

Report title	Principal Social Worker Annual Report 2020-2021	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Beverley Momenabadi Children and Young People	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable Director	Emma Bennett, Children's and Adult Services	
Originating service	Adults and Children's Service	
Accountable employee	Jennifer Rogers	Principal Social Worker
	Tel	01902 555704
	Email	Jennifer.rogers@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report has been considered by	Directorate Leadership Team	17 June 2021
	Strategic Executive Board	1 July 2021
	Scrutiny Board	14 July 2021

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Endorse the work of the Principal Social Worker and the continued impact it has on social work practice across Children's and Adult's Services
2. Endorse the main priorities for the Principal Social Worker identified for 2021-2022.

Recommendation for noting:

The Cabinet is asked to note:

1. The work carried out in respect of: Care Act easements; audit activity, which has highlighted continued strong performance and practice during Covid; and the continued commitment to supporting 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 2021-2022.

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 Following this, the College of Social Work championed the extension of the role to include adult social work. As with the children’s Principal Social Worker (PSW), the role of the PSW for adults also takes a professional lead across the organisation.
- 2.3 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. It states that 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 the Director of Adult Social Services (DASS) and/or wider council in complex or controversial cases and on law relating to social work practice.
- 2.4 Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) states that children and families PSWs have a key role in developing the practice and practice methodology that underpins direct work.
- 2.5 There has been a PSW for both Adults and Children’s Services since March 2016. Due to the previous post holder’s successful appointment to a Head of Service role during 2020-2021 the PSW post was temporarily split this year into separate adults and children’s PSWs. However, from February 2021 a permanent appointment was made to the joint PSW role.

- 2.6 The decision to appoint one PSW for Adults and Children's Services was informed by a commitment to promote and embed a whole family / think family approach in Wolverhampton. Over the last six months Adult's and Children's Services have been working more closely together to reinvigorate this commitment and the PSW role is crucial to this. The PSW works across the two services to promote a "think whole family approach" that will enable better joined up working, inspire greater aspirations for children, families and adult's with care and support needs, as well as ensuring the concept of wellbeing features in all of the work undertaken by social care.
- 2.7 The PSW role links to several of the Relighting Our City priority areas including supporting people who need us most, creating more opportunities for young people and also generating more jobs and learning opportunities in relation to the social work profession particularly, with the internal social work degree apprenticeships being an example of this. 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 stimulating vibrant high streets and local communities.
- 2.8 The PSW reports directly to a Head of Service with a dotted line to the Deputy Directors of Adults and Children's Services. 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.
- 2.9 The regional and national networks of PSWs also provide information to the Chief Social Workers for adults and children's and regular consultations are held in respect of issues such as social worker health checks, knowledge and skill statements, accreditation, legislation, practice and learning developments.

3.0 Progress

- 3.1 The PSW in Wolverhampton has key responsibility for policies and procedures and the Quality Assurance and Improvement team. The function of this unit is to implement and further develop the quality assurance frameworks for Adult and Children's Services, to support inspections and peer review work and support sector led improvement programmes. The PSW also has responsibility for the recruitment and retention of social workers.
- 3.2 This year because of Covid the PSW has played a key role in ensuring statutory duties have continued to be met whilst also supporting social worker's wellbeing and ensuring their safety whilst they carried out their critical frontline role. There has also been a focus on the role of the PSW and social work generally in tackling inequality and practising in an anti-discriminatory and anti-racist way as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement and the murder of George Floyd in May 2020.

3.3 Highlights of the work undertaken by the PSWs since March 2020 is outlined below.

3.4 Covid

3.5 Wellbeing has been a priority throughout the year because of Covid and has been promoted at social worker and workforce briefings led by the PSWs during 2020-2021. This has included at your desk yoga sessions and discussion about “the five ways to wellbeing”. There was also a wellbeing café during World Social Work Day in March 2021 facilitated by the PSW’s team. Monthly newsletters have continued to be sent out by the PSW’s team across both Adults and Children’s Services, but now have a dedicated wellbeing section. There has also been continued promotion of the council’s Wellbeing Hub with access to a large selection of resources to support wellbeing, mental health and other issues such as bereavement and financial worries. The PSW has provided content and reviews the domestic abuse section for the council’s Wellbeing Hub and was a part of the “Operational Wellbeing group” in the council. There has been an extensive training offer for individuals and managers to support wellbeing during Covid and there will be a focus on wellbeing and recovery / resilience in 2021-2022. The Peer Challenge process in October 2020 highlighted and commended how the emotional well-being of staff had been prioritised during Covid.

3.6 During the pandemic the PSW took a lead on Care Act easements as a result of the Coronavirus Bill which became law on 25th March 2020 (Coronavirus Act 2020). The measures it contained enabled adult social care to prioritise resources, if necessary, should they be unable to meet their statutory duties in full if demand spiked and staffing resources shrank significantly during the pandemic. The government gave adult PSWs a critical role in determining whether councils should suspend Care Act duties and enact these measures (easements). Locally the PSW devised local guidance that set out the possible scenarios which adult social care in Wolverhampton could face during the period of the pandemic, what operating models would look like at each stage and what should have been explored before easements were considered and implemented. The City of Wolverhampton Council’s approach was that Care Act easements should only be implemented as a last resort and only when all other options and alternatives, including utilising any other available resource, had been explored.

3.7 The PSW carried out a short local consultation and produced an easy read version of the local Care Act easement guidance to engage local people about the approach the council proposed to take on Care Act easements. Local organisations and groups as well as carers and people with care and support needs and also employees participated. The vast majority agreed with the local approach to Care Act easements. Some comments included: “I consider this to have been thorough and well thought-through”; “The fact that Wolverhampton are consulting on this issue is exemplary. You put some of your near neighbours to shame.”

3.8 In total eight local authorities across the country made the decision to implement easements during the pandemic, five of which were local authorities in the West Midlands

region. However, the City of Wolverhampton Council have not had to enact Care Act easements at any time during the pandemic.

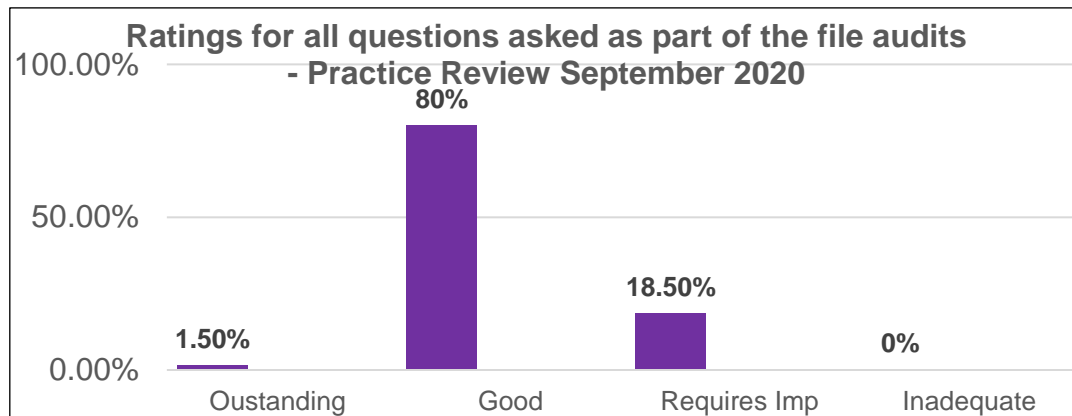
- 3.9 The PSW has supported the implementation of the Children’s Services operational model during Covid in response to the change in legislation “The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations” and responded to government consultations. This has been a prominent role during Covid-19 ensuring that senior managers are kept abreast of the changes to ensure that service delivery is in line with guidance and legislation.
- 3.10 The PSW also supported social work teams to consider legal and human rights challenges during this unprecedented time, leading on a session at a social work briefing in July 2020 with particular consideration of people in care homes and their rights to respect for family and private life and also the right to life in the context of restrictions and infection risks. Additional training has also been offered to support teams to consider human rights and inequality issues. The external Peer Challenge that took place in October 2020 (see section 3.18) concluded that there was a “visible commitment across teams and the system to social justice, protection of human rights.”
- 3.11 The PSWs have led on key guidance and policies to support and safeguard the health and wellbeing of social workers across adults and children’s during Covid. This has included procedures on visits and use of PPE.

3.12 Quality of Practice - Adults

- 3.13 A key priority for adult PSWs in the government’s Winter Plan for Adult Social Care was to ensure that throughout the pandemic social work teams were applying legislative and strengths-based frameworks. The Winter Plan also called on PSWs to review their current quality assurance and governance oversight arrangements to ensure that winter and COVID-19 pressures did not reduce the ability to deliver high-quality social work practice. To support high quality practice in light of the challenges posed by Covid, the PSW co-ordinated eight reflective sessions during Summer 2020 which focussed on key areas of practice that teams said they felt had been affected.
- 3.14 The PSW has continued to lead on quality assurance activity in adults during 2020-2021 with audits evidencing that high quality social work practice and adherence to statutory duties has continued during Covid. There has only been a very slight overall drop in performance compared with last year, which was mainly due to practitioners adjusting to a different of working at the outset of the pandemic and reduced resources in the community which has made strengths-based working more of a challenge:

Audit period	Total% files rated good or above
2019-2020	83%
2020-2021	78%

- 3.15 In total 80 audits have been carried out this year, which means that by the end of March 2021 almost 2% of people who received a service from adult social care in Wolverhampton will have had some form of qualitative audit in the year.
- 3.16 Local audit activity throughout 2020-2021 has also demonstrated consistently good practice, including areas such as effective management oversight, demonstrating dignity and respect, Making Safeguarding Personal and use of advocacy as well as evidence of involving the person in decision making despite the impact of social distancing and a reduction in face to face visits.
- 3.17 There has also been some improvement in specific areas of practice by the end of the year including increased consideration of carer conversations, which was a key area for development last year. There was also wider use of strengths-based approaches and by end of January 2021 over 90% of files were deemed good or outstanding in this area, which is more than last year.
- 3.18 There was also an external audit carried out by PSWs from across the region, as part of a Practice Review, which is an element of the Peer Challenge Process which took place in October 2020. A Peer Challenge involves a small team of regional leads, PSWs and councillors spending time at another the council as peers to provide challenge and share learning. It is delivered from the position of a critical friend supporting sector led improvement. Onsite Peer Challenges are part of a wider offer of support and development work by the West Midlands ADASS Branch. They are improvement focused and the scope is agreed with the council and tailored to reflect their local needs and specific requirements.
- 3.19 The Practice Review component of the Peer Challenge consisted of two external PSWs and the host PSW meeting with the Director of Adult Services, frontline workers and managers to gather feedback and also an audit of 21 files. The Practice Review team considered strengths-based practice and also the impact of Covid.
- 3.20 All of the files examined by PSWs in the Practice Review were considered to be consistently good. There were no cases causing concern that needed to be returned for review. There was good evidence that strengths-based conversations were taking place and that they were outcome focused. The records evidenced the creativity of practitioners in meeting needs even during Covid.



- 3.21 The Practice Review Team considered that there was a clear practice model for strengths-based practice in place for Adult Social Care with the use of the Three Conversations ©. This approach is a new way of working that replaces the default ‘contact, divert, triage, reablement, assessment for services’ process with a dynamic strength-based approach to listening to people, aimed at supporting independent lives, and reducing the need for dependence on formal services. It supports frontline employees to have three distinct and specific conversations. These conversations focus on helping people live what they feel is a good life, by utilising their own resource, resources within their local community and receiving formal support when required.
- 3.22 Three Conversations© was rolled out in the City of Wolverhampton Council in May 2018 with the creation of three innovations sites in Adult Social Care. Three evaluations have been carried out which have considered data, feedback from people and carers and also “stories of difference”. There is strong evidence that there has been an increase in productivity, with a reduction in the average number of working days taken to complete assessments when compared to old world, saving on average 28 days per assessment. Evaluations also found an increase in worker morale.
- 3.23 Over 100 stories of difference were collected demonstrating improved outcomes compared to old ways of working. A common theme is that by being able to work with people straight away social workers were more likely to be able to put in effective preventative support and build effective relationships.
- 3.24 The Practice Review team found that the Three Conversations© approach was understood and supported at every level and they were told by managers and practitioners that the way of working is “much better”. Practitioners told the reviewers that they had more autonomy, more responsibility and were engaged in decision making in ‘huddles’ and the Practice Review Team considered that this was very positive.
- 3.25 Some of the other more general key strengths identified by the Practice Review team included:
- A. Good support provided to practitioners and managers throughout the pandemic

B. Director and Principal Social Worker worked closely together on the public consultation and were well prepared for if the situation changed

C. Added value of the Principal Social Worker in driving practice improvement

- 3.26 The Peer Challenge process itself consisted of a series of 12 focus groups lead by Directors and leads from other local councils. Data was also considered. They concluded that the work on strengths-based practice is “something to be really proud of” and felt it held up across adult social care operations during Covid, with the principles and values expanding across the whole of the pathway including hospital social work.
- 3.27 A key area for opportunity though was to continue to engage with staff and agree a balance for home and office working on an on-going basis, which will be a focus for 2021-2022 corporately as well as from an individual service perspective.
- 3.28 A quality assurance report and accompanying improvement plan is presented to the Adult Leadership team quarterly ensuring senior managers have oversight of the quality of frontline practice and are able to use this information to inform improvement actions. This will incorporate actions from all quality assurance activity, including any findings from the Peer Challenge process.
- 3.29 Quality of Practice – Children’s**
- 3.30 Restorative Practice (RP) has been the overarching practice framework for Children’s Services since November 2016. It is a strengths-based approach that is fundamentally about building, maintaining and repairing relationships. It supports a strong relational way to delivering services, working with children and families, identifying strengths but also being able to effectively challenge where necessary. Whilst this approach is not new to most qualified social workers, it is powerful to have a unified way of working and language around intervention and support that is shared amongst colleagues.
- 3.31 In June 2020 a Senior Restorative Practice (SRP) Lead was appointed to support the PSW in embedding RP across the service. The SRP lead is responsible for increasing the breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of the range of Restorative Approaches across Children’s Services. The role includes developing best practice and helping to embed the approach internally and with partners. The SRP lead is now supporting in the delivery of family meetings training and is also working to incorporate RP into other key training and work carried out across Children’s Services, including key areas such as direct work and neglect. Multi-agency RP training is to be delivered across Children’s Services and partner agencies and six participants from Police, Health, Education and Voluntary Sector have been identified to act as champions for this. In total 17 RP trainers that have been enlisted to support with embedding the approach.
- 3.32 The Principal Social Worker has also been 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. The NAAS assessment includes three elements:

- A. Employee endorsement – the employer’s assessment of the social worker or practice supervisor’s skills
- B. A digital assessment based on the child and family practitioner knowledge and skills statement produced by the Chief Social Worker
- C. A simulated practice observation using role play scenarios with actors. This will include a written assessment component

3.33 The Council set a target of enabling between 20-30% of Children and Families social workers to undertake the assessment in the first year (2019-2020), which equated to between 31 and 47 social workers. By March 2020 41 social workers had completed the assessment, which meant that the target was successfully met. However, this year assessment centres have been paused due to Covid but will reopen again in June 2021.

3.34 The Quality Assurance Framework for Children’s has been revised and quarterly meetings with key stakeholders have been set up to inform future planning. A key element of quality assurance in Children’s Services is practice weeks, which an innovative and restorative approach to audit. The Director of Children’s Services along with all Heads of Service, the PSW and Service Managers spend four days undertaking audits alongside practitioners, observing practice and sitting in teams. The advantages of this approach include being able to see practice rather than just read 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 and employees report enjoying the immediate feedback and opportunity to talk about their work with senior managers.

3.35 From the start of the pandemic Children’s Services have been working flexibly and this has also applied to practice weeks, which have had to be delivered virtually this year. Observations, in particular, have been a challenge during Covid owing to limited opportunities to observe in a safe way and minimise risk to families and staff.

3.36 A few of the key areas of strength, as identified through audit in practice weeks during 2020-2021 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. Family meetings are regularly taking place increasing family resilience and helping to build relationships with families.

D. Social workers are considering the diverse needs of children and young people they are working with

3.37 There has been a steady improvement in the quality of practice being delivered by social workers and this years standard audits are showing an increase in the number of files rated good (G) or outstanding (O) compared to last year and a reduction in those rated requires improvement (RI) or inadequate (I):

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

3.38 The PSW has continued to provided leadership, mentoring and coaching to six full time equivalent Advanced Practitioners appointed in Children's Services. Advanced practitioners play a key role in embedding good practice across the service and provide practical support to newly qualified social workers, this could for instance be by attending complex meetings with them, modelling good practice and helping them write good assessment and plans. The Advanced Practitioners also contribute to quality assurance and have completed dip sampling which informs future training needs.

3.39 Advanced practitioners have also delivered training to all social workers on key themes linked to the 2020-2021 Practice Improvement Plan such as:

A. Genograms workshops have been delivered to the majority of teams. Feedback has been positive and the aim is to implement this approach in reflective practice sessions

B. Family meeting workshops every quarter with over 40 social workers having received this training this year and more planned for next year

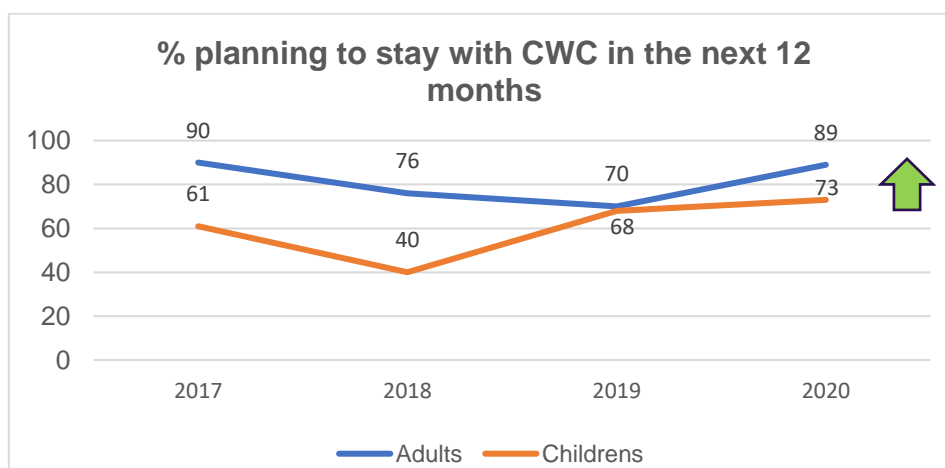
3.40 Children's Services have an updated improvement plan for 2021-2022, Making a Difference: Aiming for Excellence in Social Work Practice, which will be utilised as a tool to support Children's Service's continuing improvement journey from good to outstanding. The plan will be reviewed regularly by colleagues across the service at a range of leadership tiers.

3.41 Workforce

3.42 There is evidence in the UK of a shortage of experienced social workers (Research in Practice, 2015) with Social Work featuring on the national occupation shortage list since 2014. A Department for Education (DfE) study of Children and Family social workers in

2019 identified that within two-three years of qualifying social workers become dissatisfied and report feelings of increased stress.

- 3.43 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”.
- 3.44 The Principal Social Worker 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. The plan delivers a rolling recruitment campaign for social workers, the development of promotional material including videos for both Adult’s and Children’s Services and retention activity focused on good communication between senior leaders and frontline employees, delivering a good workforce development offer including a clear career development pathway.
- 3.45 This year In Children’s Services the PSW has hosted a recruitment session this year for agency social workers and those interested in joining the City of Wolverhampton Council. The pathway for continued professional development has also been launched, offering a clear development pathway for both children and adult social workers.
- 3.46 The City of Wolverhampton Council is bucking the national trend in the recruitment and retention of children’s social workers. The majority of vacancies in Children’s Services have been created by secondments and recent analysis evidenced that there were just 4.5 true vacant positions to be filled. In Adult’s Services the current turnover rate of social workers is low at 3.9% compared to 12.8% nationally (“The State of the Adults Social Care Sector and Workforce in England, Skills for Care October 2020). A stable workforce allows the Council to embed good practice and provide children, families and adults with consistent workers.
- 3.47 The annual Social Work Health Check survey asks social workers for their views on working conditions and this year showed that more social workers than in previous years are planning to stay with City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC):



- 3.48 A key function of the PSW role is to support the training of new social workers. There are many routes into social work and it is important that that the City of Wolverhampton Council (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, Frontline and Degree Apprenticeships in Social Work.
- 3.49 The WMSWTP is in its third year of delivery and is the largest in the country consisting of 27 partners including Local Authorities, Children's Trusts, Universities and Higher Education Colleges. Social Work Teaching Partnerships are a government funded initiative designed to enhance partnership arrangements between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) 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 for instance by being able to access a number of training/CPD sessions including Train to Teach opportunities, Court Skills and opportunities aimed at newly qualified social workers, such as considerations for working from home and Communities of Practice. The PSW attended "Practitioners Panel Student Welcome Week" at the University of Birmingham raising the profile of social work in Wolverhampton. Relationships with the universities will continue to be developed this coming year.
- 3.50 During 2020-2021 CWC have supported 25 social work placements across Adults and Children's Services, which is more than usual and 15 new Practice Educators were recruited. Given the significant challenges Universities and social work teams faced due to Covid, this shows the local commitment and drive for supporting the next generation of social workers. Four final year students have gone on to secure permanent newly qualified posts with CWC.
- 3.51 Step up to Social Work and Frontline 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. It is a 14-month condensed course. CWC has been providing placements for four Step Up students, who are on track to become qualified in May/June 2021 and will be employed as Newly Qualified Social workers from date of registration. Another cohort of Step Up students is currently being recruited and CWC have provisionally requested another four students.
- 3.52 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. Participants are supported by a dedicated consultant social worker and a tutor who

delivers theoretical training within the workplace. The PSW has worked collaboratively with Frontline to establish two Frontline units each having four participants, one consultant social worker and one deputy consultant social worker. There have been four cohorts, starting in 2017 and in total 20 have been through the programme or are currently on it. In 2020 three students moved into newly qualified social work positions with CWC. There are currently two students on the programme who started in September 2020 and who will move into newly qualified roles from August 2021.

3.53 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 eight apprentices across adults and children's services and will be recruiting a further four in 2021-2022.

3.54 The City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) undertakes a full Social Work Health Check every year to assess the "health" of its social work workforce. The National Social Work Task Force recommended a framework to assist employers and practitioners to assess the "health" of their organisation on a range of issues affecting the workload of social workers and to support the implementation of a set of national Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework. It is recognised that good practice carried out by a "healthy" and motivated workforce can lead to improved outcomes for people and families as well as reduced demand and costs. The social work Health Check carried out in October 2020 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 and this came through in both the Adult's and Children's survey. However, although stress levels rose slightly compared with last year most likely because of the challenges that Covid-19 has posed, they remain below the levels recorded in previous years.
- B. Social workers generally felt well supported by their line manager and felt that communication between senior managers and frontline staff is good.
- C. There has been an improvement in the frequency of supervision and the vast majority receive regular, high quality supervision
- D. The number of people who felt proud to work the CWC had increased on previous years

3.55 Action plans have been developed for both Children's and Adult Services to address any issues identified.

3.56 Professional Standards and Practice development

3.57 This year the new Social Work regulator Social Work England required all social workers to record some evidence of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) by November

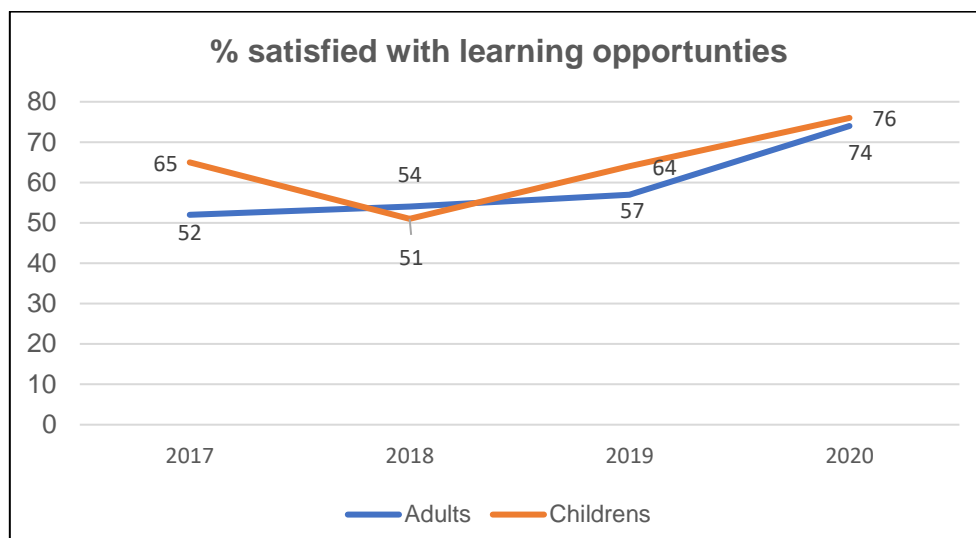
2020 in order to renew their registration to practice as a social worker. One of the key roles of the PSW alongside Organisational Development was to support all social workers to meet the re-registration requirement. The PSW acted as a conduit for engagement with Social Work England inviting the regional lead to speak to social workers directly at Social Work briefings and also at individual workshops across the year, with over 200 social workers attending one session held in the autumn. Social workers have had opportunities to access training throughout the year to evidence CPD and also have access to Research in Practice / Research in Practice for Adults which provides resources and articles to inform their practice. As of November 2020 – all social workers across adults and children’s services had re-registered successfully.

- 3.58 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. Covid initially made delivery of training more challenging as sessions had to take place virtually rather than face to face. However, the transition was ultimately very successful and over the year a wide variety of training opportunities were delivered linked to key priorities in adults and children’s services including continue the development of strengths based approaches and relational social work and also to support practice and legal literacy during Covid. Some examples included Mental Capacity Assessment training, including a focus on self-neglect, Managing Unseen Risk, Accountable and Defensible Practice in Challenging Times, Getting your Conversation Records write, Life Story Work, Child Protection Best Practice and Three Conversations© refresher workshops.
- 3.59 The PSW arranges three separate Children’s and Adult’s social work briefings a year that provide critical space for social workers to share their views with senior leaders, ensure important information is shared face to face with frontline social workers. 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 and generally state in feedback that everything presented is of use to their practice. This year subjects have featured sessions on trauma informed practice in adults, LGBT awareness, exploitation and modern slavery and Mental Capacity considerations during Covid and legal updates.
- 3.60 The joint Adults and Children’s Social Work Conference took place virtually in October 2020 on the theme of Safeguarding. It featured a keynote speech by Clenton Farquharson MBE, who describes himself as a disabled person with lived experience of health and social care, Chair of the Think Local Act Personal partnership board, and member of the Coalition for Collaborative Care. A second keynote was presented by Luke Hart from Co•co Awareness who, with his brother, share their family’s story of coercive control and domestic homicide. Social workers also shared stories from their practice and a number of workshops were delivered including: Societal Context of Men’s Violence Against Women; the Impact of Trauma on development and how this relates to adults and children’s social care and Transitional Safeguarding

3.61 Over 240 social workers attended the joint conference and feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Some comments included:

- A. "This is one of the best Social Work Conference we have had...One of the core principles of learning is sometimes learning and receiving information from people who have lived experiences and that is what has been significant in today's conference. Thank you"
- B. "3 of the best contributor speeches we have ever had at SW conference"
- C. "Well Done, all the speakers we have had today are of such high calibre and so knowledgeable."

3.62 This year's Social Work Health Check surveys showed that more social workers this year across Children's and Adult's Services feel satisfied with the learning opportunities available to them:



3.63 Raising the profile of social work and connecting with practice

3.64 This year the PSWs and 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. The PSW also represented the council by co-hosting a session at Social Work England's first Social Work Week in March 2021. The session was called "Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: A Wolverhampton Perspective" and showcased a video created locally ([Equality, diversity and inclusion - A Wolverhampton Perspective. – YouTube](#)). Over 130 people attended from across the country including people with lived experience, social work students, professionals, academics and anyone with an interest in social work. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive:

- A. "Thank you there was so much in this to take away and reflect on. Well done!"
- B. "Fantastic, so moving, couldn't be prouder...Well done Wolverhampton"

C. “Lovely work you are doing Wolverhampton”

- 3.65 In March 2021, a social work blog “*Remembering to be kind to yourself when caring for others*” was produced and published by the Department of Education on their website to highlight importance of well-being and self-care in social work
- 3.66 The PSWs have continued to work closely with social workers connecting with practice and being the voice of social work for the city. In the Peer Challenge Practice Review (September 2020) for example practitioners said they were aware of the host PSW and said she had been a presence undertaking drop-ins, delivering training and delivering virtual workshops. Practitioners said that they knew she was available which was “really re-assuring”.

3.67 Challenging inequality

- 3.68 Equalities has been a central focus this year with the creation and delivery of cultural competence workshops by the Advanced Practitioners. To date there have been five full day training sessions delivered to over 100 practitioners across Children’s and Adult’s services. Practitioners have reported that workshops have helped them to self-reflect on their own cultural competency. There have also been discussions in equalities champions meetings and the aim is to begin to disseminate tools/articles/resources for champions to present at their team meetings.
- 3.69 There has been dedicated time at social work briefings this year to reflect on inequalities and the Black Lives Matter movement. Equality and diversity is also a standard agenda item at all team meetings and is discussed within supervisions.
- 3.70 The PSWs commissioned anti-racist practice training from the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) in January 2021 with 205 social workers attending from across Adults and Children’s Service.
- 3.71 The PSW has supported Heads of Service in the creation of Service Equality Plans in Adults with a particular focus on making sure the workforce is skilled and confident to have good conversations about people’s uniqueness in the collection of equality monitoring data. The PSW will also be supporting Children’s Services with this in 2021-2022.
- 3.72 In Children’s Services the PSW has been an active part of the Practitioner’s Forum on race and culture.
- 3.73 From April 2021 the PSW became a lead ally and will be supporting the Rainbow staff equality and diversity forum this coming year

4.0 Key priorities for PSW work plan 2021-22

- 4.1 As well as the priorities already mentioned in this report the PSW will continue to ensure that the social work development plan incorporates a good development offer for social workers that enables them to continue to develop their practice whilst still not yet being

able to access face to face training. 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.

- 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. Advanced Practitioners will assist with the service's journey towards excellence in social work practice and the transition from being a "good" rated local authority to an "outstanding" one. The PSW will oversee and lead all quality assurance activity and develop the "Aiming for Excellence Plan" in Children's Services and Adults.
- 4.3 There will be continued local delivery of the NAAS and the PSW will play a key role in the ongoing embedding of Restorative Practice across Children's Services and introducing this in Adult Services by end of the year to enhance the Three Conversations[©] approach and strengths-based practice. There will be a particular focus on the use of restorative language.
- 4.4 The PSW will ensure that issues relating to tackling inequality for all groups of people with protected characteristics continues to be incorporated into social work development plans and will ensure social workers are exposed to the voices of people with lived experiences to better inform their practice and approaches. The PSW, as lead ally, will promote the leadership equality pledges, support EDI strategy (including being visible and active in forums and EDI events), and actively challenge where needed. The theme for this coming year's Joint conference will be: "Celebrating Diversity: Tackling Inequality".
- 4.5 A key priority for the PSW for 2021-2022 in conjunction with other leads within the council will be to ensure the social work workforce is prepared for the introduction of the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) by April 2022. This will replace the current Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) scheme. The introduction of this was delayed due to Covid.
- 4.6 As previously mentioned, the PSW will ensure mechanisms are in place to support social work wellbeing during Covid (and post Covid), this includes the production of a wellbeing framework, as recommended by the 2020 Local Government Association's Standards for employers of Social Workers.
- 4.7 The PSW will continue to take lead responsibility along with Human Resources and Workforce 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, an example of this is a celebration event for those who have completed their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) and Practice Educator training later in the year

- 4.8 The PSW's Quality and Improvement team will continue to support with the annual Social Work Health Check, seeking feedback from the workforce to increase response rates, and take the lead on sector-led improvement activity and inspections.
- 4.9 The PSW will continue to support a range of engagement activities between the Directors for Adults and Children's Services and social workers but will explore different ways to communicate and interact with social work teams this year, including digital solutions.
- 4.10 The PSW will meet monthly with Heads of Service and Deputy Directors to ensure operational engagement and oversight.
- 4.11 The PSW will also play a key role in the redesign of Adult's Social Care in 2021-2022, providing independence challenge and assurance in relation to social work and any changes to the practice model.
- 4.12 There will also be a role for the PSW to ensure social workers are kept informed about, and have a chance to engage with, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, which is now underway. This is a national review which will have significant implications for Children's Social Care. It is being called a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reform systems and services. The review will report to ministers and the government will publish a report and response.
- 4.13 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.
- 4.14 The PSW also attends regional network meeting on a bi-monthly basis. 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 on the strategic board for the Regional West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership and will be facilitating quarterly meetings with the University of Wolverhampton and Heads of Service.

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. 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 also provides the professional knowledge required to drive local and regional workforce development plan that will contribute to high quality, excellent practice and assist the journey from a good to outstanding Ofsted rating.

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. [MK/01072021/U]

8.0 Legal implications

8.1 There are no direct legal implications arising out of this report.
[SB/11062021/Z]

9.0 Equalities implications

9.1 Social workers provide support to the whole community covering all the protected characteristics. One of the key roles of the Principal Social Worker is to support the continual improvement of social work practice. Excellent quality social work practice is more attuned to the equality issues experienced by individuals, families and communities. This annual report highlights the actions being taken to ensure that Children's and Adults Service and social work practice generally is of a high quality and being 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 well incorporated unto the social work development plan for 2021-2022 and also considered as part of recruitment and retention activity.

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 recruitment campaigns.
- 10.2 Good social work practice will support the health and wellbeing of children, young people and adults who access services. The PSW has a key role in supporting the wellbeing of social workers and this has been highlighted in this report.

11.0 Schedule of background papers

- 11.1 There are no background papers for this report.