



Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel

16 March 2022

Report title	Adult's Social Work and Workforce Health Check 2021	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Linda Leach, Adult Services	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Executive Director for Families	
Originating service	Adult's Service	
Accountable employee(s)	Jennifer Rogers	Principal Social Worker
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Report has been considered by	Social Work Development Board	11 January 2022
	Leadership Team	20 January 2022
	Strategic Executive Board	10 February 2022

Recommendations for action or decision:

The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the findings of the Adult's social work and wider workforce health check for 2021 and progress since 2020's health check.
2. Provide comment, feedback and challenge on the proposed actions to improve the health of the social work workforce and conditions for practice.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) carries out a survey each year to check the “health” of its social workers and this forms part of Adult Services’ ongoing self-assessment. For the last three years a survey has also been circulated more widely to include all the frontline adult’s workforce within the council. This report presents an overview of the findings of both surveys and concludes with actions to address the main areas for improvement.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Health checks were a key recommendation of the National Social Work Task Force, which was set up by government after the death of Baby P. There was recognition that the whole system impacts on individual social workers and also on the overall quality of social work practice and regular health checks help organisations identify areas of strength and areas requiring greater focus. It also assists with workforce development planning and supports a culture of continuous improvement.
- 2.2 A “healthy”, motivated workforce which has good retention rates and manageable workloads has the potential to make a huge difference. For instance, adults and carers will experience fewer changes in worker, and there will be more time for developing relationships and preventative, strengths-based working. Costs, such as that spent on recruitment, will also reduce.
- 2.3 The surveys have been refreshed this year and aligned with the Local Government’s Association (LGA) Standards for employers of social workers in England and has also taken into account the questions asked in the national health check survey.
- 2.4 This report provides a summary of the main findings, including areas which have progressed as a result of actions taken over the last 12 months, and also any actions that are planned or in progress to address the key areas for improvement.

3.0 Overview and key findings

- 3.1 The health check was circulated via an online survey between 14 September to 1 November 2021. It was sent to 117 social workers and 290 non-social work qualified employees at grade five and above who work directly with adults and carers, or who manage those teams. The wider workforce is very diverse and is made up of a variety of roles such as social care workers, day opportunities team leaders, reablement assistants, welfare rights officers, direct payments officers and occupational therapists.
- 3.2 It was noted last year that response rates could be higher and one key action was to provide protected time at a briefing so that practitioners did not see this as an additional task to be completed. As a result, response rates for both surveys this year are slightly higher with a 55% response rate for social workers, compared to 52% in 2020, and a 41% response rate for the workforce survey compared to 33% last year.

However even higher response rates would ensure that the views expressed are more representative of the whole workforce, although it is important to recognise that these rates may reflect the challenges teams have faced and are continuing to face due to Covid. To improve take up there will be more protected time to complete the survey next year, not just at briefings but also in team meetings. There will also be a revised approach based on the “you said...we did” format which will help to show the difference the survey has made.

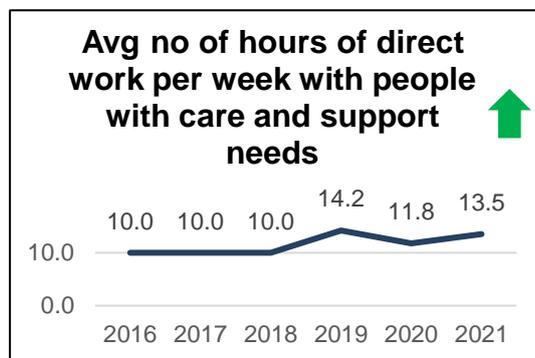
- 3.3 The findings of this year’s health checks are mostly positive, with improvement evident in a number of key areas as a result of actions taken by the service.

Social Work

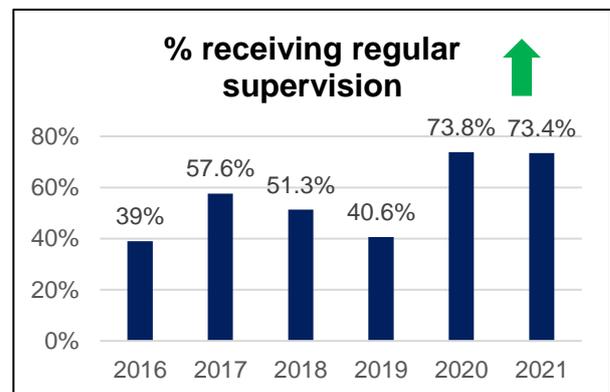
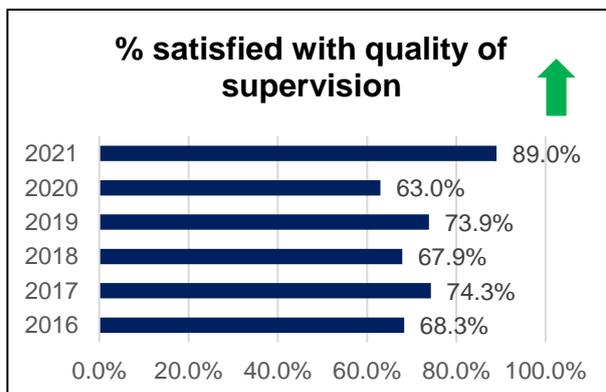
- 3.4 Nationally social work recruitment and retention continues to be a significant challenge and social work is on the national occupational shortage list. Wolverhampton’s Adults and Children’s Service has a well-established and effective recruitment and retention strategy which includes, amongst a number of other key actions, the investment in social work apprenticeships and a strong social work training and development offer, which this year has included PhD sponsorship opportunities. Covid has had a significant impact on adult social care, including social work, and has put pressure on the service in a variety of ways.
- 3.5 Positively however more social workers are saying that their workloads are manageable this year. This now applies to 75% of those who responded compared to 69% last year and is the highest this has been since 2018. Specific actions were taken since last year’s health check to improve workload manageability and included additional resources being agreed for 12 months to add extra capacity to support teams experiencing staffing challenges and increased demand during Covid. Workloads are monitored during supervision and the skill and experience of social workers, as well as the complexity of each situation, is taken into account. The revised supervision policy launched this year has reinforced this expectation.
- 3.6 There has been a slight increase in social workers working over their contracted hours. It is possible that continuous home working has created some ‘work creep’ with social workers feeling the need to answer calls or emails after work hours. A common theme in both surveys this year is a real desire to have more of a balance between working from home and in the office. A clear operating model encompassing a hybrid approach is currently being consulted on with service areas so that when it is safe to do so teams can start to use offices more often. This may be for supervision, collaboration time, team meetings and to support those workers who may be feeling isolated and struggling with their wellbeing, or who are new in post/role.
- 3.7 Actions were put in place as a result of the health check last year to ensure social workers felt more supported with their wellbeing and feelings of stress. Key actions included having a dedicated section for wellbeing on the monthly newsletter which, amongst other things, has promoted use of the council’s wellbeing hub and employee assistance programme.

The short-term additional staffing capacity, as mentioned previously, also intended to reduce stress levels as well as ensure workloads were more manageable. Consequently, in this year's health check those reporting they always or often feel stress due to work has reduced, although it is recognised that more action is needed to reduce this further over the next 12 months. The vast majority also reported that they know where to get help if they are concerned about their well-being and feel able to discuss their wellbeing, stressful situations or workload with their manager and agree satisfactory ways forward.

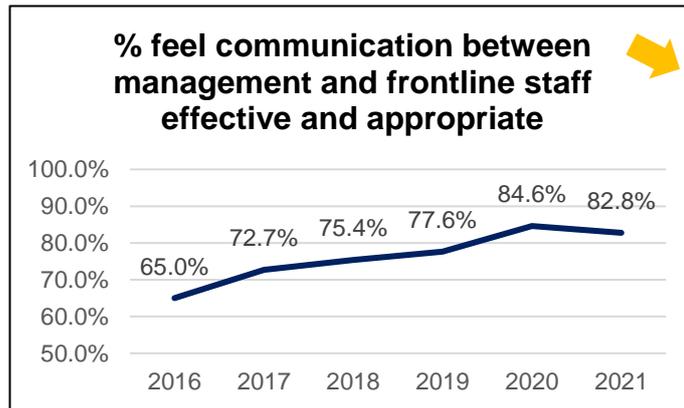
3.8 The majority of social workers have reported that Wolverhampton has a clear model of social work practice that promotes relationship working and a strengths-based approach to achieve the best outcomes for individuals and families. Positively social workers are also spending more time working directly with people this year.



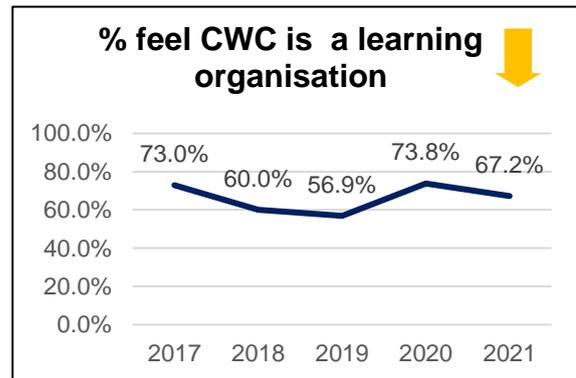
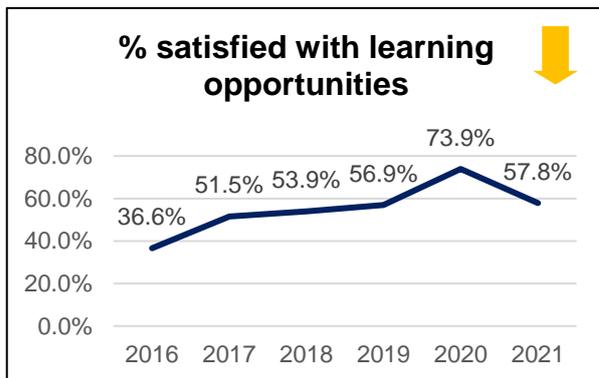
3.9 Far more this year are satisfied with the quality of supervision (89%), and this is the highest satisfaction rate since the health check survey started in 2017. This significant increase is likely due to actions taken over the last 12 months as a result of the last Health Check. One key action was the launch of the revised supervision policy and guidance in early 2021, alongside supervision training and a real commitment by the service to support teams and invest in supervision conversations. Despite the ongoing challenges posed by Covid, timeliness of supervisions remains a strength, although this could improve further. However almost 90% are satisfied with the level of support managers provide, which suggests that there is readily available support when social workers need it most. This is a significant increase from 2020 and 2019 (74% and 73% respectively).



3.10 The way senior managers communicate continues to be effective with 83% reporting this, which is just a very slight decrease from last year, but still higher than in the four years prior. The senior leadership team’s communication and engagement strategy has ensured the service has continued to be as visible as possible despite the challenges of virtual working. A regular presence at team huddles and monthly updates via the Adult Social Care newsletter has made a difference in this regard this year as well as regular social work briefings.



3.11 The majority are satisfied with the learning and development opportunities available, but there has been a slight decrease since last year. Not being given enough notice about training and wanting more progression opportunities were some common themes. Some ways in which this will be addressed is by better communication of progression opportunities such as the Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) and Practice Educator role and exploring options as part of the Adult Service’s redesign. The Organisational Development Team will also develop a brochure advertising all the training available over the year so that social workers can better plan their time and discuss their development needs as part of supervision and professional conversations.



3.12 The majority of social workers plan to stay with the council over the next 12 months. However, workloads, increasing complexity of situations and staffing challenges are issues some have raised this year which could affect retention.

The redesign is a key piece of work currently taking place which 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.

- 3.13 Over 85% would recommend CWC as an employer and there is a strong sense of pride and positivity about working for the council. Some comments included: “coming from another local authority, I am naturally comparing the experience here at Wolverhampton. I am happy in my role and feel grateful to be employed by CWC”; “I think Wolverhampton is a great local authority to work for- I am particularly inspired by its celebration of diversity...it makes me proud to work here”; “I really appreciate Wolverhampton's care and consideration of staff wellbeing and safety throughout Covid”; “great learning and development...opportunities for career progression”; “Wolverhampton have been a very supportive council and I have an approachable management team which makes all the difference and makes me want to continue to work for CWC.”
- 3.14 Almost all felt that CWC was actively committed to tackling inequality, with only 6% disagreeing, which is likely due to the strong approach taken by Adult's Services this year in addressing equality and diversity issues, reflecting the whole council's approach. This includes the creation of a cultural competency champion role, cultural competency workshops for staff as well as managers and a Joint Social Work conference in October 2021 which focussed on the theme of celebrating diversity and challenging inequality, and which featured a variety of speakers with lived experience of discrimination and oppression.
- 3.15 The majority of social workers said CWC makes them feel encouraged and empowered to make time for self-care and wellbeing activities and there has been a real commitment over the past 12 months to support wellbeing across Adult's Services. Wellbeing continues to be high on the agenda at briefings, in the monthly newsletter, in inductions and in team meetings. A wellbeing framework is also being developed to support teams manage their wellbeing further by bringing resources together in one place and reinforce messages about wellbeing particularly for social workers. The move to a hybrid model of working where teams can access offices to spend purposeful time with their teams will also support the wellbeing of all social care teams in adults.
- 3.16 More this year (66%) agree that they feel consulted about and involved in changes or proposals that affect their role. This is a significant increase compared to the last two years when only 46% in 2020 and 29% in 2019 felt this way. However, there is still room for improvement and the senior leadership team plan to communicate frequently with teams about the adult redesign work and ensure teams are involved wherever possible.

Workforce

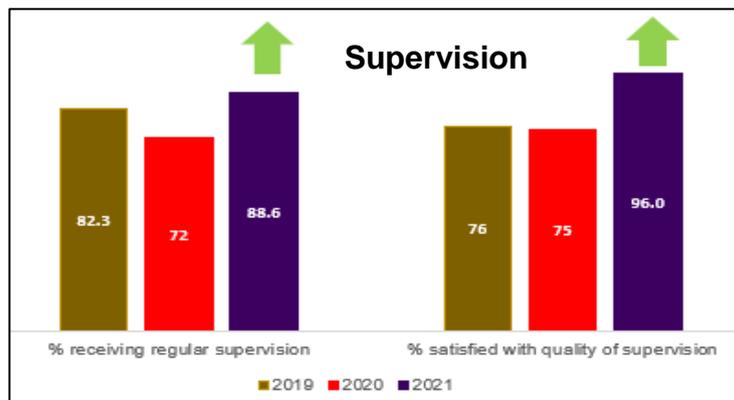
- 3.17 Around the same high number of people as last year are reporting that workloads are manageable, with 95% saying this compared to 96% in 2020.

There has also been an increase in the time spent undertaking direct work with people this year, with an average of 19.5 hours compared to 16.4 in 2020, and a decrease in those who always or often experience stress due to work.

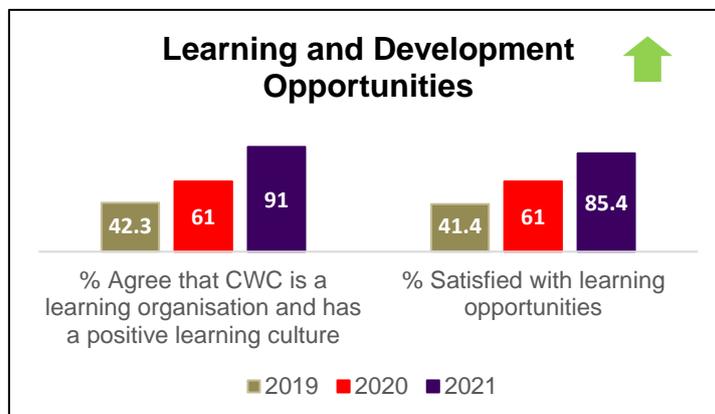
The vast majority (over 90%) know where to get help if they are concerned about their well-being and most feel able to discuss their wellbeing, stress, or workload with their manager to agree satisfactory ways forward.

3.18 There has been a slight increase in the average number of hours full time employees are working over their contracted hours (2.7 hours compared to 1.9 hours last year). Like the social work survey, a common theme is the desire to have a better balance between home and work to reduce the feeling of isolation and actions are in place to address this when it is safe to return to offices.

3.19 Timeliness of supervision has improved this year, and far more are satisfied with the quality of supervision compared to last year.

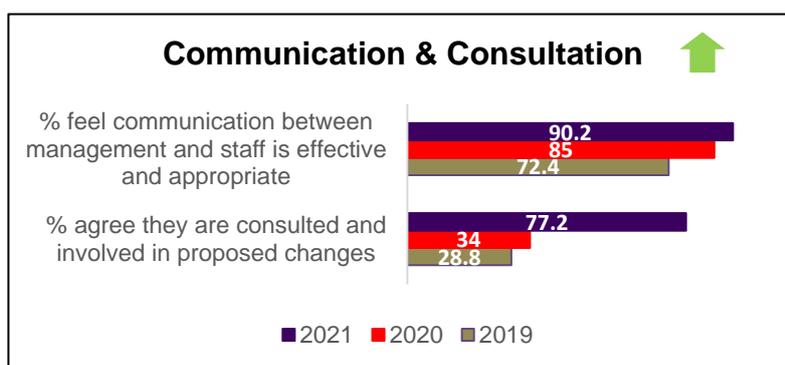


3.20 Far more are satisfied with learning and development opportunities this year and feel the City of Wolverhampton Council is a learning organisation with a positive learning culture. Access to the social work degree apprenticeship, the promotion of Research in Practice for Adults (RiPfA) and the commitment over the last year to support a variety of training opportunities seems to have supported this upwards trend.



3.21 Communication continues to be a strength with over 90% reporting that the way managers, including senior managers, communicate is effective and appropriate.

This has improved year on year. More this year (77%) also agree that they feel consulted about and involved in changes or proposals about changes that affect their role. This is a significant ongoing improvement from the previous two years. This is largely due to the action taken following last year's health check where senior leadership team built on their communication and engagement strategy which has included twice yearly whole workforce briefings providing key updates, increased presence in teams and monthly updates via the Adult Social Care newsletter.



- 3.22 Like the social work survey, almost all feel that the City of Wolverhampton Council is actively committed to tackling inequality and discrimination, with less than 2% disagreeing with this.
- 3.23 Over 90% would recommend CWC as an employer and the vast majority said that they do not intend to leave Wolverhampton over the next 12 months. Comments included: “continuing professional development opportunities have been appreciated”; “CWC have ensured we had sufficient PPE to protect us and the residents”; “friendliness, support and comradery amongst employees”; “I feel like I am making a difference”; “I feel my job is worthwhile and I get a sense the council is genuinely looking to improve things where they can and are quite forward thinking”; “I have recently joined and already been put forward for training and development opportunities. I feel respected as an employee and valued.”
- 4.0 Other notable progress and actions since 2020 survey**
- 4.1 As well as the progress and actions taken since the last health check in 2020 that are noted above, there were other areas which have seen significant development.
- 4.2. Last year a key area for improvement was satisfaction with the induction received by new social workers or those transferring to a new team or service area. The induction process was reviewed and resources to support good induction conversations were created and launched in early 2021. Consequently, this year 100% of social workers said they were satisfied with the induction they received, a significant improvement from 2020 and 2019 when satisfaction levels were 53% and 41% respectively.
- 4.3 There has also been a significant improvement this year regarding access to support and guidance from a team champion. Last year less than 14% had accessed a champion whereas this year just over 40% stated they had.

This is due to the work that has taken place to refresh the champion roles and the renewed engagement by champions in areas such as carer support, cultural competence and mental capacity and Deprivation of Liberty safeguards (DoLS).

5.0 Next Steps

5.1 An action plan has been completed as a result of these surveys to address the key areas of improvement. This will be overseen by the Adult Leadership team. The findings will also inform the workforce development plans for the coming year and will be shared with teams. Progress on identified actions will be shared with the workforce during the year.

5.2 Key actions are highlighted within the report and are summarised below, along with other notable actions:

- A redesign of Adult Social Care will take place this year to ensure systems and resources are supporting teams to use their skills and time effectively whilst keeping people at the centre and supporting even better outcomes
- Continuation of recruitment and retention strategy including investment in social work and workforce training and development offer and routes into social work (for example social work apprenticeships)
- Finalise post Covid operating model to support a hybrid approach and ensure more flexibility for teams to enable them to have a better home/ office / work / life balance
- Managers will continue to offer flexibility where needed to help people balance their work and home lives to reduce stress levels further
- The nature of social work and social care means that there is sometimes a requirement to work out of hours or longer hours than usual. When this occurs, managers will ensure that social workers / practitioners have the opportunity to take that time back by leaving work early or coming in late another day or, if more time has been accumulated, taking an extra day off.
- Stress risk assessments to be continued to be offered when needed
- Every supervision includes a robust discussion around workload / workload management
- Training and progression opportunities to be better promoted and advertised and discussed as part of Professional Conversations to ensure continued professional development is seen as a priority
- The training plan for 2022-2023 will cover topics suggested by those who completed the health check survey, including the Mental Capacity Act, Liberty Protection Safeguards, No Recourse to Public Funds and direct payments training

6.0 Financial implications

6.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

6.2 Any costs arising from actions in the work plan and priorities will be funded from within existing approved Adult Services budgets.

[MK/11022022/W]

7.0 Legal implications

7.1 There are no legal implications as a result of this report.
[SB/27012022/B]

8.0 Equalities implications

8.1 Social work / care is a diverse profession and the makeup of the social work / care teams in Wolverhampton is largely representative of the local community. The diversity of the people that are supported by social care teams are also largely representative of the diversity of the city as a whole.

9.0 Climate change and environmental implications

9.1 There are no climate or environmental implications.

10.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications

10.1 The health and wellbeing of our workforce is a priority for the City of Wolverhampton Council. The purpose of this health check is to get feedback from social workers about how they feel about working for Wolverhampton and how leaders can work to make improvements where necessary to support the wellbeing of the workforce and ensure they feel supported.

11.0 Human resources implications

11.1 Senior managers are working closely with human resources to fill vacancies as soon as they are able, even if with agency workers, in order to help keep workloads manageable for social workers.

12.0 Corporate landlord implications

12.1 There are no corporate landlord implications arising from this report or the recommendations.

13.0 Covid Implications

13.1 Covid has had an impact on the workforce over the last two years. At present this survey suggests that there is now a real desire to have a better balance between home and office working. Sickness absence related to Covid, or due to requirements to self-isolate, has contributed to staffing challenges in Adult Services. Contingency plans are regularly reviewed, and additional short-term funding was made available last year to stabilise some teams due to absences and demand. The adult redesign will address any issues longer term.

- 13.2 As previously stated, social work and social care recruitment and retention is a national issue and social work is on the national occupational shortage list. Senior managers are aware of the impact Covid continues to have and are prioritising employee wellbeing and offering support in helping them balance their work and personal circumstances.