

**REPORT TO:** Health Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 14<sup>th</sup> February 2023

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Executive Director – Adults Directorate

**PORTFOLIO:** Adult Social Care

**SUBJECT:** The Standards for Employers of Social Workers and the Social Work Health Check

**WARD(S)** Borough-wide

## 1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide PPB with an update regarding ongoing work taking place within Adult Social Care in relation to The Standards for Employers of Social Workers in England, which are published by the Local Government Association (LGA).

1.2 In particular, this report provides information on the results of the Social Work Health Check survey conducted in 2021. The health check is a national survey run by the LGA and helps organisations to consider how well they are performing in relation to the employer standards. A previous report was presented to Health PPB in November 2021 regarding the results from the 2020 health check.

## 2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

i) **PPB note the contents of the report.**

## 3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### **Background**

3.1 In Autumn 2020, the Local Government Association (LGA) launched the refreshed Standards for Employers of Social Workers. According to the LGA:

*“These are standards, which 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.”*

3.2 There are eight standards (listed below) and 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: [The Standards for employers of social workers in England 2020 | Local Government Association](#)

1. Strong and clear social work framework
2. Effective workforce planning systems
3. Safe workloads and case allocation
4. Wellbeing
5. Supervision
6. Continuing professional development
7. Professional registration
8. Strategic partnerships

3.3 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”*.

#### **Social Work Health Check 2021**

3.4 The Health Check survey for 2021 was co-ordinated at a national level by Kinetiq on behalf of the LGA with national, regional and local reports being produced. Halton Social Workers took part in the survey between November 2021 and January 2022.

3.5 The health check survey investigates the following questions:

1. How well do employers deliver the refreshed standards?
2. How do employees perceive their working environment?
3. What factors influence them to remain engaged with their work and minded to stay with their organisation?

3.6 There were 17 responses to the 2021 health check survey from Halton Social Workers, which represents an estimated 37% response rate. There were slightly more responses at 22 in 2020.

3.7 The survey asked social workers about the eight standards and an additional area relating to Covid-19. Responses were translated into a mean score, which was then categorised as red (poor), amber (moderate) or green (good).

3.8 A national and regional ranking based on an overall mean score is provided with Halton sitting at 20 out of 147 nationally and 6 out of 23 regionally.

3.9 Out of the nine areas considered as part of the health check (the eight standards plus Covid-19), all were green for Halton apart from

two, which were amber – Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Covid-19. This was very similar to the regional and national picture.

- 3.10 Halton’s highest rated standard was Standard 1 – Strong and clear social work framework and the lowest rated standard was Standard 6 – Continuing Professional Development (CPD).
- 3.11 The statements below received the highest scores based on responses to the survey from Halton Social Workers:
- “I have access to support and advice from senior social work leaders within my organisation (e.g. Principal Social Worker or Senior Managers)”
  - “My supervisor and/or manager encourage and motivate me in career development”
- 3.12 The following statement received the lowest score based on responses to the survey from Halton Social Workers:
- “My organisation provides regular/annual appraisals (or performance reviews) that are relevant for social workers”
- 3.13 In relation to CPD, the main issues relate to the absence of a professional development plan and not having dedicated time/resources etc. to carry out CPD and/or learning.
- 3.14 In relation to Covid-19 the main issue relates to changes as a result of the pandemic preventing strengths-based work with clients.
- 3.15 In terms of perception of workplace experience, the following survey statements received the highest scores:
- “I feel safe in my role and the work I am expected to do” (standard 4)
  - “My organisation promotes a working environment that upholds ethical practice and quality standards” (standard 7)
  - “I have felt positive and able to cope with work most of the time” (Covid-19)
- 3.16 The following survey statements had the biggest impact of the desire to stay with the organisation:
- “I feel safe in my role and the work I am expected to do” (standard 4)
  - “My organisation promotes a working environment that upholds ethical practice and quality standards” (standard 7)
  - “My organisation has ensured all staff are appropriately protected from the risk of infection by the virus and taken account of different individual risks of infection on grounds of

(e.g) age, ethnicity, prior health conditions, caring for others etc.” (Covid-19)

- 3.17 The survey asked people about their reason for working in social work and what they felt was the biggest challenge – some example responses are detailed below:
- Reasons for working in social work – supportive organisation, stability, training opportunities and the person-centre work completed.
  - Biggest challenges – caseload demands, keeping up to date with changes and commissioned providers.

### **Framework & Improvement Plan**

- 3.18 Standard 1 states that *“Employers should have in place a strong and clear social work accountability and assurance framework that promotes reflection and learning from experience, evidence and research of outcome-focused social work practice and from the voices of children, adults and families.”*

- 3.19 Over the last year, a [Social Work Accountability & Assurance Framework for Halton](#) has been developed to pull together the range of professional standards, requirements and good practice that supports the social work profession.

- 3.20 Sitting within this framework is an Improvement Plan based on ensuring that the areas for improvement highlighted via the health check surveys are acted upon. A specific working group has responsibility for regularly reviewing progress against the actions in the plan.

- 3.21 Action has already been taken to address some of the main issues highlighted by the results from the 2021 health check in relation to CPD, which was the lowest scoring area:
- Regular Social Work Matters Forums where staff come together network and receive/share information;
  - Principal Social Worker Newsletter;
  - Fortnightly newsletter outlining training opportunities;
  - Action Learning Sets and Journal Clubs taking place within teams giving staff dedicated development time;
  - Dedicated time for staff to complete their registration with Social Work England.
  - Liaison with Corporate on new “Employee Development Review” being developed.

### **2022 Health Check Survey**

- 3.22 The health check survey takes place on an annual basis with Halton Social Workers and Occupational Therapists having been invited to

respond to the 2022 health check survey between November 2022 and January 2023.

3.23 The 2022 survey marks the first time that Occupational Therapists have been invited to take part and this follows on from the publication of the [LGA Standards for Employers of Occupational Therapists in England](#).

3.24 A further report on the results of the 2022 health check survey will be brought to PPB in due course.

#### 4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Development of a Social Work Accountability & Assurance Framework was outlined as a key priority in the previous report; this has now been developed and implemented as a good practice tool for social work in Halton.

#### 5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 None identified.

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

##### 6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

None identified.

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

See point 6.3 below.

##### 6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

As stated by the LGA:

“Good social work can transform people’s lives and protect them from harm. In order to achieve consistently high-quality outcomes for service users and their carers, social workers must have and maintain the skills and knowledge to establish effective relationships with children, adults, families, and professionals in a range of agencies and settings, and be the key connectors in communities.

Employers should implement a whole systems approach to supporting the social work profession. These Standards set out the key components of whole systems approaches, and employers can use them to enhance their reputation as a service provider and employer by helping to develop a working environment where social work practice and social workers can flourish, in turn supporting recruitment and retention.”

##### 6.4 **A Safer Halton**

None identified.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Continued work to address gaps and areas for improvement identified through our work relating to the Standards and the Health Check is reliant upon the availability of social work practitioners to engage in this work. As workload and system pressures continue to be felt across social care, there is a risk that staff do not always have the time required to dedicate to service improvement activities. However, there is a dedicated Social Work Employer Standards Working Group that meets on a regular basis to ensure sustained progress is made.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 None identified.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None identified.

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

10.1 Not applicable.