

Report title	Principal Social Worker Annual Report 2021-2022	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Beverley Momenabadi, Children and Young People's Service Councillor Linda Leach, Adult Services	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable Director	Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families Becky Wilkinson, Director of Adults	
Originating service	Children and Young People's Service / Adult Services	
Accountable employee	Jennifer Rogers Tel Email	Principal Social Worker 01902 555704 Jennifer.rogers@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Directorate Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board Fulfilled Adult Lives Scrutiny Panel Strong Families, Children, and Young People Scrutiny Panel	16 June 2022 28 June 2022 5 July 2022 13 July 2022

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Endorse the work of the Principal Social Worker (PSW) and the continued impact it has on social work practice across Children's and Adult's Services
2. Approve the main priorities for the Principal Social Worker identified for 2022-2023

Recommendation for noting:

The Cabinet is asked to note:

1. The work carried out in respect of quality assurance activity, the commitment to supporting the continual professional development of social workers and the way in which the PSW has supported social work students and routes into social work which is ensuring the Council is able to meet demand and supply needs now and for the future.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide a progress report on the work of the Principal Social Worker in promoting and improving the quality of social work practice and outline the key priorities for 2022-2023.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Designated Principal Social Workers (PSW) were first proposed by Professor Eileen Munro in her review of child protection in 2011, which identified the importance of better communication and understanding between social workers and senior management. Munro stated that Principal Social Workers should:
- A. Create a clear line of communication between frontline staff and senior management
 - B. Champion best practice
 - C. Encourage a “reflective approach” to social work
 - D. Help to reduce bureaucracy and the amount of time spent on process-driven activities
 - E. Support social workers to use their core skills and interventions which make a real difference to people
- 2.2 The role of PSW is a statutory requirement in adults and is referenced in the 2016 revised Care Act guidance. The guidance states that the PSW should be visible across the organisation, from elected members and senior management, through to frontline social workers, people with care and support needs and carers. Local authorities should make arrangements to have a qualified and registered social work professional practice lead in place to lead and oversee excellent social work practice and the development of excellent social workers. This also includes overseeing quality assurance and improvement of social work practice as well as advising on areas of complex or controversial practice and on social work-related legislation.
- 2.3 Social work is a unique profession and social workers are responsible for making potentially life changing decisions about individuals, often during very difficult and distressing circumstances. The role is extremely rewarding and the potential for making a positive difference to children, adults and families is immense. However, it is also emotionally demanding and can be subject to at times intense, often public, scrutiny and criticism. Austerity, increased demand, a culture of blame fuelled by the media and a national shortage of social workers, resulting in increased workloads and stress, are all having a significant impact on the profession and outcomes for children, young people and adults. Research suggests that social workers and students see the profession as the worst ranked in society, well behind the respect other professions receive such as for doctors, nurses and lawyers¹. The average working life of a frontline social worker is just

¹ Social Work England, A Report on the Social Work Profession, June 2020

over seven years, compared to 25 years for doctors and 15 for nurses². The Principal Social Worker role is critical to help raise the profile of the profession, creating a strong professional identity and challenging the blame narrative. PSWs call for change at a national, regional and local level, are key to transforming public perception, advocating for the wellbeing of social workers and attracting more into the profession. PSWs provide a strong collective voice on behalf of all social workers and strive to make a positive difference for the workforce and the people social workers support.

- 2.4 There has been a PSW with joint responsibility for Adults and Children's Services since March 2016. The decision to appoint one PSW across both service areas was informed by a commitment to promote a "think whole family approach", support better joined up working and inspire greater aspirations for children, families and adults with care and support needs.
- 2.5 The PSW role links to several of the Our Council Plan priority areas including strong families where children grow up well and achieve their potential; fulfilled lives for all with quality care for those that need it most. Strengths based approaches in social work also encourage a focus on community resources and building on the assets available locally to support families and people who need us, so there is also a role for the PSW in the healthy and inclusive communities priority.
- 2.6 The PSW reports directly to a Head of Service with a dotted line to the Deputy Director in Children's Services and the Director of Adult's Services (DASS). The work of the PSW is overseen and prioritised by the People's Social Work Development Board. A degree of independence is required of the role in order to provide challenge within the organisation.
- 2.7 It is important that the role has a presence at, and is able to contribute to, national and regional PSW forums. These meetings are learning and development opportunities and also enables the Chief Social Workers for Adults and Children to share the direction of travel, answer questions and receive feedback from PSW's which can influence policy and guidance. These events also provide opportunity for the sharing of good practice.

3.0 Progress

- 3.1 The PSW in Wolverhampton has responsibility for policies and procedures, the recruitment and retention of social workers and quality of practice, which includes leading on implementing and further developing the quality assurance frameworks for Adult and Children's Services. The remit of the PSW's team also covers inspection activity. Although not directly leading on all projects involving social workers across the service, the PSW has a key role in promoting and supporting innovation in social work, such as the Social Workers in Schools project.

² Curtis et al, 2010, British Journal of Social Work

3.2 This year priorities have included building on and strengthening existing quality assurance activity, responding to the challenges faced in recruiting and retaining social workers, an ongoing focus on tackling inequality and supporting excellence in social work practice.

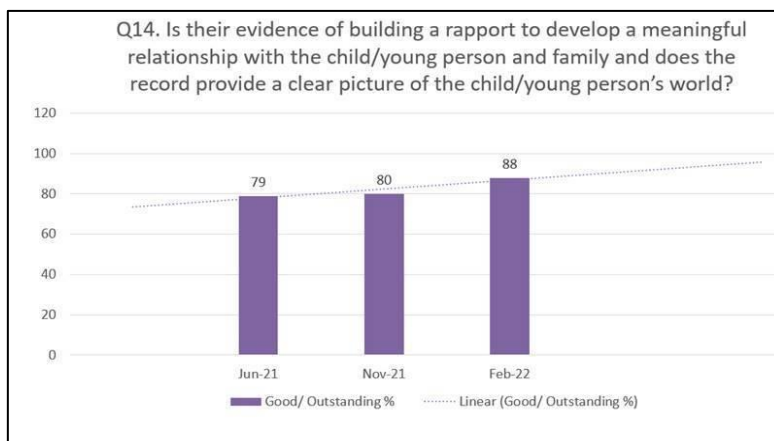
3.3 Highlights of the work undertaken by the PSW in the last 12 months since April 2021 is outlined below.

3.4 Quality of Practice – Children’s Service

3.5 Restorative Practice (RP) has been the overarching practice framework for the Children’s and Young People’s Service since November 2016. It is a strengths-based approach that is about building, maintaining and repairing relationships. It is a way of being that supports working “with” children and families and not doing “to” them, identifying strengths but also being able to effectively challenge where necessary.

3.6 In June 2020 a Senior Restorative Practice (SRP) Lead was appointed to support the PSW in further embedding RP across the service. This year the main priority has been to spread this approach wider and introduce it to external partners, including police, health, education and the voluntary sector to provide a consistent and joined up approach to improving outcomes for children and families. Agencies agreed to put forward champions to undertake train the trainer RP training which could then be offered out as multi-agency workshops. Fifteen champions have now been trained and the workshops will be rolled out during 2022-2023.

3.7 Over 90% of social workers in the annual Social Work Health Check said that Wolverhampton has a clear model of social work practice that promotes relationship working and a strengths-based approach to achieve the best outcomes for individuals and families, with comments including: “I am proud of the restorative approach. I feel that we are local leaders for other authorities”. The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspection also agreed that Restorative Practice was well embedded and understood, acknowledging that despite the challenges of Covid, “leaders and managers across the service continued to encourage the strength- and relationship-based restorative social work model and, as a consequence, there has been a significant reduction in the number of children requiring statutory interventions”. The impact of this can also be seen in audits where relationship-based practice continues to be an area of strength and the number of files rated good or outstanding have been steadily improving over the year:



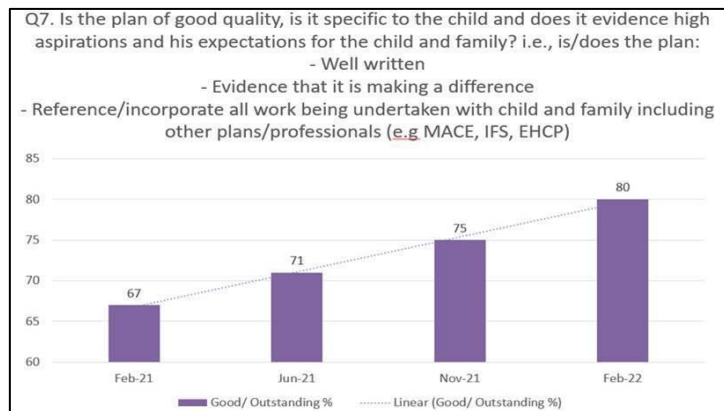
- 3.8 The Principal Social Worker has continued to be responsible for implementing the National Accreditation Process (NAAS), which involves assessing social workers against a set of standards set out in the Knowledge and Skills Statement for Practice Supervisors and Practice Leaders (now known as the post qualifying standards). This is part of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which gives the education secretary powers to set and assess practitioners against improvement standards.
- 3.9 By March 2020, 41 social workers had undertaken the NAAS in Wolverhampton, but progress then stalled because assessment centres were closed due to Covid. They reopened in August 2021 and targeted work has taken place to encourage social workers to consider the NAAS as part of their progression and professional development. This resulted in 22 practitioners being endorsed for the programme and by November 2021 a further two social workers had successfully been accredited. However, in January 2022 the Department for Education (DfE) advised that the delivery model would be changing, and the current model of the NAAS has now ceased. They expect the new delivery model to be in place by the end of this calendar year. Wolverhampton has to date maintained a 100% pass rate for the NAAS.
- 3.10 A key part of quality assurance in Children's Services continues to be practice weeks, which is a more restorative approach to undertaking traditional file audits. The Director of Children's Services along with all Heads of Service, the PSW, Service Managers and Team Managers spend time over a week having conversations on a one-to-one basis with practitioners looking at a child's file and reflecting on practice. The advantages include being able to see practice rather than just reading about it, being able to see and feel how teams are functioning and being able to offer social workers immediate feedback on their practice. Practice weeks have been well received with over 85% of social workers in this year's Health Check survey reporting practice weeks were a positive experience and some comments have included:
- A. "It was a really relaxed conversation, and I had the opportunity to highlight good areas of practice and felt comfortable in talking about areas of improvement also"
 - B. "It enables workers to get a different perspective and advice from a senior manager"

- 3.11 This year the PSW has revised the quality assurance framework for Children's Services to strengthen the well-established practice week approach by introducing moderation workshops to check the consistency of auditing against Ofsted descriptors. The PSW has also embedded a process for triangulating intelligence from across the wider system, such as complaints, data, child safeguarding practice reviews, feedback from children and families etc, to help better inform the service's understanding of social work practice and the impact it has for children and families. A practice newsletter has also been developed which is now sent out to the workforce to share findings and learning from audits and other quality assurance activity, as well as providing an update about what actions are needed to improve practice.
- 3.12 The PSW is the lead for the new Aiming for Excellence Plan, created this year, which is supporting excellent social work practice by focusing on six key areas where practice can tend to be inconsistent. Six full time equivalent Advanced Practitioners (APs) who are coached by the PSW, play a key role in leading on the areas for excellence and improving practice. The APs also provide practical support to newly qualified social workers, students and social work teams, carrying out dips and embedding a reflective and learning culture across the service.
- 3.13 A few of the key areas of strength, as identified through practice weeks during 2021-2022 include:
- A. Practitioners know the children and families they work with well
 - B. Direct work through the establishment of relationships is linked to sustained changes.
 - C. Risk is identified, children are safe, and services are making a positive difference
 - D. Evidence of strengths-based approaches and collaborative working
- 3.14 There has been a steady improvement in the quality of social work practice and this year's audits are showing an increase in the number of files rated good or outstanding and a reduction in those rated requires improvement or inadequate:

Audit Period	Total rated Good or higher	Total rated Requires Improvement or lower
2019-2020	57%	43%
2020- 2021	72%	28%
2021-2022	81%	19%

- 3.15 There has also been improvement in specific areas of practice over the year, for example the number of high quality, meaningful care plans that evidence progress for children rated good or above has increased over the last 12 months. This is a key area on the Aiming for Excellence Plan and actions that have supported this progress have included

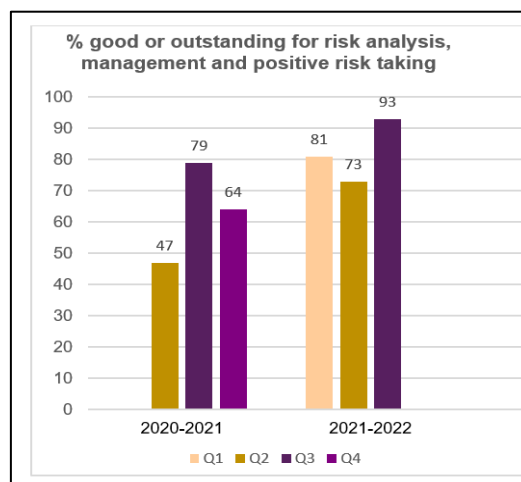
refresher workshops led by the APs and the sharing of good examples within teams and as part of reflective sessions.



- 3.16 This commitment to quality assurance and continual improvement and learning was recognised by Ofsted in their recent inspection (March 2022), commenting that “quality assurance arrangements are strong, with a comprehensive approach to learning from audits. There are a range of effective processes [and]... learning is shared.” As a result, they concluded that “senior leaders know themselves very well and endeavour to meet the needs of children and families through high-quality effective services. They have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service, which has led to a culture that is open to challenge and learning. This has led to a high level of consistent, strong social work practice.”
- 3.17 The PSW’s team has supported with three inspections this year. In September 2021 Ofsted carried out a Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) inspection, quickly followed by an inspection of the Youth Offending Team (YOT) in October 2021. A Children’s Social Care inspection then took place in March 2022, the outcome of which was that City of Wolverhampton Council continues to be a “good” rated authority. It has also been recognised as “outstanding” for the impact that leaders have on social work practice with children and families and there has been improvement noted in the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection, with the service now being rated “good” in this area whereas previously it was felt to “require improvement”.
- 3.18 The PSW’s team will continue to support the service in preparing for future inspections, co-ordinating any improvement actions where appropriate, and also preparing for the future regulation of Adults Services by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) from April 2023/2024 onwards, which will be a key priority for the PSW and the team this year.
- 3.19 Quality of Practice – Adult Services**
- 3.20 The PSW has continued to lead on quality assurance activity in adults during 2021-2022 with audits evidencing that high quality social work practice and adherence to statutory duties has continued despite the ongoing challenges of Covid:

Audit Period	Total rated Good or higher	Total rated Requires Improvement or lower
2019-2020	83%	17%
2020- 2021	78%	22%
2021-2022	92%	8%

- 3.21 Local audit activity throughout 2021-2022 has also demonstrated consistently good practice over the year in many areas, such as in use of advocacy, strengths-based approaches, Making Safeguarding Personal, effective management oversight and involving the person in decision making. Good outcomes have been evidenced for people with care and support needs over the year, with an average of 90% of files rated good or above for demonstrating that social work intervention has made a positive difference to the person.
- 3.22 There has also been improvement in specific areas of practice by the end of the year. For instance, analysis and management of risk, including consideration around positive risk taking, was an area which had improved to some extent by the end of 2020-2021, but was not a consistent strength. Training was commissioned to support practitioners and consequently this year there has been an increase in the number of files rated good or outstanding and it is now considered a consistent area of strength:



- 3.23 A different approach to auditing will be trialled for 2022-2023, following consultation with practitioners and managers this year. Feedback suggests they would welcome a more restorative approach to quality assurance activity, which is more aligned to 3 Conversations©. As a result, the traditional bi-monthly file audits will be replaced with practice conversations which will take place during practice weeks. This will be the same approach as in Children's Service where the auditor will meet on a one-to-one basis with the practitioner and have a conversation about a person they are working with. This will

also ensure leaders, including senior managers, such as heads of service, remain close to practice and visible to teams.

- 3.24 A full review and refresh of the quality assurance framework for adults will be one of the key priorities in 2022-2023. This is in readiness for the new duty that is being introduced through the Health and Care Bill whereby the Care Quality Commission (CQC) will conduct reviews of local authorities adult social care performance, specifically looking at its regulated functions under Part One of the 2014 Care Act.
- 3.25 Three Conversations©, the strengths-based approach introduced in 2018, remains well embedded in practice. This year the project was formally ended and quarterly “It’s Your Life” meetings established, chaired by senior managers across Adults Services and attended by the PSW, to ensure the approach remains at the centre of practice. Three Conversations© is a way of working which replaces the traditional “assessment for services” mindset with a meaningful conversation about what matters to them, making connections to people and places that will help them and better support their wellbeing. The approach is based on developing relationships, preventing delay and people having to retell their story. Audits evidence that strengths-based practice continues to be a strength, with an average of 89% of social work files rated good or outstanding in this area in 2021-2022. Over 75% of social workers in this year’s Health Check survey also agreed that Wolverhampton has a clear model of social work practice that promotes relationship working and a strengths-based approach to achieve the best outcomes for individuals and families.
- 3.26 The redesign of adult social care, which is now underway, will build on this and consider what more is needed to enable this approach to work even more effectively, particularly considering the impact of the new social care reforms, CQC regulation and the introduction of Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS). It will review demand, workflow, systems as well as workloads and skill mix across the service to explore how adult social care in the city could work more effectively and efficiently without losing the person at the centre.
- 3.27 Workforce**
- 3.28 There is evidence in the UK of a shortage of experienced social workers with social work featuring on the national occupation shortage list since 2014. Social work is challenged by high turnover and vacancy rates and a heavy reliance on agency staff. The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted, 2016) state that “good” local authorities have a “workforce that is sufficient, stable, suitably qualified and competent to deliver high-quality services to children and their families”.
- 3.29 The PSW continues to lead on the development and delivery of a recruitment and retention plan with colleagues from human resources, organisational development and the communications team. To further support retention the PSW this year formally launched a continuous professional development pathway for social workers in Adults and Children’s services, which sets out the opportunities for learning and progression

that are available for social workers locally from newly qualified up to director level. As a result, more this year have requested to apply to become practice educators compared to last year and there have also been four children's social workers who will be undertaking the best interest assessor role, which will also support the future implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) within Children's Services.

- 3.30 A first-year manager programme has been created and trialled, with positive feedback. The PSW has also worked collaboratively with the University of Wolverhampton this year to offer an alternative progression opportunity for those social workers more interested in research and academic learning and two social workers have now been sponsored to undertake their PhD on a part time basis. Feedback on the PhD opportunity from across the social work workforce has boosted morale and demonstrated the council's commitment to social worker's development:
- A. "This is exciting news, and it shows how Wolverhampton Council is invested in the development of its social work staff"
 - B. "I am looking forward to reading the research findings and recommendations. Thanks to our Wolverhampton City Council for investing in its workforce"
 - C. "Thank you to CWC for creating this development opportunity, very forward thinking"
- 3.31 Around 25% of vacancies in Children's Services are currently secondments caused by maternity leave and additional roles or projects such as the Social Workers in School (SWIS) project. Secondments are opportunities for progression and are therefore an important element of the local retention strategy. However there has been increasing difficulty over the last 12 months to recruit good quality agency social workers to backfill these posts because of a highly competitive recruiting environment where social workers can take their pick of vacancies/local authorities and hourly rates. A stable workforce provides individuals and families with consistent workers who have manageable workloads, all of which support good outcomes. This is why the council have taken steps this year to recruit to a new permanent team of nine peripatetic social workers who can quickly fill vacancies for a six-to-twelve-month period. Other actions being taken to support the recruitment of social workers in Children's Services include offering interviews within a week of an application being received, which should ensure more timely appointments into post and reduce the amount of time vacancies are left unfilled.
- 3.32 Actions that have been taken this year to support recruitment and retention have had a positive impact, which was recognised by Ofsted in their recent inspection in March 2022 where they reported that the City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) has "a mostly stable permanent workforce, along with manageable caseloads, [which] enables positive relationships to be built with children and families." The turnover rate of children's social workers (as of March 2022) was 13.8%, which is lower than the national average (15.4%).

- 3.33 In Adult's Services the turnover rate of social workers was 14.5% in March 2022, slightly lower than the 15% reported nationally, but over the last 6 months only four frontline social workers of a total of approximately 80 frontline adult social workers have left Adult Services.
- 3.34 The annual Social Work Health Check survey asks social workers for their views on working conditions and this year there is a strong sense of pride with on average 80% saying they would recommend CWC as an employer to family and friends. Some comments included:
- A. "I am happy in my role and feel grateful to be employed by CWC"
 - B. "I think Wolverhampton is a great local authority to work for- I am particularly inspired by its celebration of diversity...it makes me proud to work here"
 - C. "Wolverhampton have been a very supportive council and I have an approachable management team which makes all the difference and makes me want to continue to work for CWC."
 - D. "This is a listening organisation...I am keen to stay here for some time"
 - E. "There is a real commitment to learning and development."
- 3.35 Positively the majority of social workers plan to continue working for the council for at least the next 12 months. More manageable workloads would influence a small number who are unsure about staying. The adults redesign and the new peripatetic team, as well as other actions that are being taken to fill vacancies more quickly, will be key in ensuring workloads are manageable and further support the retention of social workers.
- 3.36 Recruiting experienced social workers across Adults and Children's services is an ongoing challenge and is a continued priority for 2022-2023. One way this will be taken forward is by a rebranding campaign to attract the candidates that are needed and modernise our approach to help the City of Wolverhampton Council stand out in a highly competitive arena.
- 3.37 However a key function of the PSW role is also to support the training of new social workers. There are many routes into social work, and it is important that that CWC takes a mixed economy approach to supporting the training of social workers in order to not only meet its own sufficiency needs but also contribute to the needs of the region. Programmes and initiatives that contribute to this include the West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership (WMSWTP), Step up to Social Work, the Frontline Programme and social work degree apprenticeships.
- 3.38 The WMSWTP is in its fourth year of delivery and is the largest in the country consisting of 27 partners. Social work teaching partnerships are a government funded initiative designed to enhance partnership arrangements between higher education institutions and employers; attract more able students; embed the knowledge and skills (post qualifying standards) into academic curricula and continuing professional development

(CPD) for existing workers; and overall raise the quality of social work practice. This year CWC have benefitted from participating in the WMSWTP in a number of ways, for instance by being able to access over 20 training/CPD sessions including court skills, analysis in assessment and also mentoring programmes. Almost 90 social workers in Wolverhampton have attended training offered by the WMSWTP this year. CWC are also part of a pilot involving virtual reality headsets as a way for children's social workers to experience issues such as bullying and neglect from a child or unborn baby's perspective.

- 3.39 More students this year have been offered statutory placements with Wolverhampton Council across adults and children's services (33 compared to 26 in 2020-2021). This is largely due to the creation of a Practice Educator Hub which is a collaboration between the University of Wolverhampton and CWC, whereby a university employed Practice Educator (PE) offers support to enable more students to be placed within the council. Given the significant challenges universities and social work teams have still been facing this year due to Covid, this shows the local commitment and drive for supporting the next generation of social workers. The PSW has also led interview skills workshops with final year students this year and encouraged applications to Wolverhampton as part of the final year student recruitment strategy. As a result, more of CWC's final year students have been interviewed and were appointable for newly qualified jobs in Wolverhampton this year (seven compared to just three last year).
- 3.40 Step up to Social Work and Frontline Programmes are post graduate fast track social work programmes for people interested in the profession who have a 2.2 Honours Degree or above. Step up to Social Work is co-ordinated regionally and is delivered in partnership with the University of Birmingham as a 14-month condensed course. CWC is now supporting its second cohort of Step-Up students. The first cohort qualified in June 2021 and are now all employed as newly qualified social workers in Children's Services. The second cohort have now commenced their training with the University of Birmingham and will be on placement from May 2022.
- 3.41 Frontline is a fast-track training scheme for social workers in child protection, which aims to attract outstanding graduates who may not previously have considered a career in social work. Participants complete most of their theoretical training whilst in social work placements, this allows them to transfer their learning into practice immediately. Since starting in 2017, 24 participants have been through the programme or are currently on it. There are three frontline participants on the programme at present and two who are due to finish their assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) between October – December 2022. A fifth cohort has been agreed for next year.
- 3.42 The new level six degree apprenticeship in social work was agreed in December 2018. It provides an exciting opportunity for existing social care employees to undertake a social work degree whilst remaining in full time employment. CWC currently have twelve apprentices across Adults and Children's services and have recruited a further three to

start the course from September 2022. One of the current social work apprentices has spoken about the opportunity the apprenticeship has given her to change careers and how she is looking forward to becoming a social worker: [Social Work apprenticeships - Emma's story](#)

- 3.43 Ofsted in the March 2022 inspection recognised the commitment to recruitment and retention in Wolverhampton and praised the “grow your own” approach which is evidenced by an “effective assessed and supported year in employment programme and...apprenticeship model”. Ofsted noted that “as a result, the majority of children benefit from stable and strong relationships with their social workers, who have manageable caseloads that enable them to strive to complete quality work with children to improve children’s circumstances and experiences.”
- 3.44 One of the key tasks of PSWs is to carry out an annual social work health check survey and ensure the Local Government Association (LGA) Standards for Employers of social workers are being upheld. The local social work health check was carried out between September and November 2021 and identified a number of key themes:
- A. Social work is a notoriously demanding profession, and, by its very nature, the role carries a certain level of stress however the number of those always or often feeling stress due to work has reduced this year
 - B. There has been an increase in the quality of supervision with around 90% or above this year reporting high satisfaction rates
 - C. Although frequency of supervision in children’s has reduced this year over 96% feel well supported by their managers when they need it most even suggesting informal supervision is taking place
 - D. Effective and appropriate communication between management and staff with notable year on year improvement - averaging 90%
 - E. Most know where to go in the council to support their wellbeing and said CWC makes them feel empowered to make time for self-care
 - F. There is now desire for a better balance between home and office working
- 3.45 Action plans have been developed for both Children’s and Adult Services to address any issues identified.

3.46 Professional Standards and Practice Development

- 3.47 All social workers are now required by the social work regulator Social Work England (SWE) to record evidence of continuing professional development (CPD) each year in order to renew their registration to continue to practice as a social worker. One of the key roles of the PSW alongside the organisational development team is to support all social workers to meet the re-registration requirement. Social workers have had opportunities to access training throughout the year to evidence their CPD and also have access to Research in Practice / Research in Practice for Adults which provides resources and

articles to inform their social work practice. All social workers across Adults and Children's services successfully re-registered this year and the PSW has already arranged a session with SWE's regional lead to brief social workers in Wolverhampton about the changes to the CPD requirement for 2022-2023. A briefing took place in March 2022 with around 120 social workers attending.

- 3.48 The PSW has taken on a new role this year, becoming the single point of contact between SWE and CWC for any local fitness to practice referrals. The role is critical in supporting SWE progress their investigations in a timely way, ensuring that the public is protected and reducing the impact on the wellbeing and productivity of all involved.
- 3.49 The PSW leads on social work development plans for adult and children's social workers and ensures that training opportunities are offered in line with service priorities as well as keeping practitioners up to date with changes in legislation and / or supporting with the challenges and complexities being faced in practice. Some examples of training offered in 2021-2022 includes: The Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Cultural Competence, Supporting People who Hoard, Making Safeguarding Enquiries (S42 Care Act), Working with Parents with Mental Health Difficulties, Gangs training, Child Protection (Section 47) Enquiries, Professional Curiosity, Trauma Informed Practice, Child on Parent Violence, Mental Capacity Act / Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS), and Reflective Supervision.
- 3.50 The PSW arranges three separate children's and adult's social work briefings a year that provide critical space for social workers to voice their views with senior leaders as well as ensuring important information is shared. The sessions also have a learning and development focus often chosen by social workers themselves. These have proved to be highly successful with social workers reporting that they are able to apply their learning to practice. This year's briefings have featured sessions on learning from local Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) and Child Learning Reviews; Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) updates; direct work training with children and young people; supporting people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities; exploring exploitation screening tools; updates on the exploitation hub and stories of difference presented by individual social workers.
- 3.51 The annual joint adults and children's social work conference took place virtually in October 2021 with the theme of "Celebrating Diversity; Challenging Inequality". It featured a keynote speech by Ify Nwokoro, a disability awareness spokesperson and blogger who was involved in a car accident in 2010 that left him paralysed from the shoulders down. Ify talked to social workers about his experience of social work, his disability and also the discrimination he has faced. The second keynote speaker was Elly Chapple, founder of "Can Do Ella" and #flipthenarrative. Elly spoke about what she has learnt from her daughter Ella, who has special education needs (SEN), particularly encouraging people to change their thinking about disability and to celebrate diversity. Social workers also shared stories from their practice and a number of workshops were delivered by external speakers on topics covering anti-racist social work; women and victim blaming; supporting people from the trans community and anti-poverty practice.

The day concluded with a session on “the trauma and impact of inequality and intersectionality”.

3.52 Feedback about the conference was overwhelmingly positive. Some comments included:

A. “Today was incredible - probably the best social work event I have ever been to. I feel so lucky to work for Wolverhampton”

B. “A fantastic conference. The speakers were absolutely fantastic, so inspiring and thought provoking. It had me thinking all evening. Certainly, the best conference I have ever attended, since working for Adult Social Care”

C. One of the best social work conferences we have had in Wolverhampton”

D. “I am so proud to be working for a local authority that promotes a social work culture that does not shy away from real issues”

3.53 This year’s Social Work Health Check surveys showed that the majority of social workers across Children’s and Adult’s Services feel satisfied with the learning opportunities available to them and believe CWC is a learning organisation with a positive learning culture.

3.54 Raising the profile of social work and connecting with practice

3.55 This year the PSW and her team have continued to celebrate good practice in monthly newsletters and raised the profile of the profession by recognising key events such as World Social Work Day, which took place in March 2022. The PSW collaborated with the University of Wolverhampton and a joint event was held for local social workers and social work students to come together to celebrate and reflect. Over 250 attended and comments included how this year’s local World Social Work Day event had been “inspiring” and “uplifting.”

3.56 The PSW has promoted the British Association of Social Work’s (BASW) national Amazing Social Work Awards this year, encouraging nominations across Adults and Children’s Services in Wolverhampton. Six social workers from CWC have been recognised and awarded the title of “Amazing Social Worker” for 2022 and been featured on BASW’s social media as well as on CWC’s City People.

3.57 The PSW has also continued to maintain a connection to social workers and frontline practice. For instance, the PSW has held drop-in sessions for social workers as part of World Social Work Day events, been part of reflective discussions in teams following the deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson and has also started to lead quarterly reflective sessions with newly qualified social workers. In this year’s social work Health Check the majority of social workers across Adults and Children’s Services said they have access to advice and support from senior social work leaders, including the PSW, with less than 10% saying this isn’t the case.

3.58 The PSW has also ensured that social workers in Wolverhampton were able to contribute to the national Independent Review of Childrens Social Care by setting up a bespoke local engagement session with the review team in August 2021. Over 70 social workers attended and contributed to the session. The Review was set up by the Government in March 2021 and is investigating what needs to change across the children's social care system to improve the lives of children and families. It is being called a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reform systems and services.

3.59 Challenging inequality

3.60 Equalities has continued to be a priority this year with the PSW taking an active role in the Rainbow Staff Equality forum as lead ally. The PSW is supporting the forum by leading on some research which will support the rainbow retirement workstream and also support social work practice when considering the needs of older adults who identify as LGBT+. The PSW has also been supporting the APs in Children's Services to launch workshops for social workers to support them to have good conversations about sexuality and identity when working with young people. These actions will be reported on further in the 2022-2023 PSW report.

3.61 As well as the joint conference which championed the theme of equality and diversity, the PSW has also supported the regional PSW network to progress it's ant-racist practice workstream and has delivered a masterclass on anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice for children's social workers across the region in March 2022.

3.62 The cultural competence workshops which were created by the previous Children's PSW and APs in 2020-2021, have been developed further this year as a result of feedback from cultural competence champions. A workshop has since been created which is aimed specifically at managers with the intention of supporting good conversations about equality and diversity for instance as part of team meetings and supervisions. The PSW has also supported the commissioning of training called "conversations to support people's uniqueness" to enable practitioners to feel more confident when asking about protected characteristics and recording equalities data. This will in turn help Children's and Adult's services better understand whether groups are over/ underrepresented and be able to take appropriate action to address gaps or inequality as part of their service equality plans.

3.63 As a result of the approach that has been taken to equality and diversity by the PSW, the Children's and Adult's leadership teams and their service areas, as well as the council as a whole, the vast majority of social workers in this year's Health Check survey said that CWC is actively committed to tackling inequality and discrimination.

4.0 Key priorities for the PSW's work plan 2022-2023

4.1 In 2022-2023 the PSW will continue to ensure that social work development plans incorporate a good development offer for social workers that enables them to continue to develop their practice. It is imperative that social workers are highly skilled as it is known

that good social work intervention can reduce the risk of children needing to be received into care and can enable adults with care and support needs to remain, or become, as independent as possible. It also ensures that council resources are being used appropriately and effectively and supports retention.

- 4.2 The PSW will continue to provide leadership, mentoring and coaching to the six (FTE) Advanced Social Work Practitioners in Children's Services. The focus of this work will be to support the ongoing improvement of frontline social work practice with a specific focus on the Aiming for Excellence Plan.
- 4.3 The PSW will continue to play a key role in the ongoing embedding of Restorative Practice (RP) across Children's Services and continue to develop the work on restorative language that has been started in 2021-2022.
- 4.4 The PSW will ensure that anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice continues to be prioritised and built into social work education and training as well as supporting research to develop social work knowledge and best practice when considering equality and diversity. The PSW, as lead ally, alongside actions already mentioned within this report, will promote the leadership equality pledges, support EDI strategy (including being visible and active in forums and EDI events), and actively challenge where needed.
- 4.5 A key priority for the PSW for 2022-2023 in conjunction with the Mental Capacity Act lead officer, SEND lead and other Heads of Services within the council will be to ensure the social work workforce is prepared for the introduction of the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS). This will replace the current Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) scheme. The introduction of this was delayed due to Covid.
- 4.6 The PSW will continue to take lead responsibility, along with human resources and organisational development, for the implementation of the recruitment and retention plan to support a mixed economy of routes into social work and strengthen current recruitment activity, ensuring the council is able to meet demand and supply needs now and for the future. The plan will also build on existing strategies and explore new ways to retain social workers to ensure social workers see the council as a place where they can develop their practice and career and feel valued, trusted and proud.
- 4.7 The PSW will continue to lead on the annual social work Health Check and support a range of engagement activities between the Directors for Adults and Children's Services and social workers.
- 4.8 The PSW and her team will further develop the quality assurance frameworks and associated quality assurance activity for Adults and Children's Services and take on the responsibility for this for SEND from 2022-2023. This will incorporate any actions from inspections / peer and practice reviews. There will be continued preparation for future inspections and also support for Adults Services in readiness for the CQC regulatory framework from 2023-2024.

- 4.9 As well as taking a key role in preparing for CQC regulation, the PSW will also support Adult Services in the implementation of the new social care charging reforms, with CWC being one of five councils across England trailblazing the new system this year.
- 4.10 There is a need for the PSW to continue to play a key role in the ongoing redesign of Adult's Social Care in 2022-2023, offering independent challenge and also advice about regional/national best practice specifically in relation to social work, and also working with the director of Adult's Services and heads of service to promote a culture of co-production and personalisation. This will include the PSW collaborating with Think Local Act Personal (TLAP), a national partnership committed to transforming health and care through personalisation, community-based support and the voice of people with lived experience.
- 4.11 This year the PSW has developed strong relationships with the University of Wolverhampton, resulting in a pilot PE hub, PhD sponsorship opportunities and a collaborative World Social Work Day event, all of which has had a positive impact on social work in Wolverhampton. A key priority for 2022-2023 will therefore be to further strengthen and build on this relationship, with a particular focus on exploring more research opportunities and closer links between academia and practice. This is also a priority for the Chief Social Worker, regional PSW network as well as the West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership.
- 4.12 It is important that the PSW continues to maintain a presence in national PSW forums. These meetings are learning and development opportunities and provides opportunity for the Chief Social Workers for Adults and Children to share the direction of travel, answer questions and receive feedback from PSW's. These events also provide opportunity for the sharing of good practice.
- 4.13 The PSW also attends PSW regional network meetings on a bi-monthly basis for adults and Childrens and contributes to work plans and workstream activity. This allows regional work to take place as directed by the regional West Midlands Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Association of Directors of Adults Services. The PSW will also continue to be part of regional practice reviews in adults to support the peer challenge process and prepare CWC for future CQC regulation process.
- 4.14 The PSW will continue to be the local lead for the regional West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership and the single point of contact for SWE.

5.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 5.1 This report highlights the impact on the service, city and residents that the PSW role can bring including ensuring quality of good social work practice and improved outcomes for people. There is evidence that this role has a positive impact on the profession and the people being supported across Adult and Children's Services.

5.2 There is an option of not having a PSW, but it needs to be noted that the PSW role in adults is set out in statutory guidance. Without a PSW there could be a decline in quality of practice which would affect the lives of those children, young people and adults who seek social care support.

6.0 Reasons for decision

6.1 The role of the PSW contributes to a number of key priorities across Children's and Adults Services including Restorative Practice and Three Conversations© which are approaches and models that enable social workers to build professional relationships with people who need services that help and promote a strength-based approach to their practice. These approaches enable the workforce to strengthen families where children are at risk, promote the independence of older people and people with disabilities as well safeguarding people in vulnerable situations.

6.2 The PSW provides dedicated resource to the recruitment and retention strategy which in turn helps the council reduce the spend on agency staffing. The role is also responsible for raising the profile of social work in the city which also contributes to making the City of Wolverhampton a social work employer of choice.

6.3 The role provides the professional knowledge required to drive local and regional workforce development plans that will contribute to high quality, excellent practice.

7.0 Financial implications

7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising directly from this report. Any costs arising from the actions in the workplan, and priorities set by the PSW will be met from existing budgets.

[JG/26052022/J]

8.0 Legal implications

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

[TC/31052022/B]

9.0 Equalities implications

9.1 Social workers provide support to the whole community covering all the protected characteristics. This annual report highlights the actions being taken to ensure that social workers are supported to consider and tackle inequalities for all groups. The PSW will continue to ensure that issues relating to inequality for all groups of people with protected characteristics is incorporated into social work development plans.

9.2 From a gender perspective there are more female social workers across the children's and adults social work workforce (over 80%). In terms of ethnicity there is generally a slight over representation of social workers from a dual heritage, asian and black background compared to the local population. No other diversity information has been

provided to the service to date, but this is being explored with the Equalities Team and all the information will be incorporated and considered as part of the wider service's equality action plans. The Council's approach to fair recruitment is followed robustly for the recruitment of all posts within the Adults and Children and Young People's Directorate. This includes anonymous application forms, progression of people with disabilities to interview and diverse recruitment panels.

10.0 All other Implications

10.1 There are no human resources implications. However, it is noted that close collaborative working has taken place over the last year on the implementation of the recruitment and retention strategy and action plan. This includes back-office support and attendance at social worker interviews and as part of recruitment campaigns.

11.0 Schedule of background papers

11.1 There are no background papers for this report.