

The Adults' Social Work 'Health Check' Survey Summary Report 2021

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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. Impact of Covid
7. Retention
8. General views

What will we do?

- The Head of Practice has led on the implementation of this survey and the PSW networks with SLT 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 to enable managers to have further input.
- 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 Adult's Service Social Work workforce on the 15th June 2021 by the Head of Practice. Social Care staff were given 3 weeks to complete the survey. Darlington had approximately 66 Adult Social Workers employed at this date.

A total of 44 employees completed the survey which equates to 66% of adult social workers.

For 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 continued to ensure that staff feel valued and are well supported to do their job. This year's health check evidences that some of the issues raised in previous health checks have improved for staff, especially around IT skills and case management. There has been a specific focus on the impact of Covid in the health check which has evidenced that staff have continued to feel well supported, they have been able to adapt to working from home and that they have continued to be creative in their practice, ensuring good partnership working with a strength based model of practice. There are some issues which have been raised in the Health Check around capacity and the flexi time system which 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 some significant strengths identified in the health check which are evidenced within the report which include:

72% of staff confirm that cases are allocated by a manager and include a case discussion. 97% of staff are confident that their skills and knowledge are valued in the team, this is a significant increase from the previous years at 62%. A further increase of staff reporting that practice is evidence based, 90% feel confident that practice is evidenced based compared to 81% in 2017.

There has been an increase from 62% in 2017 to 90% of staff who feel their practice is evidence based and 88% of staff continue to access Community Care for research to inform practice. This is a positive indicator that staff recognise and utilise that research plays an important factor in practice.

There has been an increase in confidence in IT skills which was a previous concern in the 2017 Health Check with 93% of staff reporting they are now confident and competent in the use of IT and the recording Liquid Logic system.

Staff report that they have regular good quality supervision which allows development and reflection and there is good evidence that social workers understand the practice framework and are encouraged to be creative in their practice. This is an improvement from previous years with over 87% of social workers now reporting that having regular good supervision and appraisals is promoting safe practice. 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. There is strong evidence that CPD is encouraged in teams and training and development continue to support learning. There has been a significant rise in practice education being valued within Darlington with 94% of staff reporting that Practice Education is valued within the service area. This is a positive indicator that staff recognise that Darlington continues to support a reflective learning culture.

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

There has been improved moral in adult services, 94% feel supported and encouraged to look after their emotional wellbeing, 91% of staff feel enthusiastic about working for Darlington which is a further increase from 2017 and 97% feel cared for by the team and their managers. 91% of practitioners feel they have good relationships with partner agencies outside of the organisation.

There were a number of positive comments made by staff which include: *feeling supported and valued 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.

Social workers were asked specifically about the impact of Covid on case loads, emotional wellbeing and practice in this health check. There are some positive messages from staff around working during Covid. 94% of staff report feeling safe and 97% feel the organisation has protected staff from the risk of infection. 94% of staff report that good technology has enabled them to work from home. 100% of staff who completed the survey report that they have felt supported both informally and formally throughout the Covid period and have continued to practice in a strength based way. The evidence would support that Darlington has implemented both safe and effective systems during Covid that have promoted good staff self-care, safe practice and supervision has ensured that staff have continued to feel safe and valued.

Further considerations from the Health Check:

There are still issues with some staff where arranged training has been cancelled or re-arranged due to workload pressures. 79% of practitioners have reported that over the last year they have cancelled leave, worked in their own time or cancelled training and its important that we understand the barriers to overcome this.

Whilst there has been a good increase in 75% of social workers feeling that Senior Leaders are supportive there are still some concerns over the last 12 months around visibility albeit this is small numbers of staff. There are some comments from practitioners which relate to staffing capacity and the impact of this on moral and workload pressures and some staff who advise that they have not always been able to use the flexi system efficiently due to capacity issues. There are also some practitioners who feel that processes such as validation and administration tasks such as finance could be more streamlined rather than duplicated, again its important that we reflect and review systems and talk to staff to help us understand how we can improve this.

As in previous years the Health Check continued to ask practitioners about recruitment and retention. In previous years 82% of staff said that annual leave would be the greatest factor when considering staying with the Local Authority, however this year 91% of staff said that having an effective flexi system would be the most important factor to consider in regards to retention. Practitioners expressed a number of issues with regards to they way in which the flexi system could be improved, this includes the number of hours that can be carried over in the period. The second most important factor for retention was 82% annual leave and 64% who would supported blended working.

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 working in Darlington with over 85% of respondents telling us they always or often enjoy their job and 79% feel enthusiastic.
- ✓ Social workers are part of a supportive team, they have regular supervision and receive support in working with complex decision making.
- ✓ Social Workers have felt safe and supported during Covid and practice has continued to be creative and strength based.

- ✓ Social workers are more 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 with more visibility from Senior Leaders.
- ✓ Social workers would like consideration to be given to reviewing processes and the flexi system
- ✓ Some staff feel capacity issues have impacted on workloads and pressures.

Comments from staff:

“ I feel the team provide a pro-active learning environment”.

Comments from staff

“Workloads are sometimes unmanageable and staff turnover has unsettled people”.

Comments from staff

“My manager and supervisor provide positive feedback.”

Comments from staff

“DBC offers a very supportive AYE programme, I particularly enjoy group supervision”.

Key findings for action

1. SLT to consider how communication with staff can be more regular and meaningful to staff.
2. SLT to consider and talk to frontline practitioners about visibility and what this means for them .
3. SLT to consider and talk to frontline practitioners about the use of the flexi system and to look at how this could improve.
4. SLT to consider processes such as administration tasks and validation with input on practitioners around how it works in practice.
5. SLT to look at the barriers in place which are preventing staff accessing training and cancelling flexi or leave.
6. The health check report is used and reflected in SLT to ensure that messages from social workers are evident in service delivery.

