



Fulfilled Adult Lives Scrutiny Panel

21 March 2023

Report title	Adult Social Work and Workforce Health Check 2022	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Linda Leach, Adult Services	
Wards affected	All	
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Originating service	Adult Services	
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Report has been considered by	Adult Services Leadership Team	16 February 2023
	Strategic Executive Board	28 February 2023

Recommendations for decision:

The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the findings of the Adult Service's social work and wider workforce health check for 2022
2. Provide comment, feedback and challenge on the proposed actions to improve practice conditions for, and the health of, social work and the wider 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 and this forms part of Adult Services’ ongoing self-assessment. For the last three years a survey has also been circulated more widely to include all the frontline adult’s workforce within the council. This report presents an overview of the findings of both surveys and concludes with actions to address the main areas for improvement.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Health checks were a key recommendation of the National Social Work Task Force, which was set up by government after the death of Baby P. There was recognition that the whole system impacts on individual social workers and also on the overall quality of social work practice and regular health checks help organisations identify areas of strength and areas requiring greater focus. It also assists with workforce development planning and supports a culture of continuous improvement.
- 2.2 A “healthy”, motivated workforce which has good retention rates and manageable workloads has the potential to make a huge difference. For instance, adults and carers will experience fewer changes in worker, and there will be more time for developing relationships and preventative, strengths-based working. Costs, such as that spent on recruitment and agency staffing, will also reduce.
- 2.3 The surveys were refreshed in 2021 and aligned with the Local Government’s Association (LGA) Standards for employers of social workers in England and have also considered the questions asked in the national health check survey.
- 2.4 This report provides a summary of the main findings and also any actions that are planned or in progress to address the key areas for improvement.

3.0 Overview and key findings

- 3.1 The health check was circulated via an online survey between 12 September to 21 November 2022. It was sent to 129 social workers and 340 non-social work qualified employees at grade five and above (an increase from last year when it was sent to 290 grade 5 and 6 workers only). The wider workforce is very diverse and is made up of a variety of roles such as social care workers, day opportunities team leaders, reablement assistants, welfare rights officers, direct payments officers and occupational therapists.
- 3.2 The response rate for the social work survey was similar to 2021 (54%, compared to 55% in 2021), but much lower for the workforce survey (26%, compared to 41% in 2021 and 33% in 2020). It has been recognised over the past two years that response rates need to improve in order to ensure the results are more representative of the wider workforce. Social workers were given protected time in team meetings as well as in the September social work briefing to complete the survey, which appears to have been mostly successful.

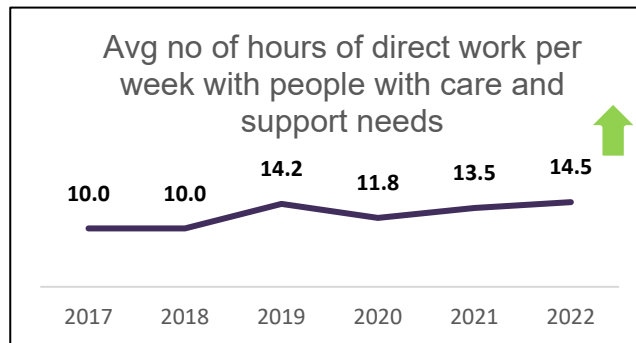
- 3.3 To improve take up and ensure responses better reflect the views of the workforce next year, there will once again be protected time at the September 2023 social work briefing to ensure social workers can complete the survey, as well as continued protected time in all workforce team meetings. Feedback from the wider workforce will be gathered during a briefing in order to identify what would encourage them to complete the survey next year and changes can be made as a result. Additionally, a Teams channel will be established and will be used to enhance communication, promote the survey, allow for discussion and gives easy access to the survey link. There will be more updates provided to the workforce this year to tell them about progress on identified actions, for instance utilising the monthly newsletter as well as workforce briefings, and a continued “you said...we did” approach will help to demonstrate how the survey can make a positive difference for practitioners.
- 3.4 The findings of this year’s health checks are mostly positive, with improvement evident in a number of key areas as a result of actions taken by the service.

Social Work

- 3.5 Nationally, social work recruitment and retention is a significant challenge and social work is on the national occupational shortage list. Whilst locally the turnover of adults social workers remains below the national average, the introduction of reforms and changes to legislation, as well as the increasing complexity of situations and demand being seen in some teams post covid may start to have an impact. Adult’s Services has a well-established strategy to attract and retain staff which includes, amongst a number of other key actions, attendance at recruitment fairs, investment in social work apprenticeships and a strong social work training and development offer. However, additional actions are being taken this year, including rebranding to set CWC apart as an employer of choice, supporting secondary trauma and benchmarking the pay and incentives for social workers.
- 3.6 In this year’s health check, full time social workers said they are working fewer hours over contract, but those who are part time are working slightly more, averaging about 3.6 hours a week. The majority, over 70%, said that their workloads are manageable, and this has stayed about the same as last year and is just slightly higher than in 2020. Specific actions were taken since last year’s health check to support teams and included some short term, additional resources being agreed to add extra capacity, for instance there has been a Keeping in Touch project in place to carry out annual statutory reviews with adults with care and support needs in the city, which has been extended into 2023.
- 3.7 The percentage of social workers reporting that they never, rarely or only occasionally experience stress due to their work has improved slightly this year, with 56% reporting this. Most said that they know where to get help if they are concerned about their wellbeing and feel able to discuss stressful situations or their workload with their manager and agree satisfactory ways forward. Where this was not the case, which was just 6%, manager availability was highlighted. The adult’s redesign, currently in progress, will review demand, workflow, systems as well as workloads and skill mix across the

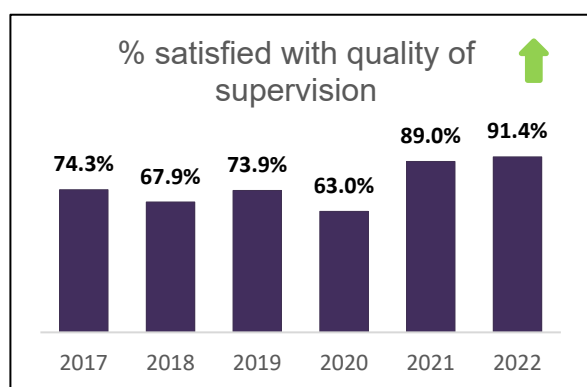
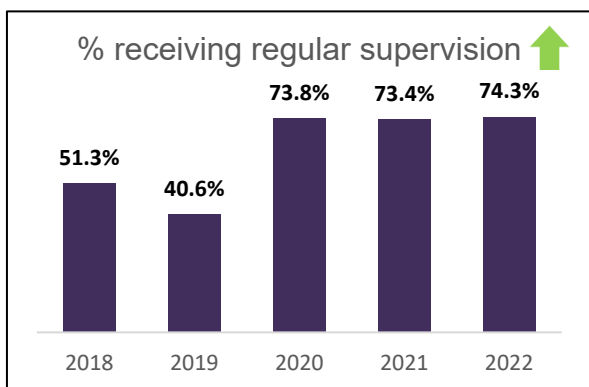
service. This, along with ongoing recruitment and retention activity, should help to further stabilise teams and create more manageable workloads, which should in turn support wellbeing and reduce stress levels.

- 3.8 The majority, 80%, of social workers agree 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. Positively social workers are also spending more time working directly with people once again this year, more than any other year since at least 2017.

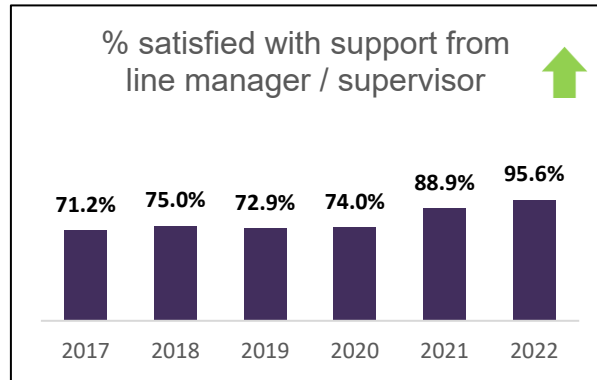


- 3.9 Almost all social workers this year are satisfied with the quality of their supervision and the support they received from their manager/supervisor, much better than any previous year. Frequency of supervision has also improved slightly this year, with 74% of social workers saying that this takes place regularly. Due to the nature of the work, supervision may sometimes have to be cancelled at the last minute by either the manager or the social worker due to a crisis or unexpected event for the people they support. This would be reflected in social workers who responded that they receive supervision “most months” (21.4%).

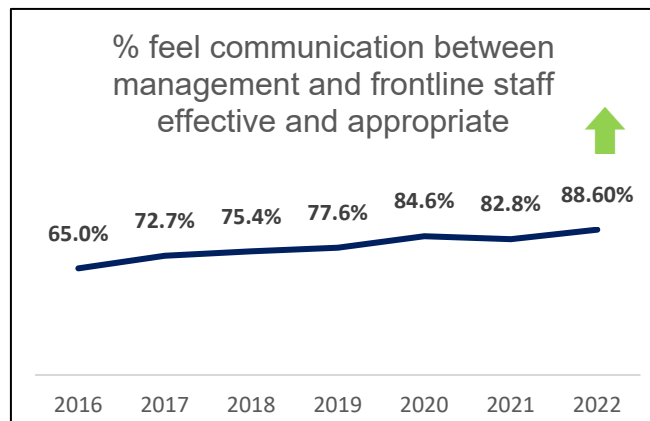
- 3.10 Actions implemented since previous health checks have contributed to the improvement in these areas, including the commissioning of supervision training and the development of a first year management portfolio programme to support new managers across the workforce. The use of weekly huddles, where managers and heads of service meet with practitioners to discuss people they are working with, has also supported this and a revised supervision policy, which was implemented in 2021.



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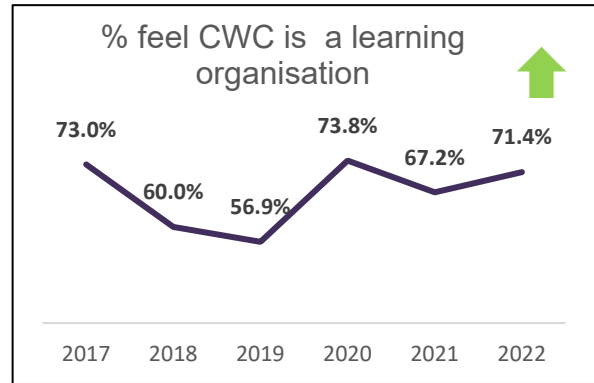
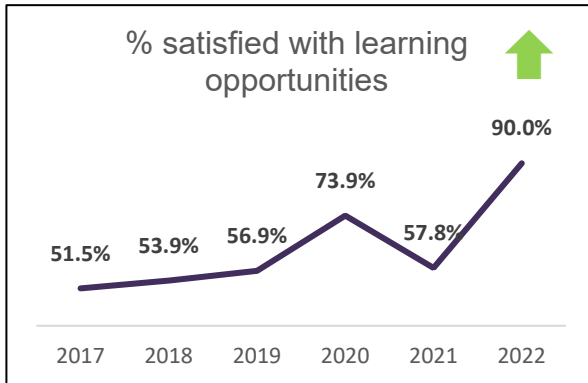


- 3.11 There has been continued improvement in communication between senior managers and frontline workers, as well as those who feel they would be, or have been, consulted on changes that would impact their work (70% compared to 66% in 2021). The senior leadership team's communication and engagement strategy has ensured they have continued to be as visible as possible. A regular presence at team huddles, continued monthly updates via the Adult Social Care newsletter and attendance and participation at regular social work briefings has made a continued difference to this.

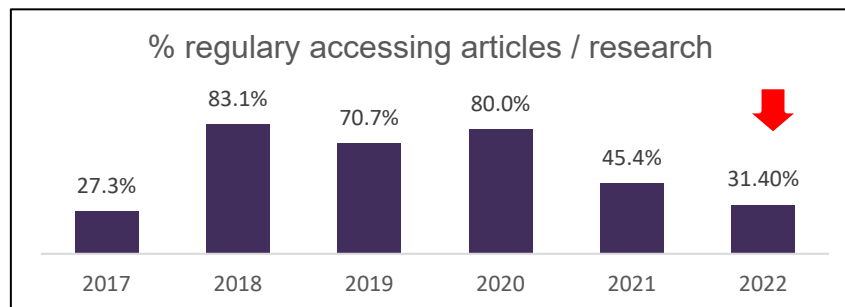


- 3.12 There has been a significant improvement in social workers' satisfaction with learning and development opportunities available to them this year. Actions to improve this over the last year has included:
- Organisational Development developed a monthly newsletter which outlines upcoming training and development opportunities
 - A more structured process for advertising and applying for Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) opportunities and specific Q&A sessions set up, leading to more taking up this opportunity this year
 - The application and selection process for Practice Education was revised and widely shared with the workforce, which was a request from several respondents in last year's health check, and a dedicated hub created to share resources and guidance
 - More face-to-face training being offered, including the Joint Adult and Children's Social Work Conference in November 2022, another key request from the 2021 health check

- The social work training plan for 2022-2023 incorporated a number of training courses prompted by suggestions from the 2021 survey, including trauma informed practice, S42 safeguarding training, Mental Capacity Act, professional curiosity and cultural competence



- 3.13 However there has been a decrease in the number of social workers who are regularly accessing research, with just 31% doing this compared to 45% in 2021 and 80% in 2020. A common theme is that they do not have the time to do this on a regular basis. Social workers' time is limited and so actions have been identified that will help them find and access relevant research quickly but effectively. One way to do this will be by collaborating with the University of Wolverhampton to create "research circles" where social workers and academics will come together to explore research on a particular area that will help support practice.



- 3.14 Positively more social workers plan to stay with the council over the next 12 months and this is the case for the majority of those who completed the survey, with just 1.4% stating they did not intend to stay at CWC (compared to 7.8% in 2021). However, workloads, and staffing challenges in some teams are issues some have raised this year which could affect retention longer term.
- 3.15 83% of social workers would recommend CWC as an employer and there is a strong sense of pride and positivity about working for the council. Some comments included:
- "I am very proud to work for CWC and of my role as social worker"
 - "I enjoy being a positive involvement in someone's life"
 - "A great organisational culture... Fantastic colleagues with vast skills and experience."
 - "Good inclusive council ethos... Enjoy my job and level of support I have"

- “Having been given the opportunity to progress in my career I have been more than happy over the last 12 months. I have gained a new pride and positivity in my role.”
- “The team were fantastic, supportive and friendly...The Three Conversations model was very well embedded and fantastic to see first-hand”

3.16 For the second year in a row, almost all felt that CWC was committed to tackling inequality in some way, with only 4% disagreeing, which is likely due to the strong approach taken by Adult’s Services in addressing equality and diversity issues, reflecting the whole council’s approach. The cultural competence champion role, as well as monthly cultural competence meetings and training for social workers and managers is helping to support this. However, there is recognition that there is more that can be achieved, and Adults Service has a service equality plan to drive this forward. The recently developed Rainbow Families (LGBT+) action plan will also be a key priority for 2023-2024 across the Families theme.

3.17 Almost all social workers said CWC makes them feel encouraged and empowered to make time for self-care. There has been a real commitment over the past 2 years to supporting wellbeing across Adult’s Services. For example, wellbeing has been a standard feature at briefings, in the monthly newsletter, in inductions and in team meetings. Also, there is a commitment to explore the impact and use of clinical supervision and / or consider the use of trauma informed supervision training to support social worker’s wellbeing in the context of reducing the impact of secondary trauma / compassion fatigue and better supporting the emotional demands of the role.

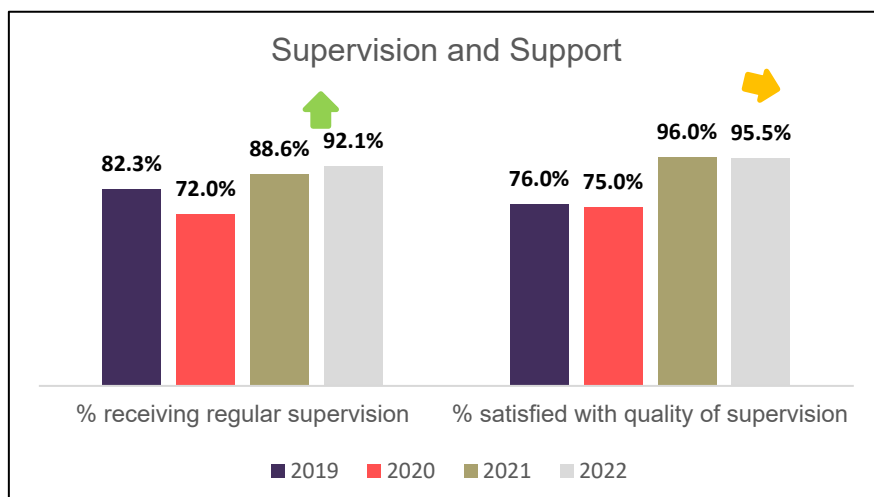
Workforce

3.18 Positively more than 90% of the wider workforce feel that their workloads are manageable, and practitioners are spending on average 19 hours a week working directly with people (19.5 hours in 2021 and 16.4 hours in 2020). There has been a further increase in those who never or rarely experience unmanageable stress due to work with almost 88% reporting this. Almost all (more than 95%) reported that they know where to get help if they are concerned about their well-being and feel able to discuss their wellbeing, stress or workload with their manager to agree satisfactory ways forward (just under 98%).

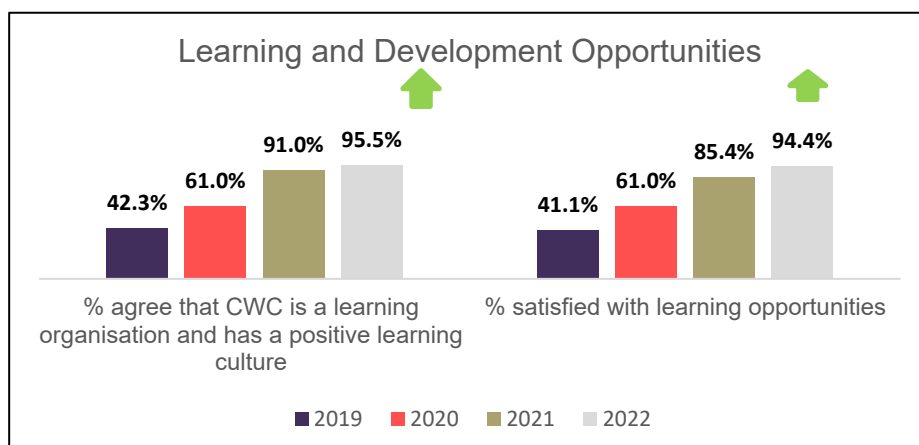
3.19 The average number of hours full time practitioners are working over their contracted hours is similar to last year and those who are part time are working slightly more hours over (2.2 hours compared to 1.8 in 2021). While many are beginning to be supported to work more from offices, which was an action from 2021’s survey, some may still be working at home part of the week. This may lead to some feeling the need to always be ‘on call,’ answering emails well after work hours compared to previous years.

3.20 The wider workforce feel that they are receiving good quality, timely supervision once again this year, with almost all reporting that this is the case, and just over 92% regularly access research to support their practice.

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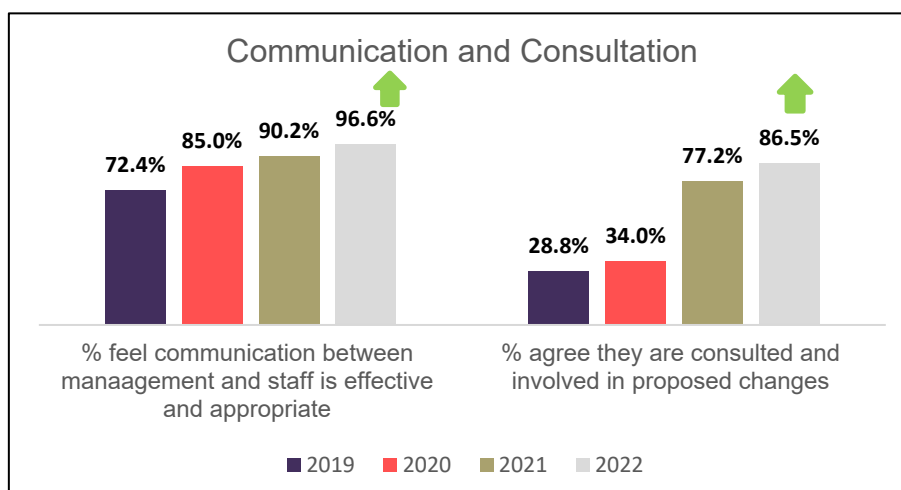


3.21 For the fourth year in a row, there has been a significant improvement in satisfaction with learning and development opportunities, as well as recognition that the City of Wolverhampton Council is a learning organisation with a positive learning culture. Key actions taken, such as the promotion of the social work degree apprenticeship, regular training brochures, access to Research in Practice for Adults (RiPFA) and a varied and relevant training offer seems to have supported this upwards trend.



3.22 Communication has continued to improve year on year with almost all (96.6%) reporting that the way managers, including senior managers, communicate is effective and appropriate. More this year (86.5%) also agree that they feel consulted about and involved in changes or proposals about changes that affect their role. This is a significant ongoing improvement from the previous three years. This is largely due to the actions taken throughout the year, including:

- Consultation and engagement about the redesign – although this year's survey identifies that practitioners would still welcome more communication about progress on this
- Regular updates via monthly newsletters
- Workforce briefings
- For social work teams, consultation and discussions around the implementation of Practice Weeks



- 3.23 Like the social work survey, almost all feel that the City of Wolverhampton Council is actively committed to tackling inequality and discrimination in some way, with less than 1% disagreeing with this.
- 3.24 Over 90% would recommend CWC as an employer and the vast majority (90%) said that they do not intend to leave Wolverhampton over the next 12 months, which is an increase on last year. Only three people said they planned to leave CWC this coming year and the numbers of those who were “unsure” has decreased. Comments included:
- “I am proud to be part of CWC, I think it is a progressive authority and I work in a diverse team within a diverse LA, this is important to me. I feel there are opportunities to develop and move forwards if you want to and I think we are treated very well as employees”
 - “I’m so grateful to the support we had through the pandemic - right across the board. The support came from the top and filtered down via our managers and supervisors”
 - “Flexible working is a huge game changer for me; I feel I am more productive and less stressed”
 - “Just the support from management. That’s the main thing that helps you get on in your job, knowing that they are supportive and them helping you when you need it. I haven’t needed much support in my 4 years working but I did recently on a personal issue and the support was excellent”
 - “The work is varied and there are plenty of opportunities to take on other tasks outside of my usual role. The hybrid working practice is really good for work/life balance”

4.0 Other notable progress and actions

- 4.1 As well as the progress and actions taken since the last health check in 2021 that are noted above, there were other areas which have seen significant development.
- 4.2 In 2021, practitioners wanted more career progression opportunities. Opportunities offered in 2022, which has also contributed to improved satisfaction with learning and development opportunities across both surveys, included:

- Aspire into management training which has been offered and promoted by the council
- Access to and promotion of the West Midlands Coaching Pool
- Specific actions to promote take up of Practice Educator and Approved Mental Health Professional opportunities, with further sessions to be offered this year

4.3 In 2021, workers stated they wanted more clarification on lone working. Some of the actions taken last year around lone working include:

- Lone working eLearning is now available via the Learning Zone and has been promoted across Adults Services
- Heads of Service are ensuring all health and safety procedures are followed and any mandatory health and safety training has been accessed
- Alertcom have attended team meetings and anyone who carries out lone visits will be able to access devices to ensure their safety

5.0 Next Steps

5.1 An action plan has been completed as a result of this year's surveys to address the key areas of improvement. The Adult Leadership team will oversee this. The findings will also inform workforce development plans and progress on identified actions will be shared with the workforce during the year.

5.2 Key actions are highlighted within the report, and some are summarised below, along with other additional actions that have been identified:

- Consultation during the May 2023 workforce briefing to get views on the survey and identify what would encourage more practitioners to complete the survey in 2023
- Adults redesign, including the development of a robust families front door, a more effective early intervention offer, a better understanding of demand and skills needed as well as an effective workforce strategy, will help to reduce some of the challenges being faced
- There will be monthly communication about the adults redesign. An update will also be provided in various briefings, such as the May 2023 workforce briefing
- Recruitment and retention strategy and action plan
- The promotion of a formal social work career pathway for social work apprenticeships to "grow our own" which will offer more progression and development opportunities for the wider workforce as well as helping to build sufficiency in social work teams
- Managers will continue to offer flexibility where needed to help people balance their work and home lives to reduce stress levels and working over contracted hours
- Continued offer of stress risk assessments and wellbeing support / resources
- The nature of social work and frontline social care generally means that there is sometimes a requirement to work out of hours or longer hours than usual. When this occurs, managers will ensure that social workers and practitioners 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 to reduce the time worked over contract

- Principal Social Worker will explore the impact and use regionally of clinical supervision and consider the use of trauma informed supervision training to support social worker's wellbeing in the context of reducing the impact of secondary trauma / compassion fatigue and better supporting the emotional demands of the role
- From June 2023, practice weeks will take place face-to-face, further improving communication between senior managers and frontline workers as well as allowing more time for reflection and direct feedback to workers
- More training in specific areas as identified by those completing the survey, including safeguarding, mental capacity conversations and supporting people with disabilities

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 work plan and priorities will be funded from within existing approved Adult Services budgets. [MK/10022023/B]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications as a result of this report. [SB/12022023/U]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 Social work and social care is a diverse profession, and the makeup of the frontline teams in Wolverhampton is largely representative of the local community. The Council's approach to fair recruitment is followed robustly for the recruitment of all posts. This includes anonymous application forms, progression of people with disabilities to interview and diverse recruitment panels. The health check survey asks practitioner's views on the council's approach to equality and diversity, and this has been mentioned in the report.
- 8.2 This survey was sent via e-mail and completed via an electronic device. While attempts are always made to ensure that all members of staff have access to and are able to complete the survey, when feedback from the workforce is gathered they will be asked if there are any barriers which prevents them from being able to do so in order to ensure support can be provided in 2023 and future surveys. Regular reminders and discussions around support required to complete the survey will also take place while the 2023 survey is open in order to support better access to all who require it.

9.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 9.1 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 social workers about how they feel about working for Wolverhampton and how leaders can work to make improvements where necessary to support the wellbeing of the workforce and ensure they feel supported. Actions identified in the report are intended to support the health and wellbeing of the workforce.

10.0 Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1: List of Health Check Questions—2022