



# Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

25 September 2019

<b>Report title</b>	Children's Social Work Health Check 2019	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor John Reynolds	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All	
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<b>Report has been considered by</b>	Children's Services Management Team	11 July 2019
	Social Work Development Board	12 July 2019
	SEB	13 August 2019

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## Recommendations for action:

The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the findings of the Children's 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) 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.

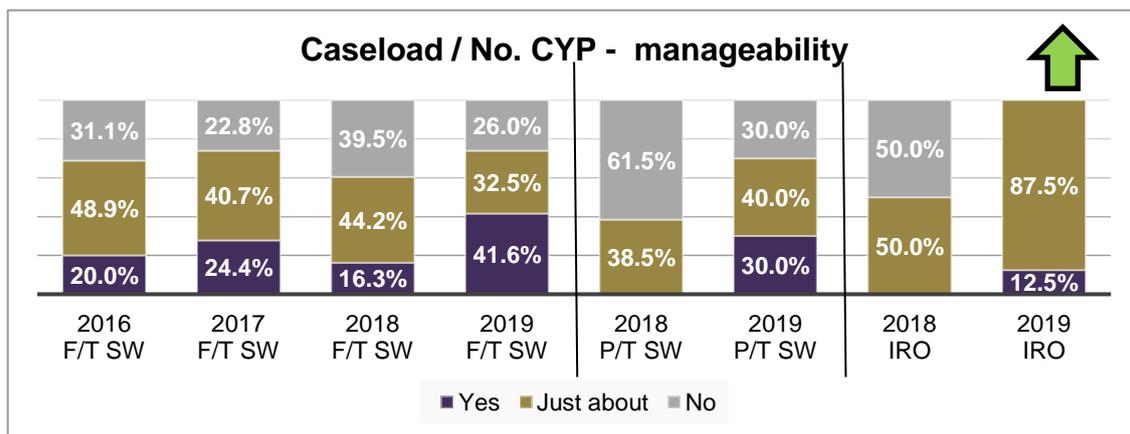
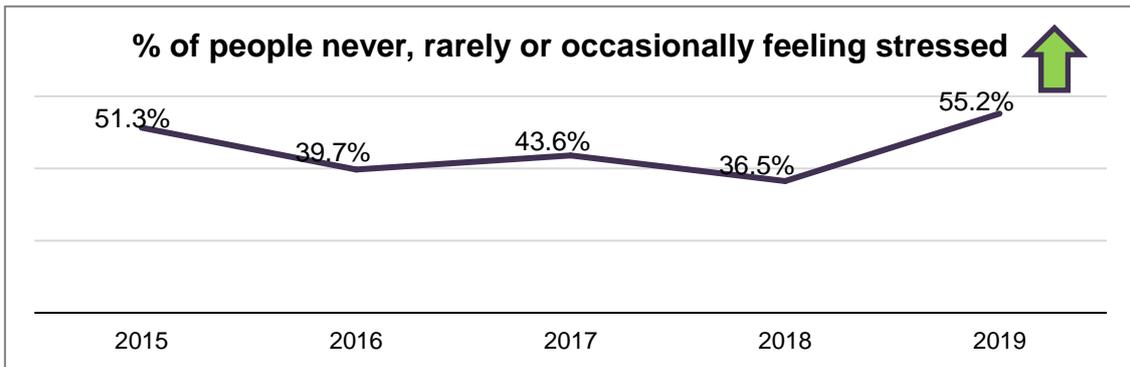
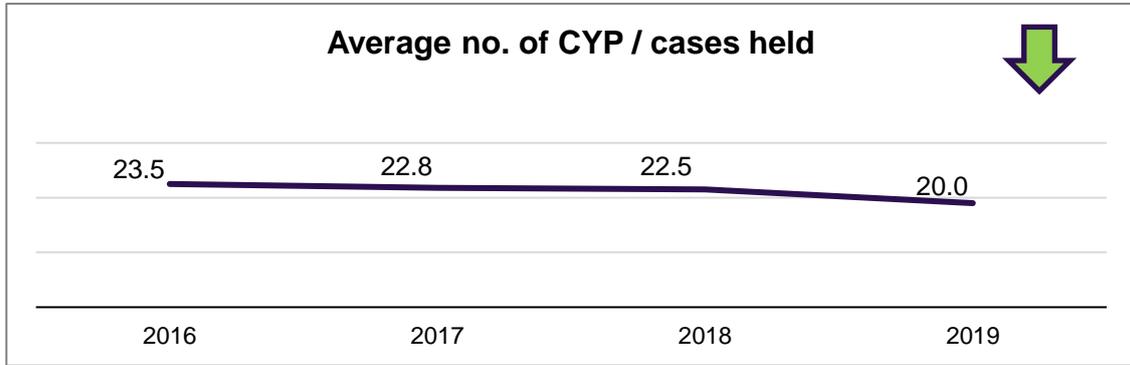
## **2.0 Background**

- 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**

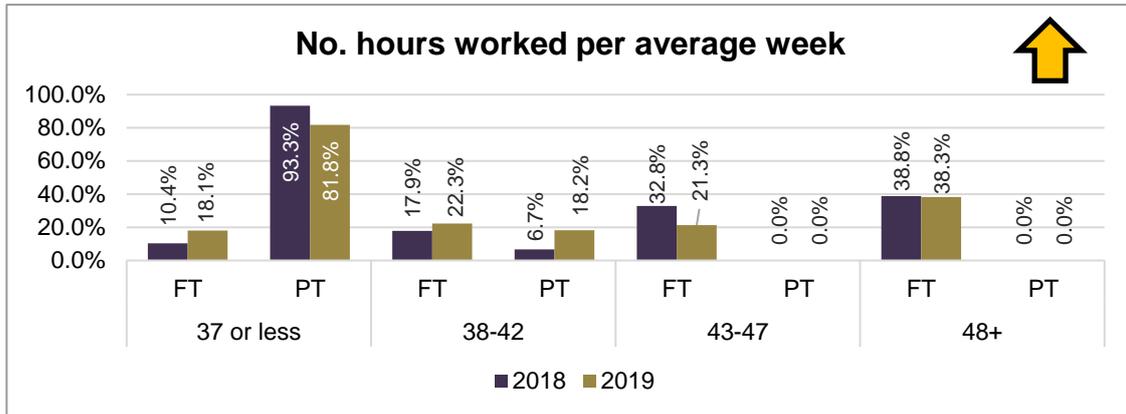
- 3.1 The Health Check was circulated to 205 social workers via an online survey between 1 April 2019 and 15 May 2019. A total of 123 responses (60%) were received. The response rate in 2018 was 44%.
- 3.2 The findings of this year’s Children’s Social Work Health Check is very positive, with progress evident in a number of key areas. Average caseloads/workloads are reducing and there has been a significant improvement in stress levels compared to previous years. 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. This year social workers are saying that workloads are more manageable, which suggests that these discussions are more robust, and actions taken over the last 12 months are starting to have a positive impact on the health of the children's social work workforce.

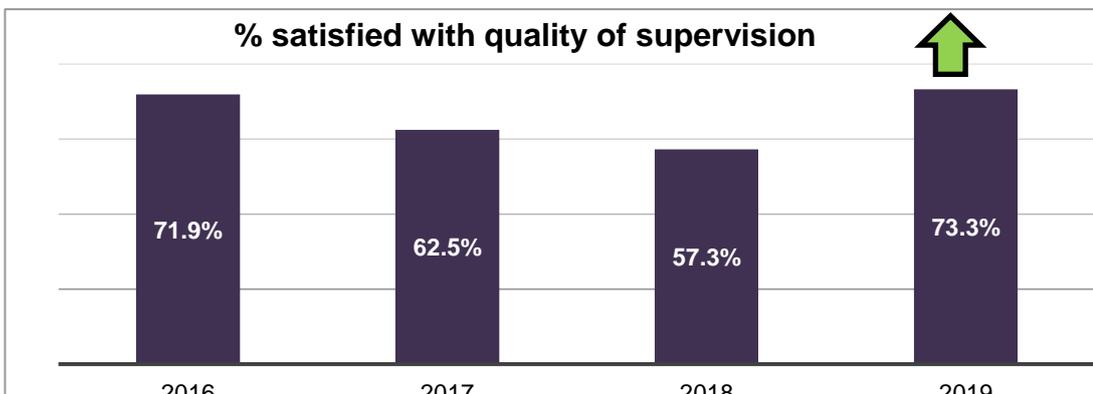
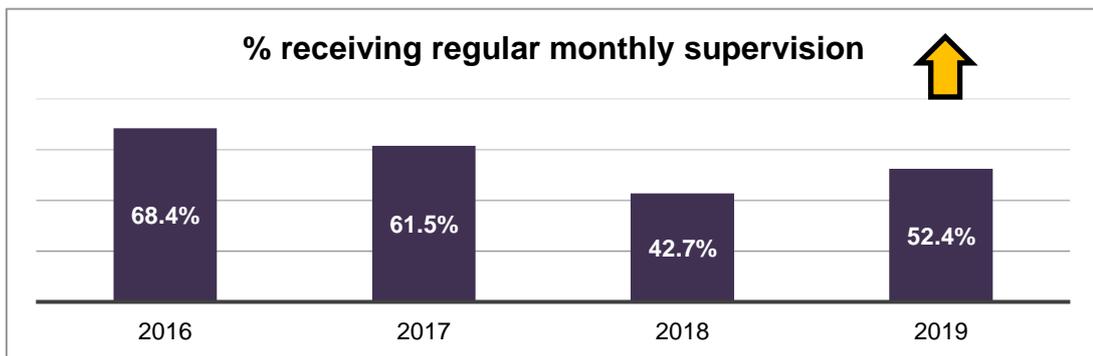


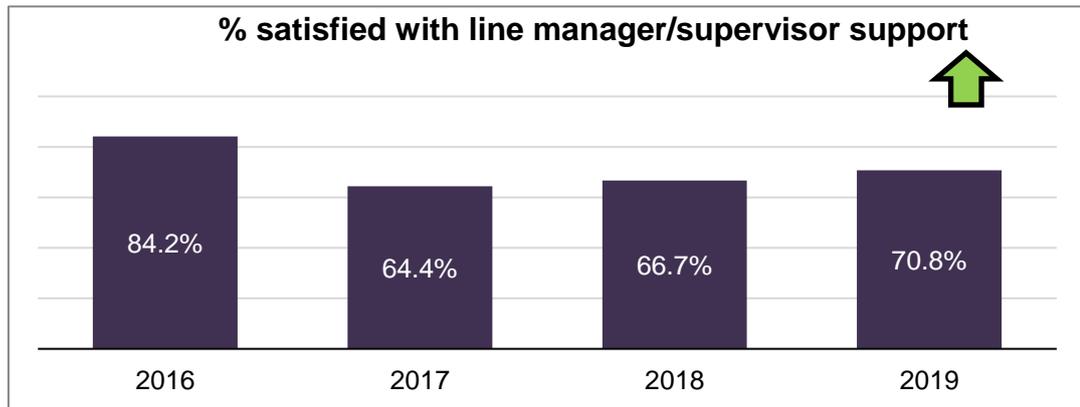
- 3.3 Fewer full-time workers are working 43-47 hours and more are working between 38-42 hours. However, about the same number as last year are working more than 48 hours which is a concern as caseloads are reducing. A further face to face consultation is taking place with social workers on the 19 August to find out more about what is contributing to long working hours for some.
- 3.4 There is recognition that all managers at all levels of the organisation need to drive a change in culture to encourage a better work / life balance, alongside improving

recording systems so less time is spent inputting and on administrative tasks. Social workers were asked to state what they would change about their job if they could and common responses included less paperwork, more manageable caseloads and a better work / life balance. It should be noted that 41% of social workers now feel that their caseload is completely manageable compared with just 16% last year.

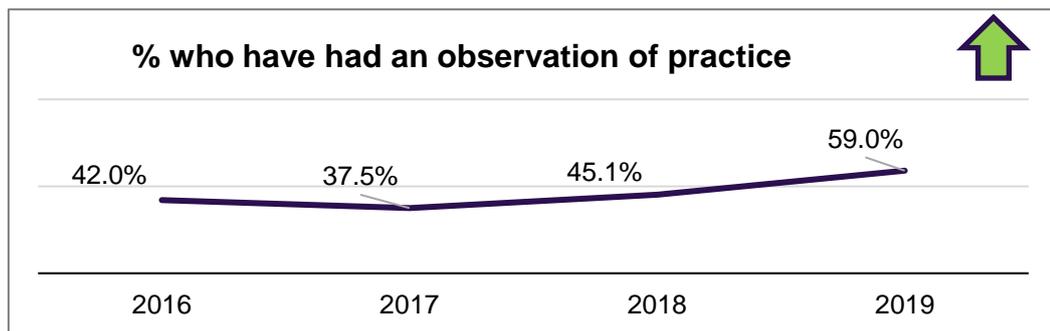


3.5 Just over half of social workers who took part in the survey said they are receiving regular monthly supervision. This has increased since last year but remains an area for further improvement. However, the quality of supervision is high, with only 4% stating they are dissatisfied, and just over 70% are happy with the support they receive from their manager / supervisor. This may suggest that while formal supervision may not be as regular as expected, there is good access to management support and informal supervision when required. This year Children’s Services will be introducing a supervision performance tool that will enable managers to see at a glance how many supervisions have been completed within a monthly timescale and this will highlight workers whose supervision is out of date. Service managers and Heads of Service will also have access to this data which will be monitored at CYP performance meetings.





3.6 Almost 60% of social workers who took part in the Health Check said they had had an observation of their practice this year which is an improvement since last year (45%). This has been helped by the introduction of practice weeks. Nearly 85% of those who had been observed as part of practice weeks said they found it a positive experience which provided an opportunity for reassurance, professional development and constructive feedback.

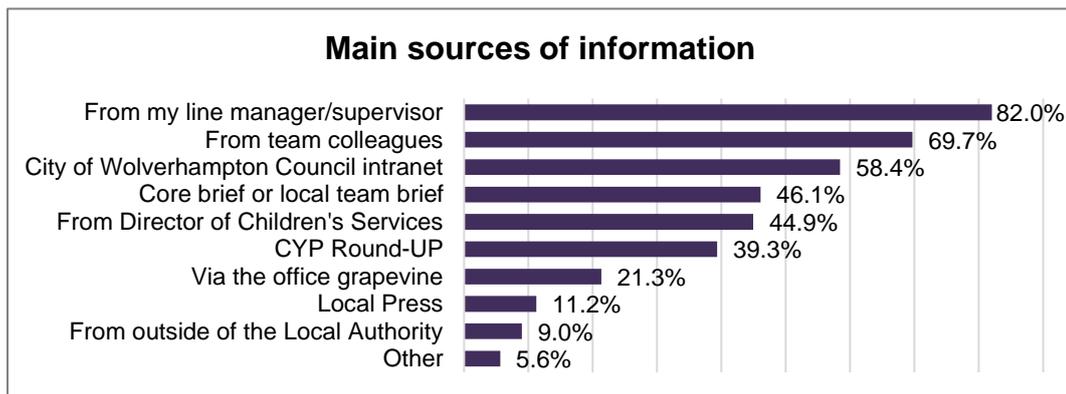
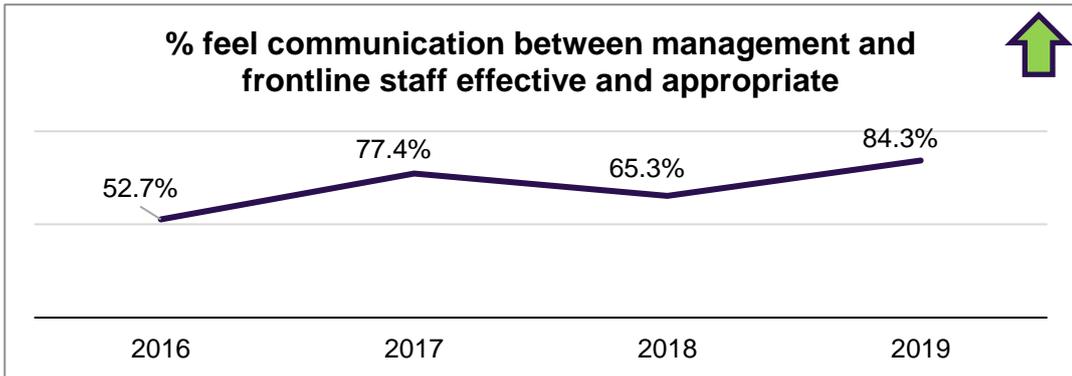


3.7 The average number of hours in a typical week spent undertaking direct work with children, young people and families has been increasing slowly over the last three years which is a positive trend. However, this is still lower than expected and this may be due to the wording of the question and an assumption that this refers to a specific intervention with a child / family rather than contact more generally. This question will be re-worded in next year's survey, and guidance provided.

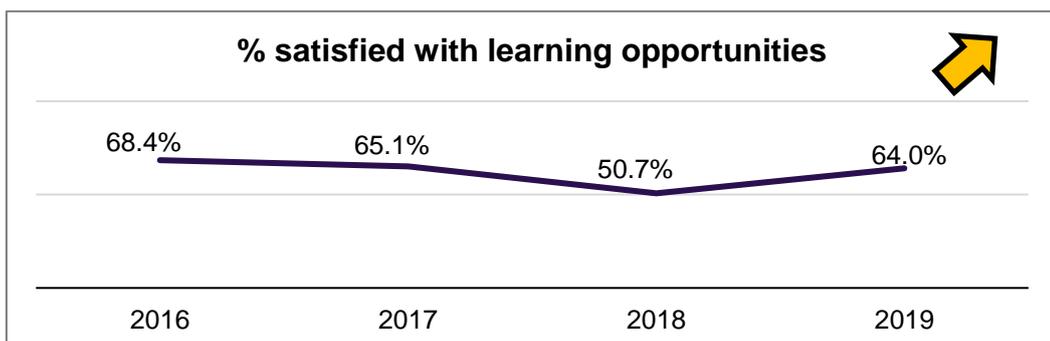


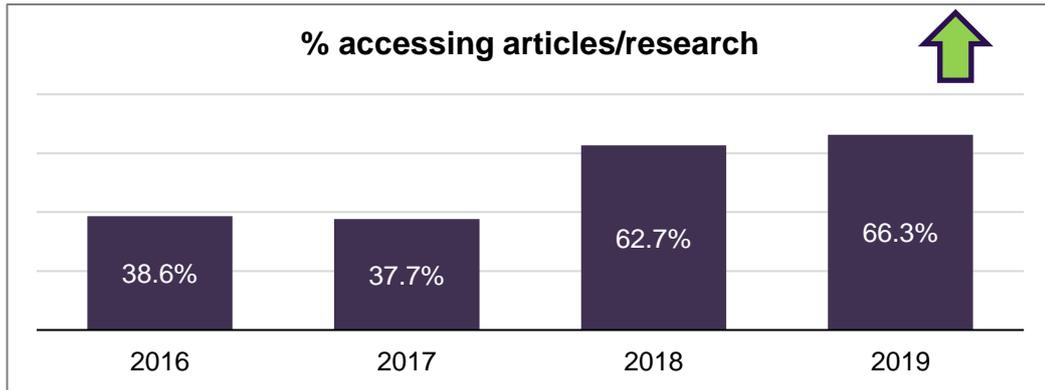
3.8 Communication between management and frontline staff has improved, with almost 85% stating that this is effective and appropriate, which is a significant increase from just over

65% in 2018. A lot of work has taken place in the last 12 months to improve communication with the children’s workforce, including the introduction of coffee and conversation sessions and the publication of a fortnightly e-bulletin alongside the usual social work briefings which take place four times a year. Team meetings are happening more often with 65% taking place every month compared to 45% last year. More social workers also feel consulted about and involved in proposed changes this year, with only 15% disagreeing with this, but this is an area that will continue to be developed as part of the Engagement Plan which was finalised in June 2019.



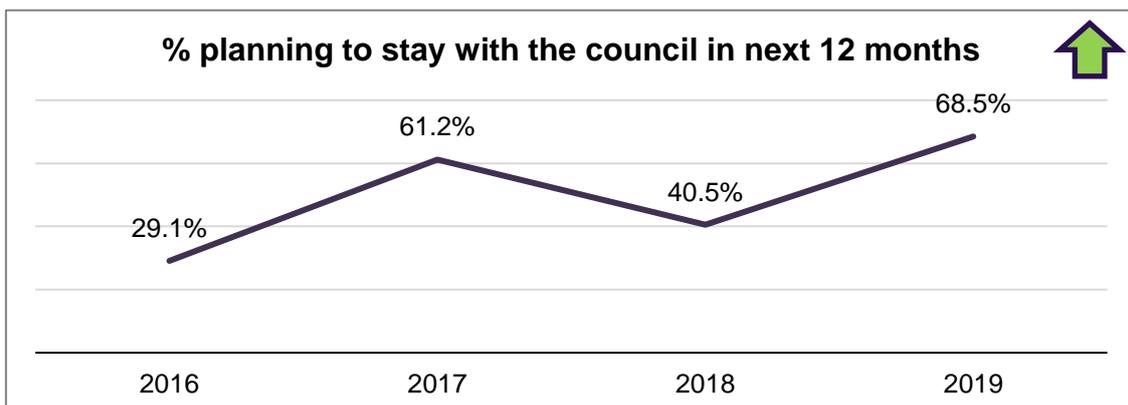
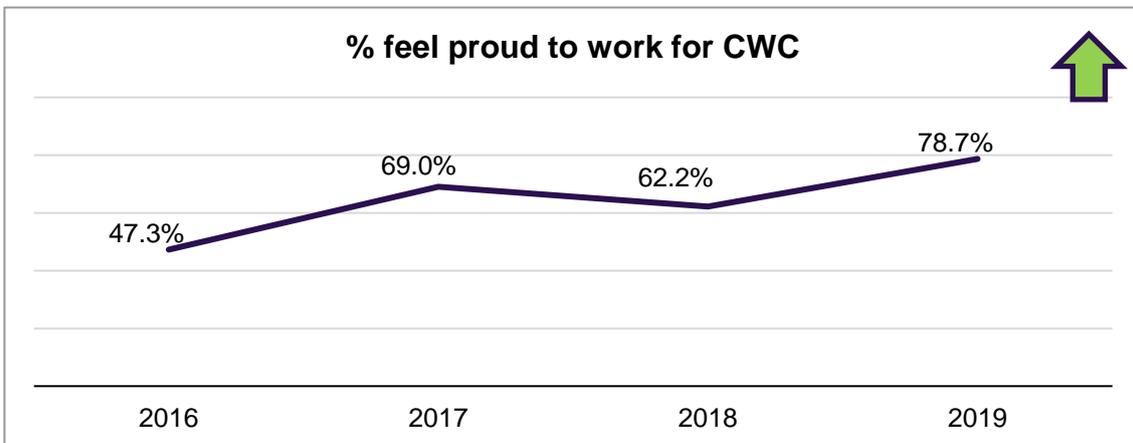
3.9 Almost 70% agreed that CWC is a learning organisation with a positive learning culture and more this year said that they are satisfied with the development opportunities available. Although team champions have not been widely used with only 6% of respondents saying they have accessed one, the number using articles and research to support and inform social work practice has continued to improve this year.





3.10 The majority, just over 75%, of respondents are enthusiastic about their job and feel their skills in their field are being used effectively. More social workers feel proud to work for CWC and there has been a significant improvement in the number who plan to remain with the council in the next 12 months, with only 18% of those thinking of leaving doing so to pursue a new job or career compared to 40% last year. Common themes that social workers said they felt positive about this year included:

- Training and learning opportunities
- The passion the service has for Restorative Practice
- Having a good ASYE programme.
- One respondent stated: "I have worked in other authorities and Wolverhampton cares about its employees"



## 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. The action plan and the Health Check findings will be shared with teams and presented at the next social work briefing in November 2019. Actions include:

- Increasing the frequency of supervisions and robustness of workload discussions. Senior managers will continue to monitor workloads and take action where required. The workload dashboard will continue to be reviewed monthly. The quantity and quality of supervision will be monitored through audit and DIP sampling. This year Children's Services have introduced a supervision performance tool that will enable managers to see at a glance how many supervisions have been completed within a monthly timescale and this will highlight workers whose supervision is out of date. Service managers and Heads of Service and will also have access to this data which will be monitored at CYP performance meetings
- Revisiting and developing the role of team champions. Work has already started in regard to the Restorative Practice Champions.
- Although workloads have reduced this has not resulted in a lower number of employees who work over 48hrs a week. Whilst this shows a very dedicated workforce it is recognised that actions are needed to help support social workers achieve a better work / life balance. A further engagement session will take place with social workers on this point in August to ensure senior leaders fully understand the problem and have the opportunity to solution find with the social work workforce. The implementation of Eclipse later in 2019 (a new recording system) should also help to reduce the amount of time that social workers spend completing administrative tasks and paperwork. Support from managers with time management and encouraging a culture where working long hours is not expected will also be prioritised.
- Managers and Heads of Service will book in all outstanding appraisals by 30 August 2019.
- Direct Work bags have been created for each team and training workshops have been arranged to ensure that all social workers understand how to best use them and record the work that they complete. This will support direct work with families and help embed restorative approaches further.

## 5.0 Financial implications

5.1 Sickness, unplanned absence from work and difficulties recruiting and retaining staff could all result in additional expenditure for the Council. The total approved budget for Children's services is £51.5 million of which the staff related element is £31.1 million. The expenditure on agency staff has reduced from £2.9 million in 2016-2017 to £2.4 million in 2018-2019. [JB/06082019/T]

## 6.0 Legal implications

6.1 There are no direct legal implications arising out of this report. [SB/05082019/S]

## **7.0 Equalities implications**

7.1 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.

## **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: Children's Social Work Health Check 2019 Dashboard

Link to the full Children's Social Work Health Check Survey Report 2019:

