



Safe and confident social workers?

***A UNISON branch guide to
Building a safe, confident future – the final
report of the Social Work Task Force***

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ACTION POINT CHECKLIST

Here we provide an at-a-glance checklist of all the action points covered in this guide.

Spreading the word

1. A UNISON members' guide to the Social Work Task Force (SWTF) report is being produced. You will be able to order copies from UNISON stock orders. Use the guide as tool for recruiting new members and activating existing ones.
2. Convene meetings for social workers, social work assistants and support workers to come together to discuss the report.
3. Map your members working in social work – do you have members who are social workers employed by health trusts, community and voluntary sector employers or agencies? Their employers will also be expected to implement the reforms.
4. Where you have separate convenors across children's and adults' services, agree how you will work together on the social work agenda.

Early engagement with employers

5. Seek an early meeting with your directors and with lead members to discuss the report.
6. Remind them of UNISON's 10-point plans for protecting vulnerable children and to improve adult social work services (see www.unison.org.uk/socialwork). To order leaflets quote stock order numbers 2747 – children, and 2797 – adults.
7. Where your members are under

particularly acute pressures because of staff shortages, high turnover, burn-out, hike in referrals and so on – seek commitments from the management and elected leadership that additional resources will be identified either from reserves or central government. Warn against moves to take money out of other services such as early intervention and prevention to throw it at safeguarding – this will prove to be a false economy.

8. Agree that 'frank and open discussions' with social workers will require an active role for UNISON stewards to ensure that social workers are confident about putting their views forward and taking part. Try to agree a schedule of meetings with UNISON involvement covering all social work teams.
9. Agree that remodelling requires a structured and negotiated approach through a remodelling group such as exists for the school workforce agreement in schools, as well as an agreed approach to grading and evaluation of new posts.
 - 9.i Look for quick-win measures such as reinstatement of admin support for social workers. This could include specialist social work administrator posts. Make sure that these admin jobs are properly evaluated for the range of responsibilities they involve – these are likely to be higher than generic admin jobs. Also ensure any training and development needs are addressed.
 - 9.ii Start talking to your employers about setting up or reinstating 'grow-your-own' schemes where support workers are funded and supported to gain their social work qualification while in employment. Research by the General Social Care

Council (GSCC) has shown these are cost-effective and that social workers who qualify in this way have better retention rates and high levels of commitment. UNISON has a partnership with the Open University which delivers this through a learning partnership – contact UNISON Learning and Organising Services for details.

9.iii Other ideas emerging out of the current remodelling pilots operating in the children’s sector are:

- social worker coach/mentor roles
- community-based early intervention teams
- small teams supported by a social work assistant and practice administrator with a dedicated caseload which they work with throughout the life of cases. These could be a mix of child protection, looked after and children in need.

- employer to get on with it
- ensure UNISON involvement to provide protection and confidence for your members to take part
- exercise independent scrutiny of the outcomes – checking that a realistic picture is emerging
- provide feedback to the union regionally and nationally on progress.

12. Use the detailed advice in Annexe 2 to agree with your employer how they are going to carry out the health check.

13. Report to your region and the national union any employer which refuses to carry out the health check.

Monitoring Integrated Children’s System (ICS) improvements

10. UNISON is disappointed that the report did not go further in setting a deadline by which improvements to ICS must actually deliver – or alternatives be implemented. UNISON will continue to raise this nationally. In the meantime we need branches to feed us information and keep talking to members about whether they are actually experiencing any improvements. Further advice on ICS is contained in Annexe 1 of this guide.

Preparing for the national employer standard – conducting the workload health check

11. Use the SWTF workload health-check recommendation to:

- keep up the pressure on the

INTRODUCTION

This guide contains preliminary advice to branches on *Building a safe, confident future*, the final report of the Social Work Task Force (SWTF).

Safe and confident social workers? is intended to assist branches to ensure that their employers get started on assessing the safety of working conditions and social work practice across their social work teams.

Further branch advice will be developed once implementation of the medium-to-long-term reform programme gets underway.

The SWTF was set up by the government to advise on a programme of reform across all fields of social work in England, including children's, adults' and mental health. It included representatives from directors of children's and adult services, service user organisations, frontline practitioners, UNISON and the British Association of Social Workers (BASW). The final report of the task force can be viewed at www.dcsf.gov.uk/swtf where you will find details of how to order free hard copies.

The report contains 15 core recommendations:

1. strengthening the calibre of entrants to the social work profession
2. an overhaul of social work degree courses
3. improving the quality of practice placements and ensuring at least one is in a statutory service
4. an assessed and supported first year in employment – similar to the NQT year for teachers and the Northern Ireland system for social workers
5. better regulation of social work education courses
6. a national standard for employers on the support they must give their social workers to do their job effectively
7. national requirements on the quantity

- and quality of supervision
8. dedicated programmes of training and support for front-line social work managers
9. a national framework for continuing professional development, moving to an 'entitlement' to ongoing learning and development
10. a nationally recognised career structure
11. an independent national college of social work
12. a programme to promote public understanding of social work
13. a license to practise system to replace registration, with stronger requirements on training and development
14. a national system for forecasting demand for social workers and planning supply
15. a national reform programme to implement the recommendations.

The government has accepted all of the recommendations and is publishing an implementation plan in early 2010. Most of the recommendations are medium-to-long-term reforms which require new legislation/guidance and changes to systems and regulation.

There will be a national social work reform programme and a board to oversee it. UNISON is on the board so that we can push for implementation which delivers genuine improvements to the working lives of social workers.

Key examples where we will need to ensure that reforms do not adversely affect UNISON members' interests include: the move to a licensing system and the assessed year for newly qualified social workers.

But these reforms will not be deliverable unless action is taken to create more capacity within social work services, and to tackle the blight of excessive workload and bureaucracy, poor working conditions

and defective IT systems.

UNISON believes that the workload health check (see page 9) recommended by the SWTF is a critical starting point for any further reform. The openness and integrity of this process and the actions agreed as a result of it will be an early indicator of how well or otherwise employers will be able to implement the wider reform programme.

The advice contained in this guide is intended to help branches:

- engage and involve social work members in discussion around the SWTF report
- get into discussions about the implications of the SWTF report with your employers
- conduct the workload health check ensuring good trade union involvement.

START SPREADING THE WORD

Make sure members know about the task force report and UNISON's involvement. Reassure members that your branch will be working hard to make sure that it delivers real improvements for members. Let them know that UNISON will be

working at national level to ensure that changes to systems such as licensing and the assessed year for newly qualified social workers do not adversely affect members' interests.

ACTION POINTS

A UNISON members' guide to the task force report is being produced. You will be able to order copies from UNISON stock orders.

1. Use the UNISON members' guide to the report as a tool for recruiting new members and activating existing ones.
2. Convene meetings for social workers, social work assistants and support workers to come together to discuss the report.
3. Map your members working in social work – do you have members who are social workers employed by health trusts, community and voluntary sector employers or agencies? Their employers will also be expected to implement the reforms.
4. Where you have separate convenors across children's and adults' services – agree how you will work together on the social work agenda.

EARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH EMPLOYERS

The government has said it will publish an implementation plan in early 2010 covering how the reforms will be 'resourced and delivered' and any legislative change that is needed. UNISON is clear that additional resources will be critical if the report is to mean more than warm words.

However, in a letter from the secretaries of state to chief executives, lead members and directors in every local authority, there is a message that they must get started now to ensure that they are putting in place the support that their social workers need:

"We encourage you to read the Task Force's full report and to discuss it with your social workers and their colleagues, and with local unions and those who use social work services. It contains strong messages about the positive difference that can be made quickly by social workers and their employers, if they come together constructively to identify the issues they are facing and the immediate changes that can be made."

**Letter from Secretaries of State,
1 December**

The short-term action recommended by the SWTF (SWTF pages 10-11) is as follows:

- The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and local authorities should continue to improve the ICS to make it more straightforward and effective
- local government should consider how resources can be reallocated to make a difference on the front line – central government must support local government to manage high pressures on front line services, including making resources available
- employers should hold frank and open discussions with frontline practitioners and managers about the reality of practice, burdens and how services can be improved
- piloting remodelling of social work services should be encouraged and incentivised and where necessary resourced.

ACTION POINTS

5. Seek an early meeting with your directors and with lead members to discuss the report.
6. Remind them of UNISON's 10-point plans for protecting vulnerable children and to improve adult social work services (see www.unison.org.uk/socialwork). To order leaflets quote stock order numbers 2747 – children and 2797 – adults)
7. Where your members are under particularly acute pressures because of staff shortages, high turnover, burn-out, hike in referrals and so on – seek commitments from the management and elected leadership that additional resources will be identified either from reserves or central government. Warn against moves to take money out of other services such as early intervention

and prevention to throw it at safeguarding – this will prove to be a false economy.

8. Agree that ‘frank and open discussions’ with social workers will require an active role for UNISON stewards to ensure that social workers are confident about putting their views forward and taking part. Try to agree a schedule of meetings with UNISON involvement covering all social work teams.
9. Agree that remodelling requires a structured and negotiated approach through a remodelling group such as exists for the school workforce agreement in schools, as well as an agreed approach to grading and evaluation of new posts.
 - 9.i Look for quick-win measures such as reinstatement of admin support for social workers. This could include specialist social work administrator posts. Make sure that these admin jobs are properly evaluated for the range of responsibilities they involve – these are likely to be higher than generic admin jobs. Also ensure any training and development needs are addressed.
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 - 9.iii Other ideas emerging out of the current remodelling pilots operating in the children’s sector are:
 - social worker coach/mentor roles
 - community-based early intervention teams
 - small teams supported by a social work assistant and practice administrator with a dedicated caseload which they work with throughout the life of cases. These could be a mix of child protection, looked after and children in need.
10. UNISON is disappointed that the report did not go further in setting a deadline by which improvements to ICS must actually deliver – or alternatives be implemented. UNISON will continue to raise this nationally. In the meantime we need branches to feed us information and keep talking to members about whether they are actually experiencing any improvements. Further advice on ICS is contained in Annexe 1 of this guide.

PREPARING FOR THE NATIONAL EMPLOYER STANDARD –

CONDUCTING THE WORKLOAD HEALTH CHECK

Task force recommendation 6 covers a “clear national standard for employers setting out the support social workers should expect from their employers in order to do their jobs effectively”.

This standard is expected to be developed and agreed through the national reform programme and all employers will be expected to assess their performance against it and publish their results “including information on the caseload ceilings or controls they are operating, and set out their plans for improvement.” (SWTF report page 33). This will also be looked at by inspectors from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Ofsted.

UNISON is disappointed that the recommendation falls short of a statutory requirement. We note that the government has separately said it will make the code of practice for social care employers statutory. The task force report also holds out the possibility of moving to direct government intervention where employers fall short of the standard.

Caseload ceilings

The national employer standard will cover the establishment and review of “local caseload ceilings for different teams and services” (SWTF report page 32).

Many areas already have these but UNISON members routinely experience the following issues:

- the system is too complicated and creates too much paperwork
- caseload systems do not take account of time needed for other activities such as Continuing Professional

Development (CPD), or of other factors such as travel time

- systems do not adjust for the skills of experience of social workers at different stages in their careers.

But the effectiveness of any scheme depends on what happens when a practitioner reaches their maximum workload and there are not enough staff to cope with the volume of work coming in.

UNISON remains concerned that without national benchmarks we will see areas where resources are most stretched continuing to breach local workload management systems and guidelines on acceptable caseloads. However, the requirement to publish information on caseload ceilings will allow us to monitor what different authorities are doing and use the results to argue for national benchmarks.

You may want to review your current systems if you have them – looking at what is in place for each team – and start talking to your employer about what needs to be improved, ahead of the development of the national standard for employers.

Branches will find a new pamphlet produced by UNISON Scotland and the BASW a very helpful resource.

Supervision and workload management for social work: a negotiating resource recommends a simple time-based model which is designed to prevent overload and its consequences.

It can be downloaded from www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork

Chief social work officer

The SWTF report falls short of recommending that each area should have a chief social work officer as is the case in Scotland but it does say that there should be:

“a senior manager who is a qualified social worker and who oversees the overall health of professional social work in the organisation: advises on how the standard for employers can be upheld; and is accessible to frontline staff. This manager would also be the person who oversees the framework ... for assessing the ‘health’ of their organisation on...workload.”

UNISON believes this could be very valuable for social workers provided the post-holder can be a source of professional guidance for those seeking a second opinion and somewhere to raise practice concerns that are not being addressed through the line management chain.

Workload health check

The 39-step workload health check is intended to be the first step on the road to establishing the employer standard.

The SWTF report states that:

“We believe strongly that employers can start to take action now to improve the support they provide to frontline social workers in managing their workload, and in preparation for the roll-out of the full standard. We recommend the development in the short term of a tool that can be used at team, service and organisation level to determine how well workflows and workloads are being managed and which, in due course, can form the basis for developing the standard. ... we are presenting an initial framework for helping employers and practitioners to take action now in assessing the ‘health’ of their organisation

on a range of issues affecting workload.”

UNISON believes this health check process is a fundamental requirement for all employers of social workers. The requirement to publish the results will allow monitoring and collation of critical benchmarking information about caseloads, turnover rates and agency staffing. It will allow elected members to hold officers to account about the working conditions in social work teams.

But to be effective, the health check has to be a true reflection of conditions on the ground as experienced by social workers.

For that reason UNISON believes it is vital that there is good trade union involvement, with local representatives involved at every step to give social workers confidence in the process. Note that the SWTF report says:

“The framework is not designed to act as a checklist, but as a mechanism to promote debate at all levels of the service... It should be the basis for discussion at each of these levels, with a requirement in place that staff have been involved in the response at each level and a mechanism for recording areas of disagreement. Where this is identified, a mechanism for reviewing the assessment, usually by a manager of another team or at a high level should be included.”

UNISON is the only organisation that will be able to provide independent scrutiny and reporting on how robustly this process has been carried out in each authority.

UNISON believes that all employers should set a target date for completion of the health check by May 2010. This is in order to provide a base-line for the social work reform programme to establish the fully fledged employer standard.

ACTION POINTS

11. Use the SWTF workload health check recommendation to:
 - keep up the pressure on the employer to get on with it
 - ensure UNISON involvement to provide protection and confidence for your members to take part
 - exercise independent scrutiny of the outcomes – checking that a realistic picture is emerging
 - provide feedback to the union regionally and nationally on progress.
12. Use the detailed advice in Annexe 2 to agree with your employer how they are going to carry out the health check.
13. Report to your region and the national union any employer which refuses to carry out the health check.

Feedback and monitoring

UNISON activists and members can provide feedback on reaction to the task force report and what should be our priority areas for the reform programme to **socialwork@unison.co.uk**

UNISON nationally will set up a simple process for branches to feed back the results of their workload health check. This will appear on the social work pages at **www.unison.org.uk/socialwork**. We will then collate and report on the results.

Make sure you have regular engagement with elected members during this process so you can give them independent feedback.

Further UNISON guidance will be produced as the national social work reform programme gets underway.

Annexe 1 – ICS

- Revisit the earlier UNISON branch advice in circular LG/SS/16/2009 and LG/SS/21/2009 (July and August 2009). This included details of relaxations and scope for simplifying and removing exemplars, and the additional grants authorities have received to do this.

- Remind your authority that the use of ICS, its specifications and exemplars is not compulsory. Talk to members about whether any improvements are being experienced.

- Check out the new DCSF guidance which was developed with a panel of social work practitioners: **www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/safeguardingandsocialcare/integratedchildrenssystem/ics/**

It covers:

- i making it easier to copy/clone data
- ii making child and family narrative visible in the system
- iii improving outputs such as how things print out
- iv making clear which elements of recording in the core assessment are mandatory and which are not.

- Seek agreement that all non-mandatory elements are removed and exemplars radically simplified. Social workers' views about what is needed should be listened to and acted upon.

Examples of non-mandatory elements which can be removed are:

- i all guidance notes
- ii all tick-box evidence statements
- iii social worker summary of each dimension
- iv age bands
- v tick boxes in the section 'parents'/carers' attributes'

- Where there is no realistic prospect of making the system usable, demand

that the authority considers putting an alternative system in place. Remind them of the example of Kensington and Chelsea, which chose not to use ICS but developed its own bespoke case recording system with the full involvement of practitioners. This system works well, meets practitioner needs and records the information which is required by statute.

- Feed back progress or lack of it to **socialwork@unison.co.uk**

Annexe 2 – workload health check

The SWTF health check is at page 57 of the final report. The framework developed by the SWTF: “is not designed to be prescriptive and can be adapted to meet the needs of each organisation.” There are 39 key prompts in the health check, which provide a comprehensive view of all the issues affecting workload and service delivery.

UNISON organising advice

The health-check process is an excellent opportunity for UNISON to organise and engage members and show them that we are taking a lead in getting their employer to start addressing the issues that affect day-to-day practice.

Be prepared

- Seek additional facility time for UNISON leads working on the health-check process
- Try and recruit a UNISON steward or contact in every social work team who will act as the UNISON point of contact and ensure that social workers have a proper say
- Advise members to prepare for their team’s health-check session by keeping a personal log of working hours, TOIL, cases, supervision sessions and cancellations.

A health and safety issue

The health-check process is similar to a risk assessment – in many areas it will highlight working conditions and stress factors which are detrimental to our members’ health and safety.

You can use this to remind the employer of their legal duties to address these issues.

The written records of the health checks will strengthen your hand in doing this.

Involve your safety representatives in planning how your branch is going to approach this – and use their powers to follow up and hold the employer to account.

Overleaf we set out a checklist for the health-check process. You can copy this and give it to your employer to help them get started – they may welcome the assistance.

The SWTF workload health check process

UNISON advice

1. Employers should agree with UNISON a joint steering group to oversee the health-check process across all the social work teams. Because of the nature of the issues, the steering group should normally include a UNISON accredited health and safety representative.
2. The steering group should agree a timetable for completion using May 2010 as its target date, and a date for when the next health check will be repeated. The SWTF says this should be at least annual but where there are acute problems you may wish to agree that this is more frequent.
3. The steering group should agree how the results will be published including to all members of staff, elected members and the local media.
4. The health check should be carried out in each social work team and the results aggregated up across each service area, directorate and across the whole employer.
5. The scope of the health check should extend to assistants, care managers and non-social-work-qualified practitioners who are carrying out casework.
6. The health check will need to combine management data – covering areas such as vacancy and turnover rates – with information and evidence from staff in areas such as TOIL, stress and experience of supervisions.
7. The employer will need to identify additional resources in terms of HR, systems and IT support to collect the data required. A simple spreadsheet to record team discussions and data will be needed. Technical guidelines will be needed covering areas such as:
 - a common date or period for data capture
 - a common definition of a case, for example where siblings are involved, whether these should count as separate cases.
8. Data should be shared with UNISON reps and with staff so they can comment on and verify the picture that emerges.
9. UNISON recommends that every team member gets a guidance note which is jointly agreed by management and the union. This should describe what the health check is for and how it will be used, and give the assurance that anything that is said in discussions will not be used in any way associated with disciplinary or capability or other management action. If staff don't get this assurance it will impact on their confidence to engage in the frank and open discussion that the SWTF recommends.
10. All team members will need to be given time to prepare for the team discussion. Data should be provided to team members and UNISON reps in advance for those areas indicated in the table overleaf. Staff will also need time to be able to prepare their own information such as their TOIL and annual leave position, the number of supervision sessions they have had and so on.
11. Employers may wish to consider engaging facilitators to run the health-check sessions with teams – this may facilitate better participation.
12. There should be a process for escalation to the steering group for areas of disagreement where social workers do not agree with their managers' assessment under any of the health-check headings.

The 39 steps - carrying out the health check

We have adapted the 39 SWTF health check prompts into a series of questions below with a commentary where necessary. On the next page we produce a clean copy which you may want to copy and use to record outcomes team by team.

SWTF workload health check

TOPIC FOR TEAM DISCUSSION	UNISON ADVICE
Effective workload management	
1) How many unfilled posts are there in the team? (employer needs to produce data in advance for team to look at)	<i>Check to make sure posts are not being 'frozen' or deleted to bring this total down</i>
2) How many posts are being covered by agency/temporary staff? (employer needs to produce data in advance for team to look at)	<i>Ask about total agency spend as this will give you some arguments about value for money and freeing up resources</i>
3) How many posts are there where the post-holder is on long-term absence eg sick leave, maternity leave? (employer needs to produce data in advance for team to look at)	
4) What is the level of staff turnover? (employer needs to produce data in advance for team to look at)	<i>UNISON recommends looking at this over a 12-month period</i>
5) How many cases does each FTE hold? (employer needs to produce data in advance for team to look at)	<i>Try to identify the active cases and whether there are problems which mean workers are still carrying cases because they have not had time to close them down</i>
6) How many hours are staff working on average a week?	<i>This needs to be done on an FTE basis and needs to be based on workers' account of working time including all the extra time they may put in at home in the evenings and at weekends</i>
7) What levels of TOIL and annual leave are still to be taken?	<i>Look back over the last 12 months and get staff to tally up how much TOIL they regularly accrue and whether they lose any. On annual leave look at the leave year and whether staff are accumulating annual leave which they are unable to take, or regularly carrying it over</i>
8) How many supervision sessions has each worker had – is this in line with organisational policy?	<i>Again we would suggest a 12-month period. Staff will need to check back through their diaries to establish this. Staff should also look at how often their supervisions were cancelled</i>

9) Have staff been able to attend the CPD opportunities planned in their appraisals or development reviews – how often is training cancelled or re-arranged?	<i>Make sure staff record times when they feel they have had to drop out of development or training due to workload</i>
10) What additional responsibilities are team members undertaking, for example supervising a student on placement, mentoring another team member, doing research?	<i>You may also want to record any social workers who have duties as union stewards, learning reps or other activities – workload pressures often impinge on the time available for these</i>
Proactive workflow management	
11) How many cases are currently unallocated? (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	<i>Make sure you compare the current picture and the past 12 months – you want to take account of variations</i>
12) How many cases are being re-referred? (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	<i>Look at whether there are patterns in types of case, source of the referral and so on</i>
13) Are there changes throughout the year in workflow (peaks and troughs)? (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	
14) How are unallocated cases risk-assessed?	
15) What is the escalation process for unallocated cases and alerts to senior managers?	<i>Check whether staff are aware of this. What are the response times like? Does a report go to elected members? There could be a channel for staff to report their professional concerns around unmet need to the ‘chief social work officer’ role as an alternative reporting line</i>
16) How many cases are currently allocated to a) team members b) the team manager c) the duty team? (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	
17) Are there delays in the transfer of cases between teams?	<i>How long are the delays and are there patterns to when and why these occur?</i>
18) How often are workers required to cancel meetings with people who use services and other professionals in an average week due to re-prioritisation of work?	<i>This must include workers’ own responses to work pressures and not a narrow interpretation of ‘required’, as through an instruction</i>
19) What specific blocks to workflow need to be considered eg efficiency of commissioned services, relationships with other agencies, transfer between teams and services?	<i>Ensure these are recorded and that they are form part of a ‘next steps’ list where UNISON can look for agreement of specific actions</i>

20) Is the most efficient use of skills being made within the team and wider service? Are social workers undertaking tasks for which their skills are primarily required or could they be done more effectively by someone with different skills eg an administrator, para professional or other professional group either within the service or via a commissioned arrangement?	<i>Be very clear that any reallocation of tasks to other groups of workers needs to be negotiated and could have grading implications for their posts. Outsourcing should not be seen as a substitute for the employment of sufficient staff with the right mix of skills</i>
Having the right tools to do the job	
21) Do staff have access to the right equipment – for example, mobile working and IT access including to the internet?	<i>This discussion must cover not just access but the quality and reliability of equipment and systems. Discussions on ICS may require a separate and longer slot</i>
22) Do staff have access to the right professional services to support case work– translators, legal advice etc?	
23) Do staff have access to the right resources, for example, research, library facilities?	
24) Do staff have appropriate office space, for example, desk, office chair, access to quiet space?	<i>The task force heard a lot of concerns about the impact of open-plan offices, hot-desking and homeworking on social workers – this would be a good time to review this ahead of the employer standard coming in</i>
A healthy workplace	
25) Is there a system in place to monitor frequency and quality of supervision in order to ensure effective practice is supported?	
26) Is there a 360° appraisal in place?	
27) Is there an employee welfare system in place and are staff aware of how they access it?	<i>Make sure the discussion covers the quality of the service – for example there should not be a cap on the number of counselling sessions. The service must be responsive to the specific needs of staff in social work</i>
28) How often do team meetings take place?	
29) Are staff able to contribute to the agenda?	
30) Are senior managers accessible/ visible in the service?	
31) How are stress levels monitored on an individual and service basis?	

32) Is there a whistle-blowing process and are staff aware of what this is?	<i>The discussion should also cover how confident staff feel about the process, and how they can be reassured about reprisals</i>
33) Are there processes in place to ensure staff welfare eg risk assessments of roles and activities, and call-back/monitoring processes to ensure safety whilst working away from the office base including out of hours?	<i>Are the processes always followed?</i>
34) What are the sickness levels in the team/service and what is the pattern over time? (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	
Effective service delivery	
35) Findings from compliments / comments and complaints (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	
36) Feedback from service users	
37) Feedback from stakeholders / other professionals	
38) Staff survey results (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	
39) Exit interview analysis (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	

The 39 steps - carrying out the health check

Copy and use this to record each team's discussions

SWTF workload health check

Team	
Name of UNISON steward/contact	
Did all social workers have a chance to consider all the data and discuss all the issues?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:
Areas of disagreement	
Agreed next steps on: a) workload management b) workflow blockages c) equipment d) professional services e) resources f) office space g) welfare h) team meetings i) stress j) whistle-blowing k) risk assessment l) sickness m) other	
TOPIC FOR TEAM DISCUSSION:	SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES:
Effective workload management	
1) How many unfilled posts are there in the team? (employer needs to produce data in advance for team to look at)	
2) How many posts are being covered by agency/temporary staff? employer needs to produce data in advance for team to look at)	

3) How many posts are there where the post-holder is on long-term absence eg sick leave, maternity leave? (employer needs to produce data in advance for team to look at)	
4) What is the level of staff turnover? (employer needs to produce data in advance for team to look at)	
5) How many cases does each FTE hold? (employer needs to produce data in advance for team to look at)	
6) How many hours are staff working on average a week?	
7) What levels of TOIL and annual leave are still to be taken?	
8) How many supervision sessions has each worker had – is this in line with organisational policy?	
9) Have staff been able to attend the CPD opportunities planned in their appraisals or development reviews – how often is training cancelled or re-arranged?	
10) What additional responsibilities are team members undertaking, for example supervising a student on placement, mentoring another team member, doing research?	
Proactive workflow management	
11) How many cases are currently unallocated? (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	
12) How many cases are being re-referred? (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	
13) Are there changes throughout the year in workflow (peaks and troughs)? (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	

14) How are unallocated cases risk-assessed?	
15) What is the escalation process for unallocated cases and alerts to senior managers?	
16) How many cases are currently allocated to a) team members b) the team manager c) the duty team? (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	
17) Are there delays in transfer of cases between teams?	
18) How often are workers required to cancel meetings with people who use services and other professionals in an average week due to re-prioritisation of work?	
19) What specific blocks to workflow need to be considered eg efficiency of commissioned services, relationships with other agencies, transfer between teams and services?	
20) Is the most efficient use of skills being made within the team and wider service? Are social workers undertaking tasks for which their skills are primarily required or could they be done more effectively by someone with different skills eg an administrator, para-professional or other professional group either within the service or via a commissioned arrangement?	
Having the right tools to do the job	
21) Do staff have access to the right equipment – for example, mobile working and IT access including to the internet??	

22) Do staff have access to the right professional services to support case work– translators, legal advice etc?	
23) Do staff have access to the right resources, for example, research, library facilities?	
24) Do staff have appropriate office space, for example, desk, office chair, access to quiet space?	
A healthy work place	
25) Is there a system in place to monitor frequency and quality of supervision in order to ensure effective practice is supported?	
26) Is there a 360° appraisal in place?	
27) Is there an employee welfare system in place and are staff aware of how they access it?	
28) How often do team meetings take place?	
29) Are staff able to contribute to the agenda?	
30) Are senior managers accessible / visible in the service?	
31) How are stress levels monitored on an individual and service basis?	
32) Is there a whistle blowing process and are staff aware of what this is?	

33) Are there processes in place to ensure staff welfare eg risk assessments of roles and activities, and call-back/monitoring processes to ensure safety whilst working away from the office base including out of hours?	
34) What are the sickness levels in the team/service and what is the pattern over time? (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	
Effective service delivery	
35) Findings from compliments/comments and complaints (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	
36) Feedback from service users	
37) Feedback from stakeholders/ other professionals	
38) Staff survey results (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	
39) Exit interview analysis (employer needs to produce data for team to look at)	



If you are already a member of UNISON, get involved by becoming a contact or a rep. We need people on the ground who can oversee the workload health check and help us to make sure that social workers get a good deal as the social work reform programme gets underway.

If you are not a member join
UNISON online at
**unison.org.uk/join or
call 0845 355 0845.**

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