Survey of UNISON Members

at Sandwell Children’s Trust

Undertaken July/August 2019

Produced by Sandwell General UNISON Branch, October 2019

Email address: sandwellunison@btconnect.com



**Analysis of UNISON members survey at Sandwell Children’s Trust**

**Held between July/August 2019**

**The results below are from the survey forms returned from UNISON members (where possible, last year’s figures are included in brackets)**

1. How would you rate the morale in your team?
* 58% said morale was poor in their team (46% in 2018)
* 11% said morale was good in their team (15% in 2018)

Good. This is in spite of conditions. Fortunate to work in a team with a very strong team ethic - very supportive of each other. We are under a lot of pressure with increasing demands.

High sickness rate, adding to workloads of colleagues. Disorganisation in management group adds to low morale.

At times we are put under a lot of pressure, working much longer hours than the 37-hour week we are paid for. Expectations are high.

SW’s are dealing with shootings, stabbings and prolific self-harm. Throughout this, staff are performance managed and the pressures of supporting such complexities on workload as well as staff wellbeing are not recognised or supported.

1. Since transferring to the Trust, have you seen any positive change?
* 83% said they had not seen any positive change (87%)
* 17% said they had seen positive change (13%)

I do not feel there has been any positive change as social workers are still not consistent within Sandwell and are leaving after around 3 months of joining the Trust. This is having a significant impact on the families we work with – We teach our children not to talk to strangers but expect them to open-up to a new social worker each month? Pressures are too high in Sandwell, resulting in staff leaving.

Workloads are still unmanageable with staff constantly leaving, Management involved in processes they know nothing about making changes which are not for the better.

More bureaucracy than before. More meetings, more reports etc. Seems to be a backward step. Too many directors not enough workers to do the job

Initially I did but since the new year and implementation of GH/OM’s it’s all got worse with little done for the very much that is said.

There have been no improvements just talk. They clearly do not know what the best course of action is for our clients and staff.

1. Do you feel supported by your line manager?
* 68% responded yes (59%)
* 32% responded no (41%)

Yes, as much as they can in their role. They appear to have no proper oversight. Department does not plan. We work in a reactive not proactive environment therefore no progress.

No, no plan or thought has been given to their style of management. Unapproachable.

My line manager is my sanity at work but sadly she is leaving too. I wonder why we cannot keep good managers or staff???

Very supportive and proactive line manager who’s always ready to roll her sleeves and ‘muck in’.

My manager is great but has a lot of pressure on her to get statistics etc causing staff to go off sick.

1. Do you feel supported by Senior Management?
* 85% responded no
* 15% responded yes

Managers only listen if it is what they want to hear.

The answer is yes and no. Senior management rarely discuss or talk to the staff about the difficulties with the job. There is complete disconnect between what is happening on the ground and strategic level.

No. Senior management inform managers and staff of the key performance indicators they want to be achieved. Despite difficulties the service faces they still want targets met even if staff are stressed and overworked.

They say the same old thing… changes are coming to improve things but what changes? They have been saying this for the last couple of years.

1. Do you feel valued for your experience and expertise?
* 73% responded no (53%)
* 27% responded yes (47%)

No. You have to do what they want you to do even if it does not match your skill set.

No. Considering moving on. No opportunity for progression, no praise just expectation that because I am “capable” I can have more cases. This leads to burnout… will they ever learn?

I feel experience is recognised but not valued or hard work appreciated.

There were many comments of “only in my own team”.

1. Have management in your area implemented the 12 reasons to stay in Sandwell?
* 67% responded no
* 33% responded yes, partly
* Nobody responded yes, fully

No. What even are they? work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work?

No. Lots of promises were made but not kept. 12 reasons seems to have disappeared – no-one can remember the reasons, no-one is tracking training. Caseloads definitely haven’t changed for probably 90% of staff.

No. I don’t think 12 reasons is designed for anyone but social workers. Working environment and opportunities to develop are extremely limited if you are not a social worker.

No. Caseloads are too high. Expectations to fulfil the role are too vast and only manageable working a 40-60 hour week.

I honestly don’t know. I’m so busy and tired all I can do is deal with each day as it comes and I don’t even have the capacity to even consider this.

1. Are you allowed to work in an agile manner?
* 67% responded yes
* 22% responded no
* 11% had not asked to work in an agile manner

Yes. Sometimes but it is usually with restrictions. It is not a favourable working mode for my manager or operational manager. There is an issue with trust.

Yes. I think this is due to the trusting relationship with my team manager.

No. Rarely allowed to work out of the office. Management micro-manage.

Yes. Manager is flexible but no support re health and safety – desk assessment/adaptation. Have had to do it on my own AGAIN.

Yes, but only when it suits senior management. It’s about being seen in the office between 9am-6pm

1. Has your workload been manageable over the last month?
* 63% responded no
* 37% responded yes

No. It is unmanageable and in 5 days per week I rarely leave the office. My average time for departure is between 6:30-7pm. A couple of times in the past two weeks I was still in the office until 7:30pm. I have done over 50 additional hours over a two week period.

No. Dangerously unmanageable.

No. Constantly rising and an inability by managers to be able to manage or understand our statutory requirements and allow us to at least meet minimum standards before addressing additional issues.

Yes. My manager monitors the cases I have to ensure I am not overloaded.

No. I would like more time to reflect and manage caseloads as having a heavy caseload does not allow time for this or to prepare resources etc.

Many reported working excessive hours

1. If you hold cases, has your caseload been higher than the recommended levels during the last month?
* 60% responded yes
* 40% responded no

There are not enough social workers to undertake the assessments. High levels of sickness and staff turnover.

The recommended is 15 to 18. I have 25 and at one point I had 30. My caseload is increasing all the time without regard to my mental health, practicality and stress.

At present the number is not higher however the complexities of some cases will take more of my time meaning falling behind with others.

1. Do you have a good work/life balance?
* 56% responded no (67%)
* 44% responded yes (33%)

No. What can I say? Exhausted and children have to fend for themselves some nights. It’s neglect towards our own families.

No. I feel work takes over my life and it is impacting my family life and relationships. I feel unhappy and want to have a good life.

No. Staff are working lots of additional hours to keep heads above water. Some of the time accrued is being lost too. Management are aware of this but expectation is to work hard until job is done.

There were many comments on this subject. The theme was people working long days causing issues in their private lives, working on their annual leave days, non-working days and weekends. Some are reluctant to take toil and annual leave for fear of falling behind. There were no positive comments to note.

No. I feel stressed all the time and find I’m thinking about work all the time because of the long list of tasks and targets I have. As soon as you close a case you get a new one without respite. This is frustrating seeing at the chair of the Trust was on Good Morning Britain w/c 09.09.19 saying how much more productive staff were when they were allowed to work from home and she did not see a reason why we had to work in an office Monday – Friday 9-5.

No. Working late and weekends is expected.

1. Are you contacted about work on your personal mobile outside normal working hours?
* 69% responded no
* 31% responded yes

Yes. All the time despite asking not to be. During A/L and when sick too.

Yes. This happens rarely and only if it has been agreed in advance or because the family is in crisis.

Yes. Have been a few times, not outside normal working hours but when on leave.

No. I do not hand my personal number out for this reason as I am aware of people who are contacted.

1. Have work pressures had a negative impact upon your health and well-being?
* 78% responded yes (69%)
* 22% responded no (31%)

Yes. I’m feeling so stressed out, trapped and see no end to this.

Yes. Constantly exhausted. Sleepless nights due to anxiety of not being able to complete or even start a task in a timely manner but expected to meet deadlines at whatever the cost might be to me and personal life.

Yes. All the time! I feel sad, upset, distressed, angry and tearful all at or because of work.

Yes. Had major impact. Increased health issues.

I am in a constant state of anxiety. I can handle the pressure and demands of the work but certainly not the anxiety.

Yes, it does as you are constantly feeling frustrated and put upon with no one to turn to for support. Feel tired all the time, we spend far too much time at work to not be in a good working environment.

1. Have you worked in addition to your contracted hours in order to complete tasks?
* 89% responded yes (77%)
* 11% responded no (23%)

Yes many times as the demand is high and I keep getting emails that I haven’t done things. Little do they know I have another million things to do, so I have ended up using my own time to get tasks done. I have worked to 2am at times.

Yes. Every week!! But then we’re told we should get all work done within contracted hours when this sometimes isn’t possible.

Yes. This has been a norm to ensure visits, care plans, pre-meeting report, chronologies, case summaries are completed due to weekly DASHboard output.

Yes. This happens on a weekly basis. There are not enough hours in the day. I feel like I’m letting down the children I work with because I struggle to give them 100%.

Absolutely – I regularly take leave and toil to enable catch up e.g. complete minutes, respond to emails, read documents in relation to cases that are active and so forth.

Yes. I have had to work additional hours as the tasks and workload is unmanageable on normal working hours.

1. On average how many hours (above your contracted hours) do you work each week?
* 46% responded it was up to 5 extra hours each week
* 49% said it was over 5 extra hours each week
* 12% said it was more than 15 extra hours each week

5-10. Working evenings to complete tasks to meet targets and deadlines.

15-20. Sometimes work at weekend and most evenings. I am reducing this now but not keeping up!

5-10. Get to work early, don’t get a lunch break and work late on visits a few times per week.

5-10. I have had to work extra (unpaid) hours to get tasks done. This is purely because I have too many cases and too many tasks to do which cannot be done in a normal working week.

1. Are you able to take TOIL for the additional hours worked?
* 79% responded yes
* 21% responded no

No. We are only allowed to take TOIL if it is accrued for a visit/meeting and not office/admin based work which is the majority of the work.

Yes, but at a cost. Prior to October 2017 it was manageable at 15 hours – my toil is on average 68 hours a month accumulated over a two-month period and in a vicious cycle that I am unable to reduce and have to lose it.

Yes. Sometimes but the TOIL taken means you get behind again and you end up working longer hours to catch up.

No. I know I should but I never have time to claim Toil or convenient time to take it.

Many comments stated employees are allowed to take TOIL but chose not to because their work would fall behind or couldn’t take it because there just wasn’t a convenient time.

No. Never bother to record TOIL as if you do they complain about the hours accrued!

1. Does your Manager discourage you from working over your contracted hours?
* 56% responded no
* 44% responded yes

No. Senior manager wants the job done. It doesn’t matter how and how long it takes. Some colleagues are working into early hours to complete tasks.

No. They encourage this (indirectly). I have been told to get things done on the weekend!

No. Quite the opposite. I feel as if my manager indirectly suggests I should work over my contracted hours.

Yes, but understands why I end up working beyond the contracted hours.

1. Do you think you will continue to work additional hours unless you undertake a work-to-rule?
* 70% responded yes
* 30% responded no

Not sure if I want to but I have to.

No. I will have to even if I don’t want to otherwise tasks will not be completed.

Yes. I can’t do work to rule – tried it – did not work and the previous manager treated it as a competency and capability issue not a resource issue.

1. Would you make the time to turn up to a union meeting to discuss organising a work-to-rule?
* 84% responded yes
* 16% responded no

Response rate for this survey was 28% of UNISON members.

General Comments listed at end of survey included:

I have seen good social workers leave due to feelings of stress and unworthiness. Things in Sandwell will not improve until the Trust adopt a more caring attitude towards staff. Also, to keep to their 12 reasons to stay in Sandwell as this is not kept to (cases being more than 15-18), this is just pure false advertising and propaganda.

The management structure needs to change in order to bring fresh talent into the service to achieve progress and develop it. The culture of bullying staff needs to cease.

The Trust still has a long way to go. More staff is needed, not only social workers but support staff too like additional contact workers and centres so the children we work with can have more contact. More business admin to help with administration tasks and organisational tasks.

I am working for an organisation that really has no direction. They talk about ‘The Child Matters’ but it is more like ‘The Cost Matters’. There is a bullying culture that has got worse since we became a Trust. I am very disappointed in how we have not developed and become a strong unit which can make a real difference.

The Trust is intent on providing lots of propaganda stating that things are getting better when the reality is that things are getting worse by the week.

Staff remain unhappy with lots of staff leaving, meaning that children and families still get a poor service.

My present impression is that senior management do not accept that workloads are too high, despite this, they have asked workers to agree to even higher caseloads because of the level of vacancies.

Recruitment and retention continued to be a major failing in Sandwell – this predates the Trust but the Trust’s record of holding onto and attracting staff is very poor.

Money being spent on agency staff must be a huge amount – no wonder £5M was needed to bail the Trust out.

Middle management continue to be an issue at Sandwell. They report to the top that everything is fine but it’s not. They cover their own backsides and let the frontline staff take the flack when things are highlighted.

I am not sure senior management are aware how bad things are. It seems the bullying culture is back where people leave really quickly for unknown reasons.

Just the basics seem to be a mess which makes the day to day role a lot more difficult than it needs to be.

We have management structure that lacks experience and a large amount of agency workers.

Permanent staff are not treated fairly and there are no incentives to stay. You have to threaten to leave to be given anything!