

2023 Social Work and Workforce Health Checks - Children & Young People's Service

Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

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Presenter:

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Recommendations for action or decision

The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the findings of the Children's Services' social work and wider workforce health check for 2023
2. Provide comment, feedback, and challenge on the proposed actions to improve practice conditions for and the health of social work and wider workforce

Purpose and background

Purpose:

- The City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) carries out a survey each year to check the “health” of its social work and wider social care workforce and this forms part of Children’s Services’ ongoing self-assessment. This report presents an overview of the findings of both surveys and concludes with actions to address the main areas for improvement.

Background:

- Undertaken annually, via an online survey, with the option to complete by hand, as part of the City of Wolverhampton Council’s (CWC) ongoing self-assessment
- Helps to identify areas of strength and areas requiring greater focus
- Informs workforce development planning and supports the continuous improvement of Children’s Services practice in Wolverhampton

Key information for scrutiny:

1. How do we compare to other (similar councils)?
 - There is a national social work / workforce health check survey which some councils opt into while others prefer to carry out their own locally. The last national survey took place in 2022 and according to the public report, which gives an overall picture of performance against the LGA standards, the lowest rated standard nationally and for the West Midlands was continuous professional development, whereas this was a particularly strong area for CWC in 2022. National findings otherwise generally reflect what was identified locally. The next national survey is taking place in January 2024 so there is no comparable data for 2023.
2. What areas are of particular concern or challenge?
 - No particular area of concern or challenge to note, however some actions will be longer term so it may take time to see progress on areas for improvement
3. What is the improvement plan for those areas and what resources are required?
 - An action plan is developed and overseen by Children and Education Leadership team to address areas highlighted by these surveys. The action plan is updated regularly and reviewed quarterly by Children and Education Team. There are no additional resources required
4. Is the improvement plan proportionate to the challenge?
 - Yes, the action plan is realistic and proportionate to what the workforce has told us needs to be developed further.
5. When can we expect to see results?
 - Actions will be tracked throughout the year to ensure progress is being made and the impact of these will be evaluated by the 2024 surveys, although some actions may take longer to embed and start to evidence progress.
6. Are there any key financial, legal, equalities, other implications for Scrutiny to be aware of?
 - See sections 6.0-9.0 of the full report for this

2023 survey details and progress since 2022

- Survey live between 6 September to 17 October 2023, extended to 19 October 2023 for the Wider Workforce Survey
- Response rates increased for both—
 - Social Work (SW) 53% (132/251) compared to 34.7% (93 of 268) in 2022
 - Wider Workforce 38% (141/374), compared to 27% (78/285) in 2022
- Generally positive and some improvement since last year as a result of actions taken from last surveys, including:
 - **Improvement in workload manageability and stress levels for social workers**—Recruitment and retention strategy, aiming to fill vacant posts and retain experienced workforce
 - **Quality and frequency of supervision this year improved for SW and remained high for wider workforce** – supervision training for managers, first year management portfolio, leadership training, senior leaders' commitment to have oversight of frequency and quality of supervision within their service areas
 - **Improvement in those who feel that CWC recognise the emotional demands of their roles**—the start of trauma informed supervision training—comments show that practitioners are aware of plans around this for the following year as well and see this as a positive step

Areas of Strength

- Strong sense of pride – almost all saying they would recommend CWC as an employer
- More social workers said that their workloads are manageable, they are working fewer hours over contract and say that unmanageable levels of stress has reduced
- Workload manageability for the wider workforce remains high and unmanageable levels of stress remains low, although this has seen a slight decline when compared to last year
- Frequency and quality of supervision have both increased for social workers and remained >90% for the wider workforce
- Satisfaction with learning and development opportunities increased – actions from last year's Health Check to improve this has had positive impact
- As last year, almost everyone said CWC was actively committed to tackling inequality and discrimination in some way, but we can improve discussions in supervision
- The majority have access to research, articles and resources to support their professional development—with actions last year and in the coming year to support this
- Almost all across both surveys feel that CWC promotes relationship working and a strengths-based approach to supporting children, young people, and families
- Most plan to stay working for CWC for the next 12 months—with fewer saying they definitely plan to leave

Areas for Improvement

- While workload manageability is high, this can be supported further—Common themes - staffing challenges and demand / complexity
- Whilst most of the wider workforce reported that they never, rarely or only occasionally feel unmanageable levels of stress due to work, this has reduced slightly
- More can be done to improve communication from senior leaders and consultation—although this still remains a strength
- There is a proportion who are unsure if they want to continue working for CWC for the next year and some plan to leave - more manageable workloads would persuade them to stay

Key actions:

- Improving response rates – e.g. consultation, protected time, “you said...we did” and regular updates
- Recruitment and retention activity –attendance at recruitment events (SW), professional fees for non social workers (EPs), supporting routes into social work, progression/development opportunities for alternately qualified staff, improving inductions, introducing staying put interviews, programme for social workers 2 years post qualified
- A dedicated post is being developed with a focus on workforce engagement, ensuring that the workforce is informed and engaged with change
- Continuation of trauma informed work that started in 2023, including a trial of trauma informed organisational approaches, evaluation of trauma informed supervision training to reduce impact of vicarious and secondary trauma which can affect staff wellbeing and result in increased absence

What our employees said.....

- “I feel like I’m part of a forward-thinking Local Authority, one that really cares about the children, young people and families who live in the city and want to make positive changes to practice to support them. I feel we are leaps ahead of other LAs in our vision”
- “City of Wolverhampton value the role of social workers”
- “I have been encouraged and supported to progress...leadership and support is visible”
- “Diverse workforce”
- “Positivity from top-down which values employees”
- “I love my job. I love spending time with young people and trying to support them through their journey”
- “I really enjoy seeing the achievements of our children, young people and staff and how we celebrate this”
- “Wolverhampton is a stable authority with a good reputation”
- It is absolutely fantastic organisation, and I would recommend to anyone who wishes to join us”
- “An inclusive employer that offers a lot of support with the promotion of wellbeing”
- “I think we have a great team of directors who are passionate about making a difference and have been supportive of reducing inequalities in CWC”
- “Working directly with children and families and seeing positive outcomes”

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