

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

10 March 2021

Report title	Children's Services Workforce Health Check 2020	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Director for Children's and Adult Services	
Originating service	Children and Young People	
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Report to be/has been considered by	Children and Young People Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board	4 February 2021 25 February 2021

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

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

1.0 Purpose

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

2.0 Background

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

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

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

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

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

3.0 Overview and key findings

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

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

4.0 Recommendations and actions

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

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

5.0 Update from 2019 survey

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

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

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

6.0 Financial implications

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

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

7.0 Legal implications

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

8.0 Equalities implications

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

9.0 Climate change and environmental implications

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

10.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications

10.1 The health and wellbeing of our workforce is a priority for the City of Wolverhampton Council. The purpose of this health check is to get feedback from the workforce about how they feel about working for Wolverhampton and how we can work to make

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

11.0 Human resources implications

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

12.0 Corporate landlord implications

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

13.0 Covid Implications

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

14.0 Appendices

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