

Report title	Principal Social Worker Annual Report 2022-2023	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Chris Burden Children and Young People	Councillor Jasbir Jaspal 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	Jenny Rogers Tel Email	Principal Social Worker 01902 555704 Jennifer.rogers@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report has been considered by	Directorate Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board Scrutiny Board	8 June 2023 20 June 2023 4 and 5 July 2023

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 2023-2024.

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 actions taken to support the recruitment and retention of social workers which is helping the Council 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 2023-2024.

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. Support social workers to use their core skills and interventions which make a real difference to people
- 2.2 The role of a PSW is a statutory requirement in adults and Care Act 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 social work practice, support effective decision making and develop 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, as well as ensuring the quality and consistency of safeguarding practice.
- 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 for 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 public figures as well as 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 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

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

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

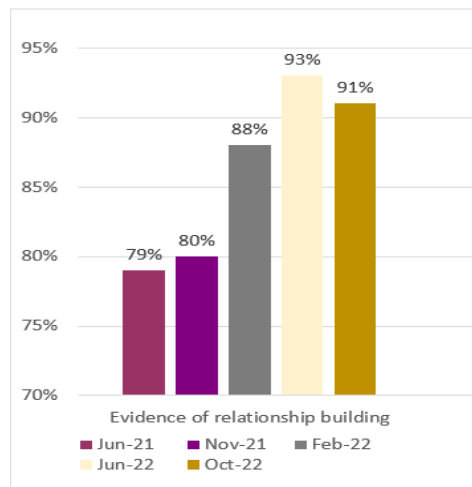
profession, creating a strong professional identity and challenge the blame narrative. PSWs call for change at a national, regional and local level, are key to transforming public perception, advocating for the wellbeing of social workers and attracting more into the profession. PSWs provide a strong 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 Adult 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 and 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 Deputy Director responsible for commissioning and transformation with a dotted line to the Deputy Director in Children's Services and the Director of Adults Services (DASS). The work of the PSW is overseen and prioritised by the local 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 national 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 includes support for inspection and CQC assurance 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.

- 3.2 This year priorities have included building on the training and development offer for social workers that enables them to continue to develop their practice, as well as further developing the quality assurance frameworks and associated quality assurance activity for Adults, Children's Services and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The PSW and her team have continued to support excellence in social work practice and taken a lead role with Adults Services in preparing for the CQC regulatory framework from 2023-2024. There has also been significant activity once again this year to counter the challenges being faced in the recruitment and retention of social workers and also an ongoing focus on challenging inequality.
- 3.3 Highlights of the work undertaken by the PSW in the last 12 months since April 2022 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 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 re-establish face to face RP training which is now being delivered by champions from across various partners including police, health, education and the voluntary sector. This will provide a consistent and joined up approach to improving outcomes for children and families. Twelve champions have now been trained and the workshops resumed in November 2022, arranged via Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together (WST). Internal RP refresher training is also offered, with 211 practitioners across Children's Services completing it over the last twelve months. A 'building and maintaining relationships with children and families who are reluctant to social care support' workshop was also developed in 2022, providing staff with tools to help develop effective restorative relationships where circumstances are challenging. A priority this coming year will be changing language to support the restorative practice approach.
- 3.7 In this year's social work health check survey, 98.7% of social workers agreed that "Wolverhampton has a clear model of social work practice that promotes relationship working and strengths-based approach to achieve best outcomes for individuals and families". This is an increase from 93% in 2021. Respondents referred to the Restorative Practice approach with its emphasis on relationship based practice and the positive impact this has had, which was echoed by Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) during its inspection of CWC in 2022.
- 3.8 The impact of RP can also be seen in the outcomes from practice conversations (audits) where relationship-based practice is now a consistent area of strength and the number of files rated good or outstanding have been generally improving over the year:



3.9 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 Executive Director of Families, Deputy Director 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 hear about 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. Practice weeks are well received with 87% of social workers reporting that they are a positive experience and some comments have included:

- A. “It’s good to see what you are doing well and where you need to improve...good experience to gain feedback and develop my skills”
- B. “It made me feel like I was doing a good job...provides a safe space for reflection”

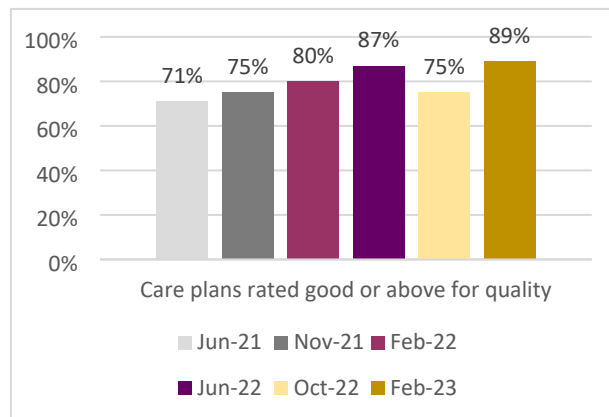
3.10 This year the PSW and her team have continued to embed the revised quality assurance framework for Children’s Services which, in addition to practice weeks and observations of practice, includes moderation workshops to check the consistency of auditing against the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) descriptors. There is also 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 identify where further quality assurance may be needed. The PSW plans to develop quality assurance activity further in 2023-2024 by introducing a 360 approach during practice conversations where more direct feedback will be sought from young people / parents / families to better understand the impact of specific practice being audited.

- 3.11 A few of the key areas of strength, as identified through practice weeks during 2022-2023 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
 - E. Assessments have made things better for the child / young people and are timely, comprehensive, and are leading to appropriately focused help and effective interventions
- 3.12 There has been a steady improvement in the quality of social work practice and this year's practice conversations (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 Outstanding	Total rated Requires Improvement or Inadequate
2019-2020	57%	43%
2020- 2021	72%	28%
2021-2022	82%	18%
2022-2023	91%	9%

- 3.13 The PSW is the lead for the Aiming for Excellence Plan, the service's practice improvement plan, which is supporting excellent social work practice by focusing on six key areas where intelligence is indicating that practice can be inconsistent. A team of Advanced Practitioners (APs), line managed by the newly appointed Deputy Principal Social Worker, 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.
- 3.14 A review of the Aiming for Excellence Plan took place this year to assess the impact of actions taken and to identify where areas needed to be revised or removed from the plan if practice has improved. A number of areas are now considered consistent and as such have become areas of strengths, including practice in relation to care planning that can evidence progress and is supporting high expectations and aspirations for the child.

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.



- 3.15 This commitment to quality assurance and continual improvement and learning was recognised by Ofsted in their inspection in March 2022, commenting that “quality assurance arrangements are strong, with a comprehensive approach to learning from audits.” 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...This has led to a high level of consistent, strong social work practice.”
- 3.16 The PSW’s team will continue to support the service in preparing for future inspections, updating action plans and co-ordinating any improvement actions where appropriate.
- 3.17 Quality of Practice – Adult Services**
- 3.18 A refresh of the quality assurance framework for Adult Services was one of the key priorities in 2022-2023. This was in readiness for the new duty introduced through the Health and Care Act 2022 whereby the Care Quality Commission (CQC) will conduct reviews of local authorities adult social care performance. This will specifically look at its regulated functions under part one of the 2014 Care Act.
- 3.19 As part of this, the PSW and her team have successfully introduced a practice week model to Adult Services this year which is aligned to the 3 Conversations© approach and supports a culture of learning and reflection. Feedback from practitioners and managers has been positive with many reporting that it brings the person to life and is more strengths based compared to traditional auditing. Almost 80% of those who have had a practice conversation this year felt it was a beneficial experience, with comments such as:
- A. “The learning experience was very positive – I was able to identify areas of development as well as strengths. Having the time to talk through practice was incredibly beneficial as well as having an experienced practitioner to critically challenge me in a supportive way”
 - B. “Good space to reflect, discuss and learn”

C. “Some really reflective conversations”

- 3.20 Quality assurance activity in Adult Services during 2022-2023 has evidenced that overall social work practice is of a high quality and shows adherence to statutory duties with 90% of files rated good or outstanding during practice weeks:

Audit Period	Total rated Good or Outstanding	Total rated Requires Improvement or inadequate
2019 - 2020	83%	17%
2020 - 2021	78%	22%
2021 - 2022	92%	8%
2022 - 2023	90%	10%

- 3.21 Consistently good practice has also been evidenced over the year in many specific areas, such as in use of advocacy, Care Act eligibility, Making Safeguarding Personal, managing safeguarding risk, effective management oversight and involving the person in decision making as well as promoting dignity and demonstrating respect. Good outcomes have been evidenced for people with care and support needs over the year, with an average of 97% 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 practice. For instance, professional curiosity was an area which had improved to some extent by the start of 2022-2023 but was not a consistent strength. A session was arranged with noted academic Professor David Shemmings in June 2022 on professional curiosity, and the learning was reinforced at subsequent social work briefings, which also provided time for social workers to reflect and apply their learning to practice. By the end of the year there has been a steady increase in the number of files rated good or outstanding, with an average of 76% of files evidencing professional curiosity compared to just under 65% in 2021-2022. There has also been some improvement in the use of the Mental Capacity Act and the quality of mental capacity conversations with a number of actions having been taken to improve practice, including refresher training. However, this remains an area for further focus in 2023-2024.
- 3.23 Three Conversations©, the strengths-based approach introduced in 2018, is well embedded in 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. Practice conversations evidence that use of strengths-based approaches continue to be applied consistently, with an average of 84% of social work

files rated good or outstanding in this area in 2022-2023. Over 80% of social workers in this year's social work 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.

- 3.24 The redesign of adult social care in Wolverhampton, which is now underway, will build on this and consider what more is needed to enable this approach to work even more effectively. 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.
- 3.25 Another key priority for the PSW this year was to promote a culture of co-production and personalisation in Adult Services. An example of this was the collaboration with Think Local Act Personal (TLAP), a national partnership committed to transforming health and care through personalisation and the voice of people with lived experience. The PSW submitted a proposal to TLAP, setting out the commitment to using their [Making It Real](#) "I/we" statements in Adult Service's 2021-2022 annual report (the Local Account). Making it Real is a framework of best practice for personalised care and support. It is an easy to read set of principles that focus on what matters to people. This year's [Local Account](#) has been shaped by a number of people with lived experience, and the Making It Real statements frame the report and have informed the service's priorities. The learning from this will now be taken forward by Adult Services as part of the redesign work and the commitment to further developing co-production and more personalised approaches.
- 3.26 The PSW has also continued to be part of regional practice reviews to support the peer challenge process and prepare CWC for future CQC assurance.

3.27 Workforce

- 3.28 The recruitment and retention of high-quality social workers is a key function that supports the delivery of good and safe social work practice. Effective recruitment and retention enables the development of a stable workforce, which in turn can improve the quality of work undertaken with children, young people, adults with care and support needs and families. However social work nationally is challenged by high turnover and vacancy rates, which can leave social workers trying to work with too many individuals. There is ongoing and increasing pressure on local authorities not only to recruit but also to retain experienced social workers and social work is on the national occupational shortage list.
- 3.29 The PSW continues to lead on the development and delivery of a robust and proactive recruitment and retention plan with colleagues from human resources, organisational development and the communications team. Some key activity this year has included attendance at recruitment fairs, piloting weekly interviews, delivering welcome events, as well as a continued investment in "grow your own" initiatives and other social work recruitment programmes.

- 3.30 There are many routes into social work, and it is important that that CWC takes a mixed economy approach to investing in the training of new social workers to not only meet its own sufficiency needs but also contribute to the needs of the region. Some of the programmes and initiatives that supports this include the West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership (WMSWTP), Step up to Social Work, the Frontline Programme and social work degree apprenticeships.
- 3.31 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. There are 13 social work apprentices currently on the social work degree apprenticeship programme in CWC and four who have completed their social work degree this year, three of whom have now moved into newly qualified social work (NQSW) positions. This year the PSW has formalised the social work degree apprenticeship as a career pathway to ensure that once apprentices have qualified, they will automatically be offered a social work position with CWC. This has encouraged more to apply for the programme in Children's Services this year and as a result five apprentices are being taken on instead of the usual three. However, a priority for next year is to promote this opportunity more in Adult Services.
- 3.32 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. The first cohort qualified in June 2021 and are now all employed as newly qualified social workers in Children's Services. This year CWC has supported a second cohort of Step-Up students and two of the three students have now been appointed into newly qualified posts. CWC plan to take on a third cohort in 2024.
- 3.33 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, 29 participants have been through the programme or are currently on it. A further cohort has been agreed for next year.
- 3.34 The West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership (WMSWTP) is in its fifth year of delivery and is the largest in the country consisting of 27 partners. Social work teaching partnerships are 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; support continuing professional development (CPD) for existing social 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 sessions including trauma informed selfcare, domestic abuse and coercive control, and the lived experience of young people in residential care, as well as being able to access

conferences about co-production and practice education. CWC booked 90 places on courses offered by the WMSWTP this year and feedback has been positive.

- 3.35 This year a revised Practice Educator strategy was launched locally which sets out the commitment to incrementally increase the number of statutory placements offered to social work students over the next three years. This is crucial to better prepare students for practising as social workers and also increases the number of students who are likely to consider applying for newly qualified positions with CWC, which supports recruitment. This year the number of statutory placements being offered has increased slightly (26 compared to 25 in 2021-2022), but it is forecasted that this can increase further to around 29 next year. Actions such as welcome events and an interview skills workshops led by the PSW has encouraged more final year students to apply for NQSW position with CWC. To date seven of the ten NQSWs posts that have been appointed to from a recent campaign were final year students with CWC.
- 3.36 To increase the number of students placements also requires existing, experienced social workers to act as practice educators. The role of a practice educator (PE) is a key part of Wolverhampton's social work development and career progression pathway and as such supports retention. This year practice education has been well promoted by the PSW's team and specific sessions delivered to encourage social workers to consider this opportunity to help progress in their career and develop their skills and knowledge. This has resulted in significantly more social workers expressing an interest in becoming a PE this year than in previous years and so 22 social workers will be undertaking the course in September 2023 (stage 1 and stage 2) compared to 16 in 2022.
- 3.37 Other actions taken to support recruitment and retention has included creating and launching a new campaign, co-produced with local social workers, to better promote vacancies and help CWC stand out in a highly competitive arena as a social work employer of choice. The "be the social worker you want to be" brand was launched at Compass Recruitment fair on 20 March 2023 with positive feedback. Promotional materials include quotes from and photos of social workers from across Adults and Children's Services. The local social work [microsite](#), which sets out the benefits of working for CWC and hosts social work vacancies has also been refreshed and now includes the new branding. This will be developed further to include photos of young people and people with lived experience to promote specific campaigns and use of videos from social workers explaining why they choose to work in Wolverhampton.
- 3.38 To further support recruitment and retention, particularly in the Strengthening Families service where turnover can be most challenging, the PSW has been instrumental in supporting the creation of a new progression opportunity. This is aimed at experienced social workers who want to be recognised for their expertise, but do not necessarily want to progress to other senior social worker roles. This new role would not have supervisory responsibilities but would enable the social worker to remain in a social work team and carry out complex child protection work. It links to the recommendation made by the National Independent Review of Children's Social Care to create a new Expert Child

Protection Practitioner role, which has been since been supported by the Government's response "Stable Homes Built on Love" (February 2023). The PSW has also introduced Advanced Practitioner roles for adult social workers, which are also progression and development opportunities.

- 3.39 The PSW has also led on proposals to reimburse social workers locally for the costs involved in renewing their annual professional registration with Social Work England (SWE) if they are required to do this as part of their job description. Proposals also included reimbursing costs of membership to the Blue Light card discount scheme to any eligible employees across social care. This will not only help to ensure CWC stands out in a highly competitive recruitment market along with other actions being taken but will also help promote CWC as a social work employer of choice.
- 3.40 At the end of March 2023 the local social work turnover rate in Children's Services was lower than national and regional averages at 12.9% (compared to 17.1% nationally; 16.4% regionally) however recruiting experienced social workers into vacancies remains a challenge.
- 3.41 In Adult's Services the turnover rate of social workers was also lower than the national average, with a rate of 10.1% by the end of March 2023, compared to 17.1% reported nationally.
- 3.42 The annual social work health check survey asks social workers for their views on working conditions and there is a strong sense of pride with on average 83% saying they would recommend CWC as an employer to family and friends. Some comments included:
- A. "CWC are proactive and forward thinking"
 - B. "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."
 - C. "A great organisational culture...Fantastic colleagues with vast skills and experience."
 - D. "Positive culture and learning opportunities"
 - E. "CWC actively promotes cultural competence and diversity. It promotes an all-encompassing workforce which is excellent in its consideration of minority groups and making all members of the community feel included"
- 3.43 Positively the majority of social workers said they plan to continue working for the council for at least the next 12 months and fewer said they definitely intend to leave compared to 2021. More manageable workloads would influence those who are unsure about staying. The adults redesign as well as other actions that are being taken to fill vacancies across both adults and children's services, will be key in ensuring workloads are manageable and will further support the retention of social workers. Recruiting and retaining social workers remains an ongoing priority for 2023-2024.

- 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 2022 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. The number of those always or often feeling stress due to work has reduced or stayed the same this year except for children's social workers and feelings around manageability of workloads has had an impact on this
 - B. Quality of supervision is high with around 90% or above this year reporting satisfaction rates
 - C. Satisfaction with learning and development opportunities has increased significantly – actions from last year's Health Check to improve this has had a positive impact
 - D. There is effective and appropriate communication between senior management and staff with a notable year on year improvement
 - E. Most know where to go in the council to support their wellbeing and said CWC makes them feel encouraged and empowered to make time for self-care - they can discuss stressful situations / wellbeing with managers
 - F. Social workers are spending more time working directly with people
- 3.45 Action plans have been developed for both Children's and Adult Services to address areas for improvement.

3.46 Professional Standards and Practice Development

- 3.47 One of the PSW's priorities this year has been the training and development of social workers, ensuring that there is a good development offer that enables them to continue to develop their practice. All social workers are required to record evidence of continuing professional development (CPD) each year with the social work regulator Social Work England (SWE) in order to continue to practice as a social worker. 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.
- 3.48 The PSW has continued to lead on social work development plans for adult and children's social workers and ensured that training opportunities have been 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 commissioned training offered in 2022-2023 has included: child on parent violence, working with perpetrators of domestic abuse/sexual abuse, assessing and supporting parents with learning difficulties, motivational interviewing, advocacy, trauma informed practice, supervision for managers, cultural competence, mental capacity act, supporting autistic people during care act conversations and s42

safeguarding enquiries. Training is also accessed through the Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together partnership and webinars and articles are available through the subscription with Research in Practice and Research in Practice for Adults.

- 3.49 The PSW arranges three separate children's and adult's social work briefings a year. The sessions have a learning and development focus often chosen by social workers themselves but are also opportunities for senior leaders to share key updates. This year's briefings have featured sessions on learning from local Safeguarding Adult Reviews and Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews; Liberty Protection Safeguards; supporting people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities; using language restoratively and supporting people who hoard. Social workers have also shared examples from their own practice and talked about approaches that have made a positive difference.
- 3.50 The annual joint adults and children's social work conference took place face to face in November 2022 with the theme of "For the love of social work: celebrating professional identity and contemporary practice". 308 social workers attended, which was the highest attended joint conference in the last five years. Leading social work professionals and authors of the book "Out of the Shadows: the role of social workers in disasters" Angie Bartoli and Maris Stratulis delivered a key note speech reflecting on the valuable role social workers play at times of crisis and tragedy. Lori Goossen, Principal Social Worker for Medway Council, also shared her expertise on secondary trauma and compassion fatigue within social work and the importance of self-care and professional support. There was also a workshop on virginity testing, honour based abuse and female genital mutilation and a session on social work with refugees and those affected by any type of border.
- 3.51 Feedback about the conference was overwhelmingly positive. Some comments included:
- A. "Inspirational and inspiring"
 - B. "Proud to work for Wolves"
 - C. "Thought provoking, empowering and very relevant"
- 3.52 This year's Social Work Health Check surveys showed that significantly more social workers across Children's and Adult Services feel satisfied with the learning opportunities available to them with over 90% reporting this compared to around 70% last year.
- 3.53 The PSW has also continued to act as 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.
- 3.54 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 2023. In response to the theme of the day “respecting diversity through joint social action,” the PSW invited noted academic Dr Neil Thompson to speak about anti-discriminatory practice. This was followed by a collaborative session with the University of Wolverhampton and a guest speaker from India which helped attendees reflect on international social work and the Social Graces tool. Over 200 attended and comments included how this year’s local World Social Work Day events were “powerful” and impactful”.

- 3.56 The PSW has promoted the British Association of Social Work’s (BASW) national Amazing Social Work Awards this year, encouraging nominations across Adult and Children’s Services in Wolverhampton. Three social workers from CWC have been recognised and awarded the title of “Amazing Social Worker” for 2023 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, with more face to face visits to social work teams carried out this year and more planned in 2023-2024. The PSW is also connected to social workers during practice weeks, at workshops as well as other forums such as the quarterly “It’s Your Life” meetings in Adult Services. In this year’s social work health check, the majority of social workers across Adult and Children’s Services said they have access to advice and support from senior social work leaders, including the PSW, with less than 7% saying this isn’t the case.
- 3.58 The PSW also attends PSW regional and national network meetings for adults and children’s and contributes to work plans and workstream activity. From November 2022 the PSW became the co-chair of the Regional Children’s PSW Network and has been connecting with co-chairs nationally.
- 3.59 This year the PSW has also raised the profile of social work by working with the University of Wolverhampton to promote the PhD research being carried out by two social workers in Wolverhampton in a national webinar hosted by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE). The webinar series, developed on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Care, highlighted local authorities who are demonstrating innovative and transformative practices. The webinar focussed on the importance of research-mindedness in social work practice and featured two senior social workers who are a year into their PhD research, having been sponsored by the Council to do this on a part-time basis. The research will explore honour based abuse and the use of physical chastisement as a way of disciplining children focussing on parents of African heritage.

3.60 Challenging inequality

- 3.61 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 has also been leading on some academic research which will support the rainbow retirement workstream and is supporting the delivery of the Rainbow Families action plan to enable the whole Families

Directorate to improve the support it offers to individuals who identify as LGBT+. This will include identifying relevant resources and training for practitioners.

- 3.62 As well as the sessions offered on World Social Work Day, the PSW has also supported the regional PSW network to progress its ant-racist/ anti-discriminatory practice workstream and has been instrumental in the creation of an equalities statement. This is underpinned by a number of actions now being taken forward by both Adults and Children's PSW networks and supported by the WMSWTP. Actions include establishing a regional forum of social work practitioners, students, universities and Adults and Children's PSW networks to share experiences, reflect on the statement and identify best practice. This will result in a best practice guide to be shared across the region. Training will also be identified and commissioned regionally.
- 3.63 The PSW has also been supporting the regional West Midlands Association of Directors for Children's Services (WMADCS) to procure a training programme aimed at supporting women of colour into leadership roles. The LeadHERship in Colour programme is for women of colour whose next steps are progression to a Head of Service role (or equivalent seniority) in the next few years. It recognises that women of colour are underrepresented in management and senior leadership positions and reflects the regional commitment to address this inequality. Two employees from Children's Services have been successful at obtaining places on this programme, fully funded by the regional ADCS network. Those who were unsuccessful have been supported by the PSW onto local development programmes or other regional leadership courses and been offered mentoring and coaching.
- 3.64 As a result of the strong 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 2023-2024

- 4.1 In 2023-2024 the PSW will continue to ensure that social work development plans incorporate a good development offer for social workers that enables them to develop their practice. The PSW will work collaboratively with organisational development colleagues to ensure feedback is obtained and analysed following all training attended, which will better inform the social work development plans for 2024-2025.
- 4.2 The PSW will lead the delivery of the revised Aiming for Excellence Plan and Adult's Best Practice Plan, to ensure high quality, consistent social work practice with the support of the Deputy Principal Social Worker and Advanced Practitioners.
- 4.3 There is more to do to further embed Restorative Practice (RP) across Children's Services, with a particular focus on language and on re-establishing a steering group to bring partners together to ensure RP remains a key priority across the system.

- 4.4 The PSW will ensure that anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice continues to be prioritised in training. As lead ally the PSW will, alongside actions already mentioned within this report, 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 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.
- 4.6 A key priority is the annual social work health check and the PSW's team will also continue to support a range of engagement activities between the Directors for Adult and Children's Services and social workers.
- 4.7 The PSW and her team will further develop the quality assurance frameworks and associated quality assurance activity for Adults, SEND and Children's Services. This will particularly focus on exploring how to better utilise feedback from children, young people, adults and families and introduce a 360 approach to practice weeks.
- 4.8 There will be continued preparation for future inspections and also ongoing support for Adult Services in readiness for the CQC regulatory framework.
- 4.9 There is a need for the PSW to continue to play a key role in the ongoing redesign of Adult's Social Care in 2023-2024, offering independent challenge and also advice about regional/national best practice specifically in relation to social work. The PSW will also work with the Director of Adult Services and Heads of Service to collaborate with the national group [SocialCareFuture](#) to learn and share from people with lived experience and other organisations to change the narratives around social care and drive forward co-production and personalisation.
- 4.10 Another key priority for this coming year will be to build on the existing partnership with the University of Wolverhampton and support the link between research and practice particularly with the creation of research circles.
- 4.11 The PSW will also lead on further supporting the wellbeing of social workers, specifically exploring trauma informed approaches to supervision in helping to reduce secondary trauma.
- 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 will continue to be the local lead for the regional West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership, co-chair for the regional Children's PSW network 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 the quality of social work practice and improved outcomes for people. There is evidence that this role has a positive impact on the profession and consequently 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 Adult Services including Restorative Practice and strengths based practice which are approaches and models that enable social workers to build professional relationships with people who need services that help and promote an asset 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 as safeguarding people in vulnerable situations.
- 6.2 The PSW provides dedicated resource to the recruitment and retention strategy which in turn should help 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/09052023/H]

8.0 Legal implications

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

[TC/05052021/B]

9.0 Equalities implications

- 9.1 Social workers provide support to the whole community covering all 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. 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.