

Stockton Borough Council Social Work Survey - 2018

Key issues:

- General response

Low number of responses but did include students, Social Workers and Team Managers and included staff who had worked for Stockton from less than 1 year to more than 20 years.

- Flexible working

Although welcomed, most found it difficult to take due to work pressure or other staff absence. The more experienced (or senior) the worker the more difficult it was to take flexi time.

- Annual leave

Half of respondents had to carry leave over as they were unable to schedule in. Again, the more experienced (or senior) the worker, the more of a problem this was.

- Training

The majority of respondents were able to attend training and saw this as a positive.

- Impact of job

Every respondent felt stressed at some point due to the nature of their work. The majority felt this pressure only occasionally.

- Sickness

No respondent had taken sick leave during the last year.

- Stability of teams

The majority of respondents had not experienced a stable team during their last year. Those who had felt that this was due to supportive management. Reasons for the instability were: - secondments, sickness, maternity and vacancies. The main reason cited for instability was caseloads and volume of paperwork.

- Caseloads

There was a mixed response to the question of 'is your caseload manageable' – the majority responded 'completely manageable' or 'not really'. This depended on how experienced the staff member was i.e. the more experienced the more unmanageable the worker felt the caseload was.

Generally staff did feel that the caseload had been manageable over the last 12 months.

- ASYE

All felt their caseload was manageable and they were protected.

- Direct work with children

The majority of staff spent 2 – 3 hours per week directly working with children. Most would like to spend more time but feel this can be restricted by caseloads and paperwork.

- Skills utilised

A number of staff felt that the amount of paperwork impacted on their ability to focus on 'social work'. A number felt that a lot of paperwork tasks could be undertaken by admin i.e. arranging meetings, photocopying, and passports.

- Resources

All workers had access to various IT equipment to support in their jobs, although most experienced problems at some time i.e. unreliable photocopier. Some reported tablets as being unreliable and RAISE being 'slow and cumbersome' and out of date. IT Training could be improved.

- Communication

Most respondents learn of changes via their Line Managers following management meetings. Team meetings are held regularly. All respondents can either completely or partially recognise Senior Managers with communication being generally effective. Involvement on proposed changes is only "either partly" or "not at all happening".

- Learning culture

Stockton is seen as a positive learning culture, with the majority being very happy with the learning and development opportunities offered. The majority of staff either 'sometimes' or 'often' look forward to going to work and felt the same in terms of enthusiasm about their job. Time passes quickly.

- SBF Talent Network

No respondents were a member of the SBC Talent Network.

- Supervision

All respondents receive supervision (personal and professional) with the majority being undertaken monthly. Over 90% are at least "completely satisfied" with the quality of the supervision they receive.

- Access to support

The majority of respondents have always been able to access support when making an important decision on a case. A small percentage reported "sometimes" not being able to access this support.

- Appraisals

Appraisals have been undertaken with the majority of respondents.

- Senior Managers

All respondents either partially or completely recognise Senior Managers.

- What would you change about your job?

Comments received;

- Reduce paperwork/ bureaucracy
- Reduce Caseloads to allow more direct time with children
- Reduce the need to record/review the supervision process

- What contributes to you wanting to work for Stockton Borough Council?

Comments received;

- The availability of resources
- Support offered by Line Manager and wider structure 'A supportive environment'
- SBC is invested in its staff.
- The Chief Executive's induction talk was inspirational and made me want to work for Stockton
- My team members
- Use of lap tops and phones
- The ethos of wanting to make positive improvements
- Availability of training
- "Stockton is one of the best Local Authorities to work for"

Summary

Although there was a low response rate to the survey, Stockton Borough Council is seen as a very positive place to work. Opportunities for training and development and the support available are the main reasons for wishing to continue to work for Stockton.

The current IT system (RAISE) needs improving: - **It is planned that Liquid Logic will be implemented by December 2019.**

Communication can still be improved. **Both the DCS and AD are currently looking at how this can be achieved and staff made to feel more inclusive of changes.**

Caseloads for the more experienced workers remain too high and prevents staff from being able to spend more time with children. **We have implemented a range of new approaches and services to support staff in managing caseloads:**

- **Family group conferencing – launched December 2017.**
- **Our Place – Edge of Care Service – launched January 2018.**
- **Commissioning of Safe Families for Children, including the opportunity for home stay with volunteers.**
- **Additional support to step down cases to Early Help.**

- **Recommissioned Domestic Abuse Service including additional resources to work alongside Social Work teams with an enhanced focus on perpetrators.**
- **Recruitment and retention has focussed on attracting more experienced Social Workers who are able to support the management of caseloads.**
- **Overall caseloads are averaging 19 (CiN census) although there are variations between teams.**
- **We have retained our commitment to ASYE's.**
- **We have a developing culture for Team Managers to have access to information to support effective performance and improvement.**
- **We have focussed on reducing dual protections on decision making around coming into Care.**
- **We are focussing on 'stepping down' cases from CiN to Early Help where appropriate.**
- **We have significantly reduced the number of children on child protection plans, through a focus on planning and the use of Signs of Safety.**
- **We are in the process of implementing a re-unification framework to bring children home or back to their birth family where it is safe to do so.**