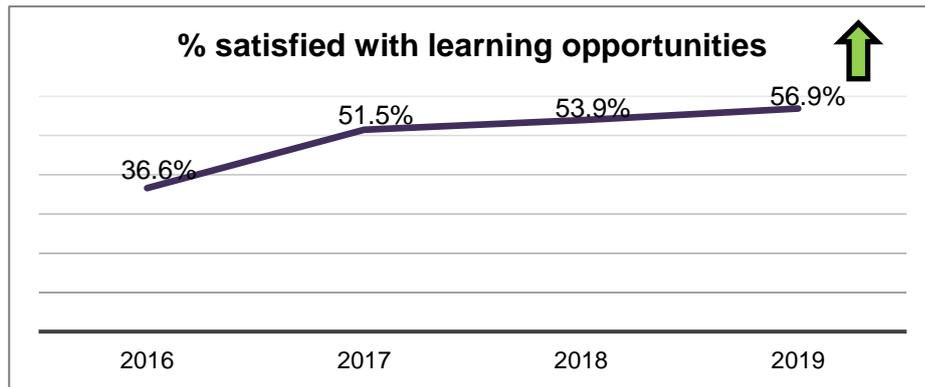
- Smaller workloads
- Less admin / paperwork
- Spending more time with people



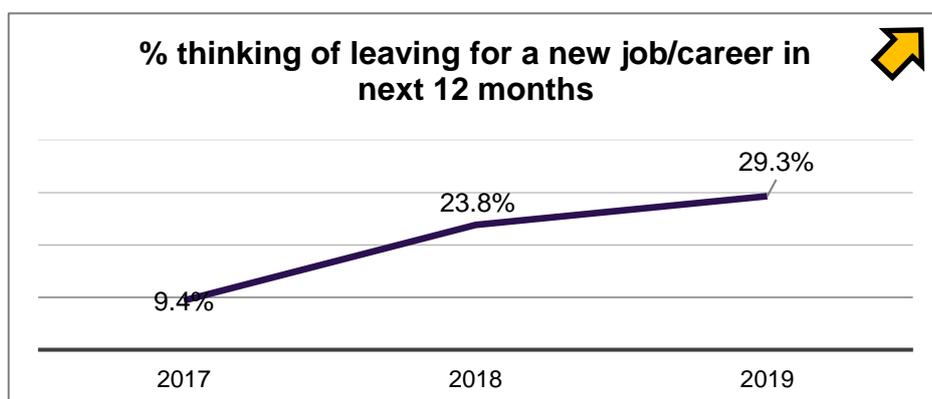
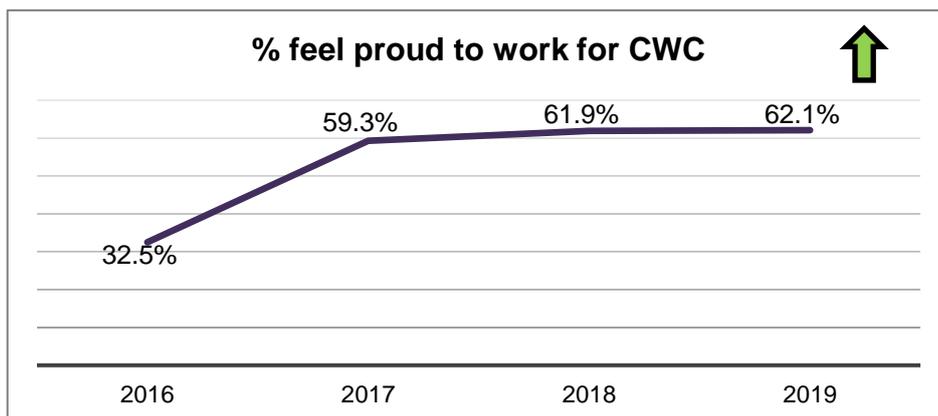
3.7 Communication in the organisation continues to be a key strength. The number who feel that communication between frontline staff and management is effective and appropriate has increased again this year. More people also knew who the senior managers were and could recognise them. 93% of respondents said that team meetings take place monthly, which is a significant improvement since last year when this figure was 75%. Almost all said they feel able to contribute to the agenda.



3.8 Most respondents felt that council is a learning organisation which has a positive learning culture and the majority were satisfied with the learning opportunities available. There were several comments about preferring face to face training rather than e-learning, which was also the case last year. The majority of social workers reported that their skills are being used effectively in their current role. However, team champions have only been accessed by a small number (17%) although the quality of advice / information from champions was high when they were used.



- 3.9 There continues to be a strong sense of pride about working for CWC. 66% feel enthusiastic about their job, which is similar to last year, with only 9% disagreeing with this statement. There are slightly more employees considering leaving CWC for a new job / career this year (29% compared to 23%), which is to be expected considering the major change programme that has been implemented in adult services this year, but the majority of people still plan to remain with the council for the next 12 months. Turnover of frontline adult social workers in Wolverhampton is 8%, which is lower than the national average (14%). The things that made respondents feel positive included:
- The introduction of 3 Conversations and being part of an innovation site
 - Learning and development opportunities
 - Supportive teams and managers
 - “The last joint social work conference made me feel proud to be working as a Wolverhampton employee”
 - “Communication, openness and inclusion between senior managers and the wider workforce has improved and approachability has positively changed”.



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. The findings will also inform the workforce development plans for the coming year. The plan incorporates improvement actions including:

- Managers will offer stress risk assessments where appropriate to support social workers' wellbeing
- A discussion will take place with social workers at the next social work briefing in December 2019 to ascertain their views about the frequency of supervision and discuss how often they feel supervision should be taking place (four / six weekly). The supervision policy will be revised following this to provide consistency about the frequency of supervision as well as expectations about observations of practice and will support robust workload discussions to support employees who feel that their caseloads are not manageable
- The Workforce Development plan includes more face to face opportunities on specific areas of practice this year and covers the main areas social workers have identified (Mental Capacity Act, Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards etc)
- The Workforce Development team will develop a plan on a page of learning and development opportunities to better communicate what training is available
- The role of team champions will be revisited as part of a task and finish group by October 2019. The role has already been revised and relaunched for Mental Capacity Act champions following a thematic audit
- Support is being provided to managers and teams with culture change including three sessions on "coaching conversations" for managers that will take place by July 2019
- The roll out of a new way of working called 3 Conversations across all social work teams by the end of the year is expected to further reduce the amount of time social workers spend inputting onto forms and doing administrative tasks.

4.2 The findings and actions will be shared with teams as well as being discussed at the next social work briefing in December 2019.

4.3 The Health Check action plan will be reviewed quarterly at the Social Work Development Board.

5.0 Financial implications

5.1 Good social work reduces demand and costs. The work currently being undertaken in implementing the Three Conversations© approach provides some evidence of financial efficiencies if this way of working was rolled out across the whole service. The evaluation of phase one and two in the main shows that although demand is increasing the number of new people going on to receive formal support has reduced and when support is put in place it is at a lower weekly cost to the council. This is likely due to the more relational and strengths-based approach being taken and people being better connected to their communities and preventative support.

5.2 Any costs involved with any actions directly resulting from this Health Check will be contained within the £61.8 million Adult Services Budget. [MI/13082019/F]

6.0 Legal implications

6.1 There are no direct legal implications arising out of this report. [TC/05072019/Y]

7.0 Equalities implications

7.1 The adult social work workforce in Wolverhampton is largely representative of the diversity of the local community and the people currently being supported by adult social care.

8.0 Environmental implications

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

9.0 Human resources implications

9.1 There are no Human Resource implications arising out of this report.

10.0 Corporate landlord implications

10.1 There are no specific Corporate landlord implications arising out of this report.

11.0 Schedule of background papers

11.1 Appendix A: Adult Social Work Health Check 2019 Dashboard

11.2 Link to Adult Social Work Health Check Survey full report 2019:

