

**REPORT TO:** Health & Wellbeing Board

**DATE:** 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, People

**PORTFOLIO:** Children, Education and Social Care

**SUBJECT:** Principal Social Worker Progress Report

**WARD(S)** Borough-wide

**1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 To provide a progress report on the Principal Social Work Role and Responsibilities.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

**i) That Members of the Health and Wellbeing Board note the report.**

**3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

**3.1 Background**

Marie Lynch has now held the role of Principal Social Worker for over five years since it was first introduced for Adult Services in Halton. The national guidance on the role has evolved and been updated and clarified over recent years.

The role was first instigated from July 2012, by the Care and Support White Paper, *Caring for our future: reforming care and support* (HM Government, 2012) which set out a commitment to establishing the role of Principal Social Worker (PSW) within adult services to mirror the developments in Children and Family Services instigated by the Munro Review (Munro, 2011).

The Care and Support Statutory Guidance provided an update in May 2016 offering further clarification about the Principal Social Worker role for adults. The Guidance states that the Principal Social Worker should be visible across the organization, from Elected Members and Senior Management, through to frontline Social workers and people who use services and their carers. Principal Social Workers should also have a broad knowledge base on safeguarding and 'Making Safeguarding Personal'. It also states that local authorities should make arrangements to have a qualified and registered social work professional practice lead in place to:

- Function at the strategic level of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF)
  - Lead and oversee excellent social work practice
  - Support and develop arrangements for excellent practice
  - Lead the development of excellent Social Workers
  - Support effective social work supervision and decision making
  - Oversee quality assurance and improvement of social work practice
  - Advise the Director of Adult Social Services (DASS) and/or wider Council in complex or controversial cases and on case or other law relating to social work practice
- 3.2 The role was clarified again to develop a national understanding in July 2019, introducing, “PSW Role and Responsibilities: Adult Principal Social Worker (APSW)” guidance”, produced in collaboration with the Principal Social Worker Adults (PSA) network and ADASS. Alongside this runs the new, “Capability Statement for Principal Social Workers in Adult Services”, issued by the Department of Health and Social Care.
- 3.3 In her role as Principal Social Worker, Marie has maintained her professional registration through the new regulatory body social work England, which came into force in Dec 2019. There is now a new requirement to upload evidence of meeting all professional standards of a professional capability framework (PCF). She has supported our social work staff in renewing their registration and completing their PCF, in November 2020.
- 3.4 Whilst discussing her progress, in this role, she has begun by acknowledging the challenges and priorities arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, in respect of social workers. Throughout the pandemic, they have adapted well to new ways of working required. Both nationally and locally, we have observed, higher than usual levels of sickness, stress and anxiety, which has contributed to issues of capacity, staff recruitment and retention. We have seen increased service demand, complexity of casework and safeguarding’s. As such, staff mental health and wellbeing is an ongoing priority. Our social work teams make best use of “Mindfulness” Training sessions, which prove really helpful.

The teams were initially required to reconfigure to a Single point of Access Team (SPA) working over a seven day period with extended hours for a substantive part of last year. They lived up to the challenge of becoming redeployed to meet needs, support hospital discharges and working in a more joined-up way with other services.

Although social workers are now working from home, face to face visits have continued where necessary. Much work has been completed digitally using IT tools such as skype, FaceTime, Microsoft teams and Zoom.

The biggest challenges as a PSW when we move into the post-COVID-19 ‘recovery’ phase\* are likely to be around, supporting workforce

development, the mental health and well-being of staff, and harnessing working in different ways with people who use services.

3.5 It is also stated, “The PSW role straddles the strategic and operational interface and Principal Social Workers need to be able to challenge the organisation in its delivery and development of social work practice. Specific tasks for Principal Social Workers include:

- I. Ensuring the employer standards are implemented
- II. Ensuring the organisational health check is completed each year
- III. Improving practice supervision arrangements
- IV. Ensuring reflective practice supervision is taking place across the authority

The role is about leading beyond authority and developing a circle of influence, and to do this the Principal Social Worker must have practice credibility with frontline social work staff, but also the status and authority, gravitas to lead and time to carry this out”.

### 3.6 **Progress**

#### I. Employee standards

What are the Standards? The Local Government Association states “*they set out the shared core expectations of employers which will enable social workers in all employment settings to work effectively and safely. These expectations can be used within self-regulation and improvement frameworks for public services and by service regulators. All employers providing a social work service should establish a monitoring system by which they can assess their organisation’s performance against this framework, set a process for review and, where necessary, outline their plans for improvement.*” There are eight standards under each standard there is a list of things that employers should do in order to meet that standard. Full details can be found on the LGA’s website:

(<https://www.local.gov.uk/standards-employers-social-workers-england-0>)

Marie has established a steering group and completed our own self-assessment against the standards, In summary, the self-assessment exercise revealed that the working group agreed that Halton’s performance was generally good in relation to the Standards with most areas being identified as ‘fully met’.

#### II. Organisational Health Check

*One of the requirements under Standard 1 is for employers to “ensure that mechanisms are in place to listen to and respond to the views of practitioners on a regular basis, including undertaking an annual health check to ensure the organisation remains a place where the right environment and conditions exist to support best social work practice”*

The Health Check survey issued in December 2020, by the Local

Government Association, asked social workers about the eight standards and five other areas – COVID, employee contribution, tensions, overall satisfaction and desire to stay.

We have now received an initial Health Check report, with a more detail report to follow later. The working group will re-convene to review the results and compare them to the outcome of the self-assessment exercise. An action plan will then be agreed in order to determine what needs to be done to ensure that Halton is meeting all areas of the Standards.

### III. Improving Practice Supervision Arrangements

The [Supervision Policy](#) for Halton Borough Council's adult social care services was reviewed in December 2020. This comprehensive document sets the standard for supporting staff across services and provides a framework for conducting regular supervision. Used in conjunction with the [Workload Management Policy](#) and the [Adult Social Work Progression Policy](#) (both also recently reviewed) the processes set out to aid social work professionals in managing caseload, exploring Continue Professional Development (CPD) options, reflecting on fieldwork practice and give scope to consider service user feedback. Having a structured supervision procedure ensures that all aspect of working life are considered and outcomes recording, from wellbeing and support needs through to workload scheduling. The stipulations for having two-way conversations, between supervisor and supervisee, ensure equity of access to ongoing support and advocate a consultative approach to managing the challenges of the role of a social worker.

Operational teams play a valuable role in the review of policies in Halton enabling them to be effective working documents that fit the needs of the workplace. In these most recent reviews engagement with social work and assessment teams has been extensive to ensure that the resulting processes give them a clear voice in shaping social work practice in Halton.

### IV. Ensuring reflective practice supervision is taking place across the authority

Marie runs a Social Work Matters forum which focuses on updating social workers of what's happening regionally, nationally, new legislation or guidance and enables social workers to share their best practice, learning and issues or concerns. During the height of the pandemic we have substituted these with newsletters, before reinstating meetings through Microsoft teams, see an example attached.

The social workers have their own regular Journal Clubs and Action learning sets, where they share good practice and reading materials. We are signed up to RIPFA which provides up to date research, guidance and training.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 None

5.0 **FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 None identified.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

None

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

None

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

None

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

None

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Not required

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 Not at this time

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None.