

The Adults' Social Work 'Health Check' Survey Summary Report 2018

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Introduction

The annual social work health check survey is a recommended action from the 2009 Social Work Task Force. Its aim was to develop standards for social work employers and this included a **'health check'** process for assessing practice conditions; **Standard 1** states

"All employers should: complete, review and publish an annual 'health check' or audit to assess whether the practice conditions and working environment of the organisation's social work workforce are safe, effective, caring, responsive and well-led."

This was seen as valuable tool to consult with social workers and give them an opportunity to raise issues about practice issues. This health check will need to be viewed in conjunction with other Council and Departmental reporting and feedback mechanisms; for example Council staff survey, service user feedback and wider performance and data analysis about staffing and workloads. This will give the full picture and 'check' on the health of the social work workforce.

The survey was devised into Sections covering questions which are shown as follows in this Report

1. Your role within the directorate
2. Effective workload management
3. Social work Skills and Evidenced Based Practice
4. Learning & Development
5. Supervision & Appraisal
6. Retention
7. General views

What will we do?

- The Principle Social Worker (PSW) has led on the implementation of this survey and the PSW networks with SMT will provide the opportunity to feedback the results, develop and review actions raised by the workforce to the Director.
- We will review and learn and develop from this survey to ensure it meets its purpose; we have already identified the need to refine some of the questions.
- We will undertake this health check annually and consider how we can increase take up

Context

The survey was sent electronically for anonymous returns, to the Children's Service Social Work workforce on the 17th September 2018 by the Principal Social Worker. Social Care staff were given 3 weeks to complete the survey. Darlington had approximately 164 Social Workers employed at this date.

A total of 122 employees completed the survey - of the 122 completed:

49 were employed within Adults Social Care

73 were employed within Children's Social Care

For the purpose of this report the data will only be analysed from the responses submitted by Adult's Services - there is a separate report and data for responses from Children's Social Care

Executive Summary

The feedback from the survey shows that overall Darlington has made some improvements to ensure that staff feel valued and are better supported to do their job. This year's health check evidences that some of the issues raised in 2017 have improved for staff. Other issues raised will inform discussions with SLT and will look at strategies and actions to address these. The results evidence that some issues are still prevalent for social workers in relation to routine admin tasks and data input into IT systems. Other issues raised from the Health Check will inform discussions with SLT and the PSW and will look at strategies and actions to address these.

Key Messages from the Health Check:

There are many positive messages which are evidenced within the report which include:

76% of staff report they feel their skills as a social worker are being utilised this is an increase from last year from 62%. A further increase of staff reporting that practice is evidence based, 81% feel confident that practice is evidenced based compared to 75% in 2017. There has also been a decrease in the number of staff having to cancel training due to work pressures which is a good indicator. There are still issues with some staff where arranged training has to be cancelled or re-arranged due to workload pressures, whilst this is a relatively small number of staff it is important that we understand the barriers to overcome this.

Staff report that in Adult Services there is not an agreed case load structure, however 36% of staff have caseloads of 18 and under and a further 30% have caseloads under 35. 63% of those staff maintain most of the time caseloads are manageable which again an increase from 46% is in 2017.

76% of staff feel confident that their skills as a social worker are being utilised which again is an increase from 62% in 2017 and 81% advise that their practice is evidenced based. 83% of staff access Community Care for research to inform practice and of those 89% access this at least monthly. This is a positive indicator that staff recognise and utilise that research plays an important factor in practice.

Staff report that they have regular good quality supervision 87% have at least monthly supervision. Whilst this is an improvement, again it's important to understand any barriers for staff who may not have monthly supervision. Staff report they are happy with the quality of supervision and the opportunity to discuss cases involving complex risk and safeguarding alongside policy, procedures and good practice. This is a positive indicator that staff recognise that Darlington continues to support a reflective learning culture.

Communication and visibility of managers has improved from 2017, 55% of staff now feel they are happy with levels of communication from Senior Managers compared to 17%.

There are many positive messages which are evidenced within the report which include

There has been improved moral in adult services, 80% of staff feel enthusiastic about their job which is a 30% increase from 2017 and 86% of staff enjoy their job. There were a number of positive comments made by staff which include: *feeling supported by Team Managers, changes to some areas are improving, supportive teams and positive team working*. This is a positive indicator that social workers in Darlington are feeling valued and motivated in work.

Further considerations from the Health Check:

One of the biggest and most referenced problems identified was in relation to the amount of time social workers spend doing routine admin tasks. Social workers describe admin tasks such as Brokerage queries, dealing with non-payment of bills for service users, routine letters, and dealing with the impact of Universal Credits and changes in the Benefits System takes them away from the face to face interactions with service users. Staff reference in response to the questions a lack of administrative support and see this taking them away from their core social work tasks.

When staff were asked if access to learning and development opportunities had improved 64% felt that it had not improved. There were a high proportion of staff members who commented that they thought opportunities for adult training was not comparative compared to the Children`s training offer. Staff identified that they would like to have further training opportunities in Leadership and specialist knowledge of the Benefits system, Court of Protection, Legislation changes and support plans and would welcome this in the future.

Whilst there has been a good increase in social workers and levels of communication with Senior Managers, 38% of social workers are still reporting that they do not always feel supported. Some comments from staff relate to the impact of anxiety following feedback from Validation forum and for those social workers who are AMHP`s support from senior managers when working after hours would be welcomed.

This year the Health Check had an additional focus in the questions in relation to the factors that would retain staff. 82% of staff said that annual leave would be the greatest factor when considering staying with the Local Authority. The second most important factor for retention was agile working followed by flexi leave.

In summary our health check tells us that

- ✓ Darlington Council is making really good progress as a supportive employer with an experienced workforce. The work force enjoy their job with over 86% of respondents telling us they always or often enjoy their job and 80% feel enthusiastic.
- ✓ Social workers are part of a supportive team with regular supervision and receive support in working with complex decision making.
- ✓ Social workers are confident that their practice is evidenced based and they access Community Care to ensure research is up to date.
- ✓ Communication from senior management has improved since 2017, but this could be improved further especially when staff are working out of hours.
- ✓ Social workers do identify that better access to admin support would enable them to spend more direct time with service users.

- ✓ Not all staff feel the training offer is specialist enough and have offered thoughts on specific training they would like to see, including Leadership and Management, Legislative changes and specialised knowledge in areas such as Mental Health and Benefit changes.

Comments from staff:

“ I don’t feel there are enough training opportunities for Adult Services, when the training e-mails come around it is mostly for children`s services”.

Comments from staff

“It’s a small authority so you can make relationships easy. Its great to know who you are talking to, or who you can go to for advice.

Comments from staff

“Very supportive local authority where everyone is welcoming. Great training and learning opportunities available.”

Key findings for action

1. Staff across all levels to continue to be actively involved in the Transformation Plan. Staff to continue to be engaged in any further service changes via staff forums.
2. Comments about admin business support to be considered in SLT
3. Feedback to SLT and Workforce Development around training and support in specialist areas .
4. Case load management to be discussed and a plan of action achieved in SMT and shared with staff.
5. SLT to consider how communication with staff can be more regular and meaningful to staff.
6. Discussion with SLT and Workforce Development in relation to Leadership Training.
7. SLT to consider how staff are supported for out of hours visits when Team Managers are not available.
8. The health check report is used and reflected in SLT to ensure that messages from social workers are evident in service delivery.

