

Adult and Safer City Scrutiny Panel

16 March 2021

Report title	Adult Social Care Workforce Health Check 2020	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Linda Leach Cabinet Member for Adults	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Director of Adult and Children's Services	
Originating service	Adult Social Care	
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Report to be/has been considered by	Adult Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board	25 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 Adult Workforce Health Check for 2020
2. Provide comment and challenge on proposed actions to improve the health of the 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. Last year the Health Check was extended to include the wider adult social care workforce and it was decided that this should continue every year. This report presents an overview of the findings of the wider workforce survey and concludes with actions to address areas for improvement.

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. It is recognised that 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.

2.2 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

2.3 The wider adult workforce Health Check was circulated to 301 employees via an online survey between 2 November 2020 and 14 December 2020. All grade five and six non-social work qualified staff were invited to complete the online survey. It was also sent out to several senior occupational therapists (grade seven). This is a very diverse workforce and is made up a variety of roles such as social care workers, day opportunities team leaders, reablement assistants, welfare rights officers, direct payments reviewing officers and occupational therapists.

2.4 It is important to note that the country entered the second national lockdown at the time that this Health Check survey was circulated. It is recognised that this year’s responses may have been affected by the unique circumstances experienced this year due to the pandemic. This has included increases in demand and staffing issues in some teams, as well as more general feelings of fatigue, isolation and the ongoing challenges associated with working from home and balancing other commitments.

2.5 A total of 100 responses were received (33%), although not every respondent answered every survey question. This is a slightly lower response rate from 2019, which was 38%,

which is likely due to the impact Covid has had this year and the challenges teams have experienced and continue to face.

3.0 Overview and key findings

- 3.1 The average number of people being supported varies because of the diversity of job roles. It is difficult to draw comparisons as each team / service may have a variety of roles with differing expectations in terms of workload. Those who said their service area was Community Financial Support work with the greatest average number of people with care and support needs and although this average appears high, over half of these people would not require active involvement and is reasonable for this team. It is also lower than in 2019.
- 3.2 On average most teams are generally supporting fewer people than they were last year or just slightly more. However, full time Occupational Therapists seem to be supporting more people this year. The variety of responsibilities within the service makes it difficult to draw any conclusions around this increase. Although referral rates are increasing due to Covid, workloads remain static overall. It is important to note that the small number of therapists and even smaller number of respondents (10 respondents in 2020 and 5 in 2019) can skew these numbers.
- 3.3 Almost all (97%) respondents that work directly with people felt that their workload was manageable this year.
- 3.4 More employees than in 2019 “never”, “rarely” or only “occasionally” feel stressed due to workload or the nature of their work (71% compared to 65.8% in 2019), which is really positive given the challenges of the pandemic.
- 3.5 Although still high, there has been a slight decrease in the number of employees that are receiving supervision compared to last year (72% compared to 82% in 2019). Satisfaction with the quality of supervision is also high and about the same as last year. However only 65% had an appraisal this year, much lower than the almost 90% in 2019. But it is important to note that the Council changed the appraisal process partway through 2020 and due to Covid related challenges some team managers have struggled to complete their training. The Policy and Procedure Officer will work with teams to help ensure that all employees across adult social care participate in a Professional Conversation (appraisal) in the next year.
- 3.6 Slightly fewer respondents said that they had an observation of practice this year, 58% compared to over 60% in 2019. Observations of practice would have been more difficult to carry out in 2020 due to Covid restrictions. About the same number (77%) said that they were satisfied with the support they received from their line manager/supervisor, which is positive.
- 3.7 On average, full time employees spent slightly less time carrying out direct work with people and families (17 hours compared to 20 hours in 2019) while part time employees spent slightly more time (16 hours compared to 15 hours). Due to the variety of roles and

how areas may have been impacted differently by Covid restrictions, it is difficult to draw conclusions about these results.

- 3.8 There has been an increase in the number of employees saying team meetings take place monthly or weekly (82% compared to 71.3% in 2019), and more (93%) said that they feel able to contribute to the agenda. Communication in the organisation appears to be a key strength, particularly between management and frontline staff with more employees reporting that this is effective and appropriate (85% compared to 72% last year). However only 34% said that they are involved in or consulted about proposed changes, although it is important to note that a significant number (36%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. This is a slight improvement from 2019.
- 3.9 More respondents than last year (81% compared to almost 69%) said that they plan to remain with CWC for at least the next 12 months. This is a very positive improvement. When asked what they would change about their job, common themes were more time to work with people and less admin / paperwork. When asked what made them feel positive about their job responses included flexibility, staff safety during the pandemic, feeling supported and valued by the Council during the pandemic, supportive colleagues / managers and learning and development opportunities. Some notable comments were:
- “The Chief Executive listens to and communicates with staff”
 - “Very enlightened and supportive management team”
 - “I feel that our service offers people a good life”
- 3.10 More respondents this year are completely satisfied with the training and development opportunities on offer to them, with 61% agreeing to this compared to 41% in 2019. There have been a number of webinars and virtual training opportunities available for the adult social care workforce this year. Additionally, the social work apprenticeship programme will offer an opportunity for non-social work qualified employees to progress their careers and to gain a recognised qualification.
- 3.11 There is a strong sense of pride with 82% agreeing that they are proud to work for CWC, a significant increase from 2019 when this was about 56%.
- 3.12 10% of respondents said that they felt that they had been treated unfairly in the previous 12 months on the grounds of protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and actions will be taken to address this.

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 key actions are noted below.
- 4.2 One clear action is to ensure that employees feel that they are involved in and consulted about any proposed changes in the next 12 months. Where any changes may be being planned the Adult Leadership Team are committed to ensuring teams are involved and consulted. There are two workforce briefings a year, led by the Deputy Director and

Director for Adults Services and these will continue to take place to communicate key updates and information to employees. The monthly newsletter the Adult Social Care (ASC) Update is sent out by the Director for Adult Services and will continue to provide updates and information about developments across the whole workforce. Managers will be asked to promote the ASC Update to their teams, sharing key parts of it at team meetings and ensuring copies are accessible to those employees who may not have access to emails. Consultations will take place when any significant changes are planned and Senior managers will revisit the Engagement Plan in light of restrictions imposed by Covid in order to establish how leaders can reengage with the workforce.

- 4.3 The findings from this year's Health Check suggests that the frequency of supervision has reduced, and some employees are still always or often feeling stressed, although this is less than last year. To address this the Policy and Procedure team will be working with Heads of Service to produce a general adult service supervision policy over the next three months. This will set out expectations about frequency and quality of supervision in wider adult services teams and this will cover workload manageability and support for wellbeing. It will also include expectations around Professional Conversations and carrying out observations of practice so these should also increase next year. Supporting wellbeing has been a continual focus throughout the pandemic and been a feature in workforce briefings and team meetings. This focus on wellbeing will continue this year. Stress risk assessments will be carried out where identified as needed to ensure employees receive the support they need.
- 4.4 The implementation of Eclipse later in 2021 should help streamline processes and reduce the amount of time that practitioners spend completing forms and administrative tasks.
- 4.5 The champion programme is not working well in all areas. Therefore, the champion programme will be reviewed and refreshed in 2021-2022 by the Quality and Improvement team and teams will be encouraged to identify Equalities Champions.
- 4.6 Although there has been a significant improvement in the number of employees feeling satisfied by the learning and development offer it is important that the Council builds on this progress. As a result, training and opportunities will continue to be promoted via the monthly newsletter and the leadership team will ensure that workforce briefings have a focus on development as well as information updates. Heads of Service are currently working with Workforce Development to identify training needs for their service areas for the coming year, which teams are encouraged to contribute to. Workforce Development will be encouraging all the workforce to sign up to Research in Practice for Adults (RiPFA) and this will be promoted during March 2021 with sessions to support people on the benefits of using this resource and how they can access it. The social work apprenticeship scheme will continue to be offered.
- 4.7 Ensuring people feel treated fairly is extremely important to the Council and to Adult Services. Actions will be taken to address the issues raised in this year's survey including:

- Promoting training to support managers to facilitate good conversations around Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion and creating safe spaces within supervisions or individual discussions.
- The Council is committed to upholding the highest standards of conduct and ethics and has launched a safe space for employees to report any serious concerns about any aspect of the Council's work in a confidential way. This will be actively promoted by all managers and teams across Adults Services.
- Adult leadership team are progressing their Service Equality Plans and training is planned to ensure all frontline employees are able to have good conversations with people about their uniqueness and protected characteristics. This will also improve data collection on protected characteristics so gaps and representation can be explored further.
- Equality and Diversity is a standard agenda item on all team meetings at all levels as well as covered at every supervision.
- Equalities champions will be identified within teams this coming year

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 are noted below.

5.2 In 2019, over 40% of respondents neither agreed or disagreed that CWC had a positive learning culture and a quarter were not satisfied with the learning and development opportunities; they wanted more face to face training. Actions taken to address this included:

- Continuation of twice-yearly workforce briefings, but they incorporated more learning and development sessions
- Opportunities for learning and development were better promoted through the monthly ASC update (newsletter)
- The Workforce Development team worked with Heads of Service to explore training needs and further opportunities for the workforce and will continue to do this every year. More face to face training was offered.
- The introduction of the social work apprenticeship programme offered the opportunity for those eligible to apply to gain a professional / recognised qualification.
- This has resulted in an increase in the number of employees this year (2020) who felt satisfied by the learning and development opportunities on offer and more have said the Council has a learning culture.

5.3 In 2019, some respondents said that they did not feel involved in or consulted about proposed changes. To address this the following actions were taken:

- Continuation of twice-yearly workforce briefings which included key updates from the Director of Adult Services
- The Monthly ASC Update newsletter was introduced and provided updates about changes and developments across the workforce.

- There was a commitment by managers to share updates and information at team meetings and that these should be held at least monthly.
- The 2020 findings show that there were more regular team meetings and more employees feel communication has improved. There has also been an increase in the number who say they have felt involved in proposed changes, but this is still an area needing further improvement. It is hoped that the 2021 survey will continue to show progress in this area

5.4 In 2019, many respondents said that they were spending a lot of time inputting data onto systems and completing paperwork. Some of the key actions taken as a result included:

- The further roll out of Three Conversations© should have helped to reduce the amount of time spent inputting into systems and completing lengthy forms. However results are similar this year so this remains an area to improve.
- The implementation of a new system called Eclipse was also intended to be rolled out in 2020 to support more efficient working but this has been delayed until 2021-2022.

6.0 Financial implications

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

6.2 Any costs arising from actions in the workplan and priorities will be funded from within the Adult Services overall budget of £68.2 million. [MK/26022021/R].

7.0 Legal implications

7.1 There are no direct legal implications as a result of this report although it is important to implement practices and procedures to ensure the wellbeing of employees in order to avoid potential employment law claims. [SB/26022021/C]

8.0 Equalities implications

8.1 The Adult Social Care workforce in Wolverhampton is largely representative of the community and the people currently being supported by adult social care, with a slight over representation in regard to Black and Asian communities.

9.0 Climate change and environmental implications

9.1 There are no climate change or environmental implications arising from 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 practitioners and continue to support the wellbeing of the workforce in balancing their work and personal circumstances.

14.0 Appendices

14.1 Appendix 1: Adult Social Care Workforce Health Check 2020 Dashboard