

The Standards for Employers of Social Workers

Halton Borough Council

Written by the team at Kinetiq
Lead Researcher: Dr Martin Reddington



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Members of The Standards for Employers of Social Workers Group:

The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS)
The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)
British Association of Social workers (BASW)
The Department of Education (DfE)
The Department of Health (DHSC)
Health Education England
Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee (JucSWEC)
Local Government Association (LGA)
NSPCC
SCIE
Skills for Care (SfC)
Social Work England
UNISON the Public Service Union
What Works Centre
The Adult Principal Social Worker Network
The Children's Principal Social Worker Network

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Introduction

This timely report examines a number of critical questions about the experiences of social workers:

- How well do employers deliver the refreshed Standards?
- How do employees perceive their working environment?
- What factors influence them to remain engaged with their work and minded to stay with their organisations?

These questions feature prominently in regional and national news, as it is recognised that 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.

The lessons that flow from the evidence in this report can and should shape the way leaders and managers in both the private and public sectors think about the people who work for them. They will also help to take forward the debate about what government and other policy makers can do to help promote a better environment to attract, develop and retain professional, compassionate and engaged staff who deliver high quality social work.

At the time of writing this report, with the country in the grip of the Covid-19 pandemic, the reliance on their services has never been greater.

Lastly, enormous appreciation is extended to all organisations that encouraged their staff to take part in this piece of research.

Refreshed Standards

The employer standards for social workers in England were last refreshed in 2020. They set out the key components of whole systems approaches, and employers can use them, along with an appropriate supervision framework, to help develop a working environment where social work practice and social workers can flourish, in turn supporting recruitment and retention. They are explained in headline detail below:

Standard 1 - Strong and clear social work framework

This standard is about promoting a clear statement about the principles that constitute good social work practice, and how those principles function across the full range of social work settings.

Standard 2 - Effective workforce planning systems

This standard is about using effective workforce planning systems to make sure that the right number of social workers, with the right level of skills and experience, are available to meet current and future service demands.

Standard 3 - Safe workloads and case allocation

This standard is about ensuring employees do not experience excessive workloads, resulting in unallocated cases and long waiting times for individuals.

Standard 4 - Wellbeing

This standard is about promoting a positive culture for employee wellbeing and supporting social workers to have the practical tools, resources and the organisational environment they need to practice effectively and safely.

Standard 5 - Supervision

This standard is about making sure students and qualified practitioners can reflect critically on their practice through high quality, regular supervision being an integral part of social work practice.

Standard 6 - Continuing professional development (CPD)

This standard is about social workers being provided with the time and opportunity to learn, keep their knowledge and skills up to date, and critically reflect on the impact this has on their practice.

Standard 7 - Professional registration

This standard is about supporting social workers to maintain their professional registration with the regulator.

Standard 8 - Strategic partnerships

This standard is about creating strong partnerships and good collaboration between employers, higher education institutions and other training providers.

More information about these standards can be found at <https://www.local.gov.uk/standards-employers-social-workers-england-0>

The survey items used to measure these standards can be found in appendix 2.

Purpose of the Research

Research Question 1

How well do employers of social workers deliver the refreshed Employer Standards?

Research Question 2

How do social workers perceive their working environment?

Research Question 3

What factors influence them to remain in their organisations, or choose to leave?

The insights gained from this study provide a lens on the workplace environment experienced by employees involved in the delivery of social work by social workers in Halton Borough Council. Some important features of the analysis are set out below in an 'at-a-glance' style. More granular details can be found in the report, with links to the relevant material.

Research Question 1: Delivery of refreshed Employer Standards

Highest rated Standards overall:

Strategic Partnerships

Lowest rated Standard overall:

CPD - Continuous Professional Development

Research Question 2: Perception of Workplace Experience

Top three survey items having biggest impact on social worker contribution:

I feel cared for by my managers and/or supervisor.

My organisation has a well-defined framework/approach to social work practice so I am clear about my role and accountability

I have been supported by my organisation to continue to work safely and effectively within a clear social work practice framework.

Employee voices

Most frequent themes:

Training & development

**Management Resources (including staffing)
Equality & diversity
I.T., Technology & Equipment**

Research Question 3: Factors influencing Desire to Stay

Top three survey items having biggest impact on desire to stay:

Supervision helps me reflect on how I meet professional regulatory standards

I identify my learning needs and access professional development opportunities and training through supervision

Supervision helps me critically reflect on my work including working relationships, emotions and use of evidence

The evidence set out in this report provides an opportunity for your organisation and related agencies involved in the delivery of social work to undertake *conversations for change* about how to improve the engagement and retention of staff through the adoption and delivery of the refreshed Employer Standards.

The research revealed a number of key themes, which have been examined in some detail within the main body of the report. These findings are broadly and succinctly summarised below:

1: Perception of Employer Standards

While the overall results should be a source of encouragement to your employer, ongoing efforts will be required to sustain and improve those levels. It is also important to note that views of employers' COVID-19 responses were well received overall – with employees reporting that they had received *good levels of support to work remotely and opportunities to maintain enough high quality, safe contact with colleagues*. The most challenging downsides of the pandemic were reported as an *increase in severity of need of people being referred and able to cope with workload and ability to work in a strength-based way*. These findings should be explored further and the lessons infused into the 'new normal' operating environment 'post Covid-19'.

2: Biggest impact on staff engagement

The quality of the employment relationship is shaped by the reliable delivery of obligations and promises by the employer. For example, the expectation that as an employee you will have access to adequate support, be treated fairly and offered the training essential to one's job role. In the narrative analysis, there were many positive comments regarding the existence of *strong support structures* helping to encourage a *sense of wellbeing and safety*. *Good conversations* – having *quality time and space to meet supervisor and colleagues to discuss work outcomes* – were also revealed as important.

3: Biggest impact on staff retention (desire to stay)

The desire to stay with an organisation is an expression of organisational commitment. The evidence pointed strongly to key shaping influences such as *employees having quality supervision and support in provision of personal learning and development opportunities*.

Please note that where appropriate this report contains data imported from the North West Region report, to inform the reader of insights emerging from analysis of a larger data sample. This is particularly prevalent for Key Driver Analysis of statistical data and thematic analysis of free text responses. The data from your own organisation has been used to provide a faithful representation, as best as possible, of how your own employees perceive their workplace experience.

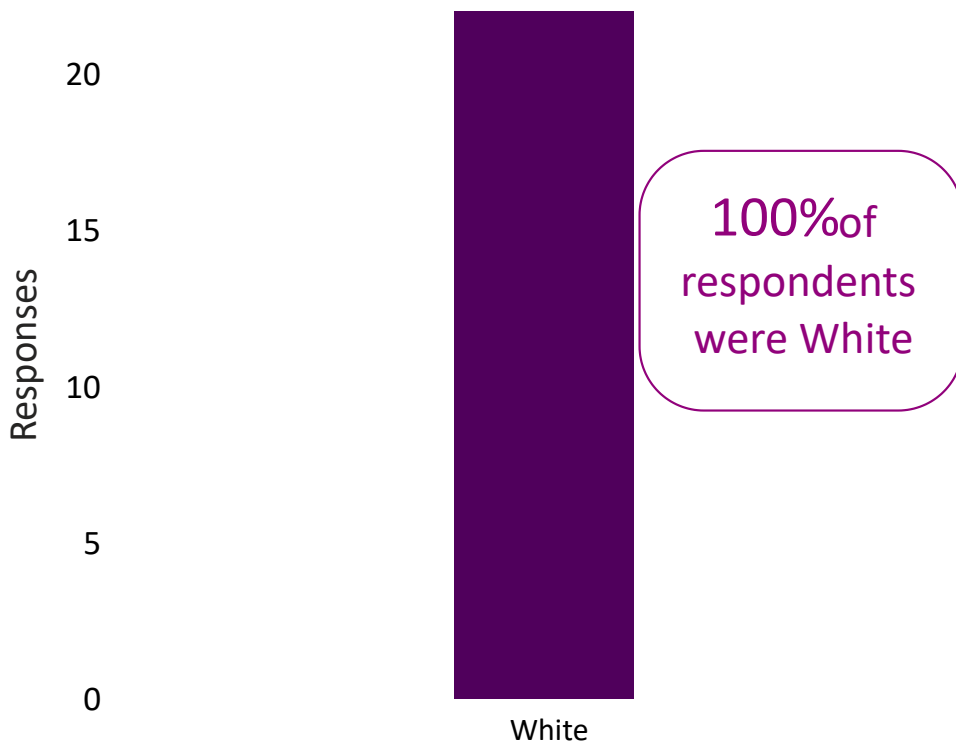
Respondents by Gender



Gender
● Female
● Male

82% of respondents were female

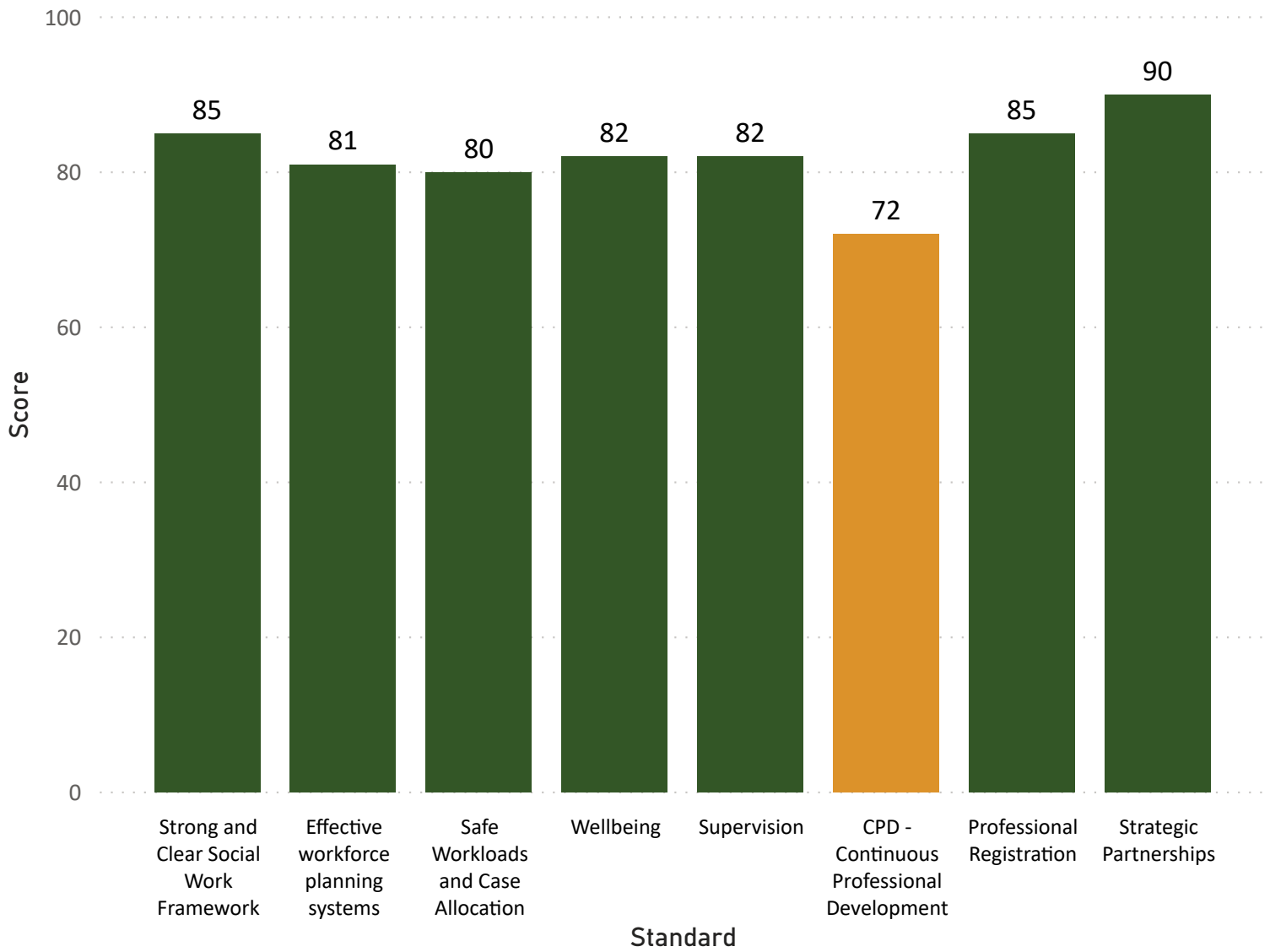
Responses by Ethnicity



How well do employers of social workers deliver the refreshed Employer Standards?

Figure 1 provides a visualisation of the mean scores across all Employer Standards. A more granular analysis of the survey items for the region can be found in appendix 2.

Figure 1: Standard Scores



(75+)

Good score / outcome to be celebrated.



(51-74)

Moderate score / outcome. Capable of improvement.



(50 or less)

Relatively poor score / outcome A clear sign to take steps to improve.

How do social workers perceive their working environment?

Key Driver Analysis (KDA) was used to discover which aspects of the Employer Standards were most potent (impactful) in driving employee contribution in the workplace. These aspects are highlighted below in figures 2 & 3. The model used in this research – The Employment Deal Diagnostic (TEDD®) - and the technique behind KDA are explained in more detail in appendix 1.

Key Driver Analysis requires large volumes of data. As such, the key drivers for the North West Region have been used in this report but importantly the values shown are for Halton Borough Council.

Improvements in these elements and others shown in figures 2 & 3 have the highest impact on employee contribution.

Figure 2: Employee Contribution at the Standard Level

Standards	Standard	Mean
Covid	Covid	73
Strong and Clear Social Work Framework	1	85
Professional Registration	7	85
Strategic Partnerships	8	90
Wellbeing	4	82

INCREASED IMPACT

Figure 3: Employee Contribution at the More Granular Level

Questions	Standard	Mean
I feel cared for by my managers and/or supervisor.	4	83
My organisation has a well-defined framework/approach to social work practice so I am clear about my role and accountability	1	83
I have been supported by my organisation to continue to work safely and effectively within a clear social work practice framework.	Covid	83
I feel safe in my role & the work I am expected to do.	4	80
I have time and space for supportive peer to peer and team discussion	4	73

INCREASED IMPACT



(75+)

Good score / outcome to be celebrated.



(51-74)

Moderate score / outcome. Capable of improvement.



(50 or less)

Relatively poor score / outcome A clear sign to take steps to improve.

What factors influence employees to remain in their organisations, or choose to leave?

Key Driver Analysis (KDA) was used to discover which aspects of the Employer Standards were most potent (impactful) in driving desire to stay in the workplace. These aspects are highlighted below in figures 4 & 5. The model used in this research – The Employment Deal Diagnostic (TEDD®) - and the technique behind KDA are explained in more detail in appendix 1.

Key Driver Analysis requires large volumes of data. As such, the key drivers for the North West Region have been used in this report but importantly the values shown are for Halton Borough Council.

Improvements in these elements and others shown in figures 4 & 5 have the highest impact on desire to stay.

Figure 4: Desire to Stay at the Standard Level

Standards	Standard	Score
Covid	Covid	73
Safe Workloads and Case Allocation	3	80
Strong and Clear Social Work Framework	1	85

Figure 5: Desire to Stay at the More Granular Level

Questions	Standard	Score
Supervision helps me reflect on how I meet professional regulatory standards	5	74
I identify my learning needs and access professional development opportunities and training through supervision	5	83
Supervision helps me critically reflect on my work including working relationships, emotions and use of evidence	5	80
My organisation understands, supports and provides conditions for social work practice that help me meet my professional standards	7	83
I have been able to continue to access relevant learning opportunities and training through my organisation	Covid	81



(75+)

Good score / outcome to be celebrated.



(51-74)

Moderate score / outcome. Capable of improvement.

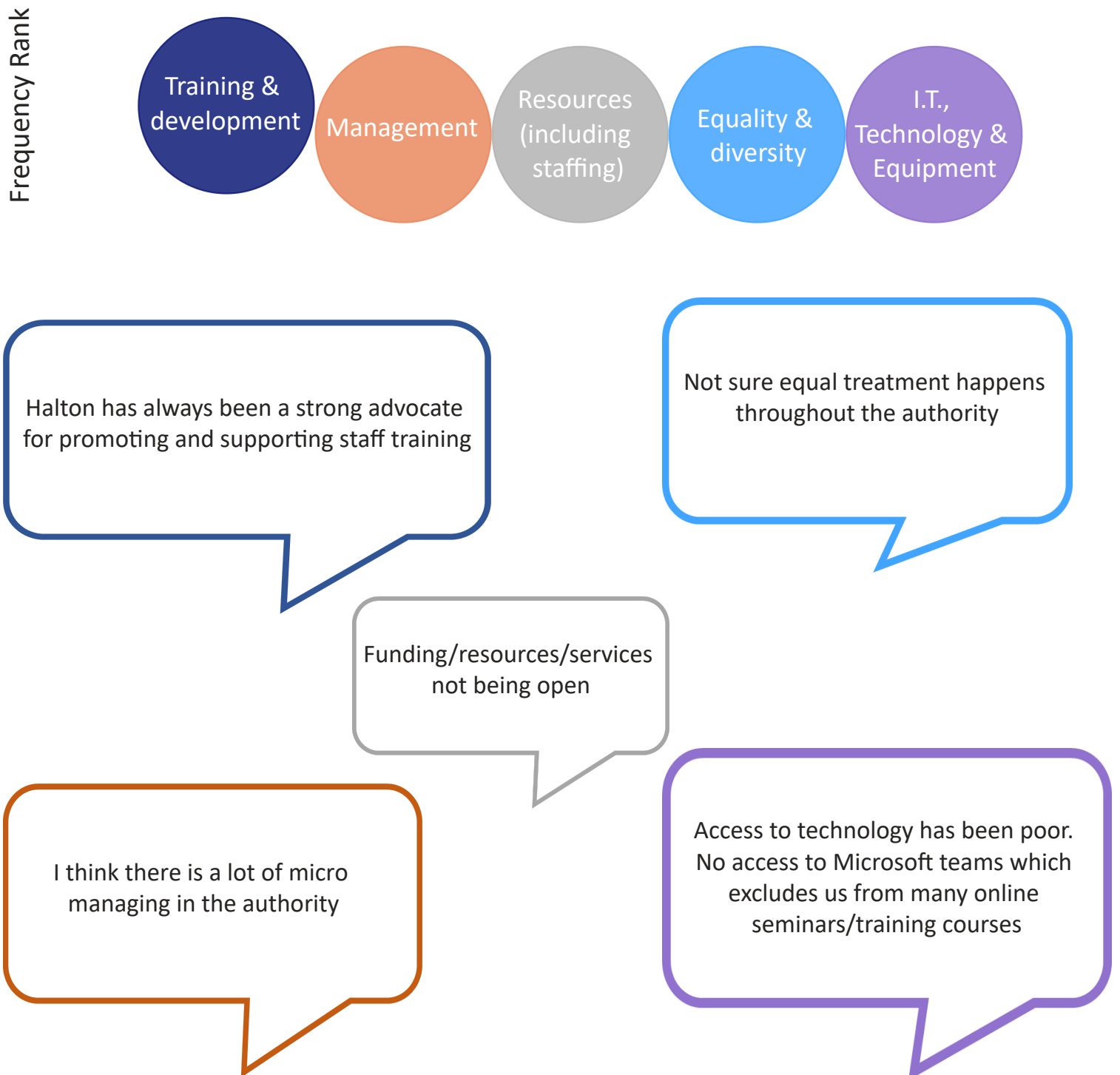


(50 or less)

Relatively poor score / outcome A clear sign to take steps to improve.

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide free text comments throughout the survey. The bubble chart below outlines the frequency rank of the top five themes from the free text comments collected from respondents at Halton Borough Council. There are free text examples colour coordinated to the relevant theme.

Figure 6: Key Themes Bubble Chart



Survey respondents were given an opportunity, via the use of free text, to provide more insights into their reasons for being a social worker. A selection of responses collected from Halton Borough Council are provided below in figure 7.

Figure 7: Reasons for Working in Social Work Free Text Comments



Free Text Analysis

Survey respondents were given an opportunity, via the use of free text, to provide more insights into challenges faced in the workplace. A selection of responses collected from Halton Borough Council are provided below in figure 8.

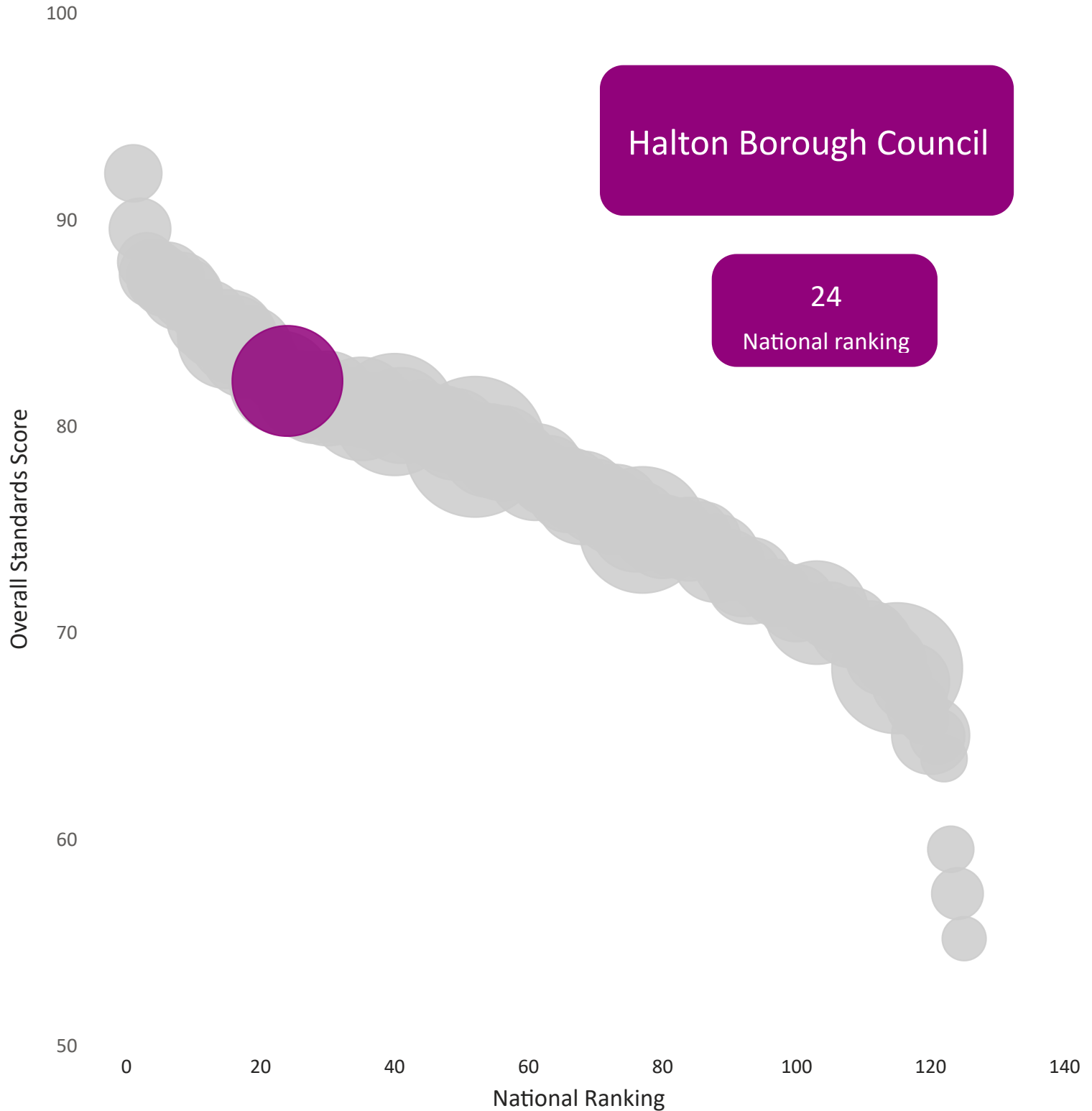
Figure 8: Biggest Challenge



Organisational Ranking

Figure 11 provides a visualisation of the organisation's overall mean scores for each standard compared to other participating organisations. The purple circle represents the specific organisation while other participating authorities are shown by the grey circles with their response numbers dictating the size of the circle.

Figure 11: National Ranking by Overall Standard Score



Organisational Ranking

Figure 12 provides a visualisation of the organisation's overall mean scores for each standard compared to other participating organisations within the region. The purple circle represents the specific organisation while other participating authorities are shown by the grey circles with their response numbers dictating the size of the circle.

Figure 12: Regional Ranking by Overall Standard Score

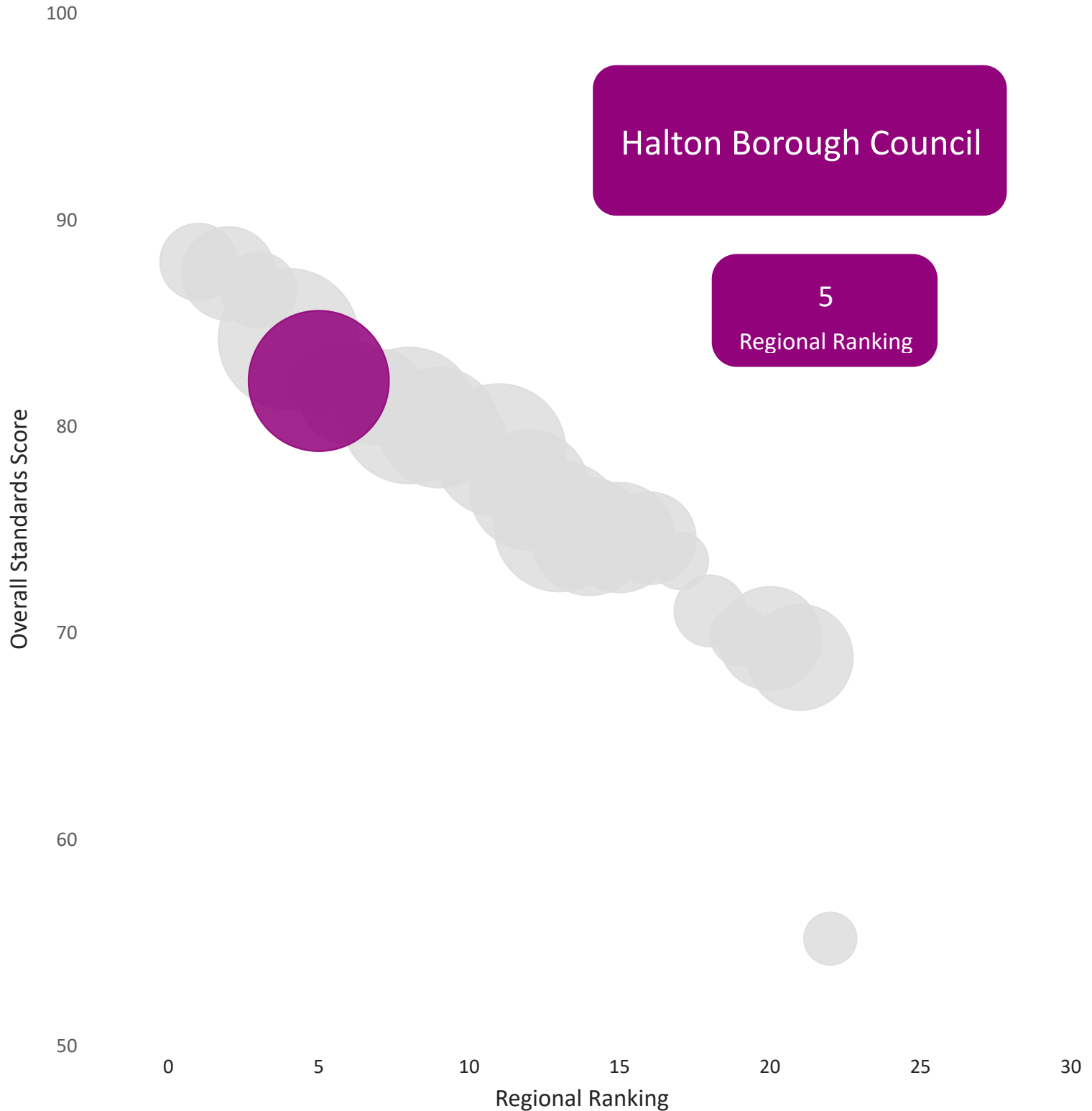
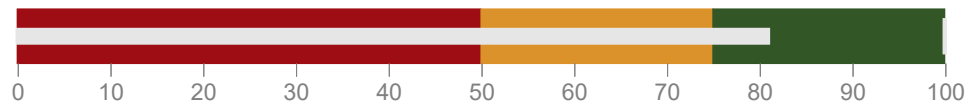


Figure 13 displays the overall mean scores for each standard as reported by gender for Halton Borough Council.

Figure 13 - Overall Average by Gender

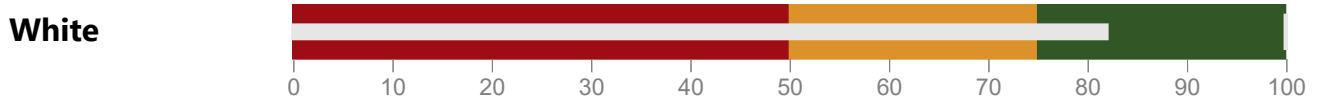
Female



Please note that genders may be absent from the graph if there were less than 10 respondents from that category.

Figure 14 displays the overall mean scores for each standard as reported by ethnicity for Halton Borough Council.

Figure 14 - Overall Average by Ethnicity



Please note that ethnicities may be absent from the graph if there were less than 10 respondents from that category.

Demographic Comparison

The figures below provides a visualisation of the organisation's overall mean scores for each standard across different demographic categories along with their regional and national ranking.

Figure 15: Demographic National and Regional Ranking Table

Demographic Category	Mean Score	National Rank	Total National Organisations*	Regional Rank	Total Regional Organisations**
Female	81	45	118	9	22
White	82	31	126	7	23

*Number of organisations nationally that had 10 or more responses for the specific demographic category.

**Number of organisations within the region that had 10 or more responses for the specific demographic category.

Appendix 1

The new Employer Standards were refreshed most recently in 2020. The Local Government Association hosts the standards on its website on behalf of the sector and continues to work with stakeholder partners on their regular review through the Standards for Employers Working Group.

Supplementary items specifically related to the impact of Covid-19 and job/organisational engagement were added. The latter were drawn from TEDD® – an approach based on the concept of Social Exchange Theory (SET), which places the notion of reciprocity and mutuality at the heart of the employment relationship (also called the employment deal). This is used to create an expression of how employee engagement is encouraged, experienced and personified (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Conway and Briner, 2009; Francis et. al, 2012; Guest, 2014; Reddington and Weber, 2016).

A simplified illustration is shown in the figure below. For a more detailed explanation see – [Developing a New Employment Deal for Local Government \(2017\) 1.](#)

The model allows the delivery of the employer standards and Covid effort to be regarded as *Employer Contributions*, thereby permitting key driver analysis when viewing *Employee Contributions* and *Desire to Stay* as targets of interest.

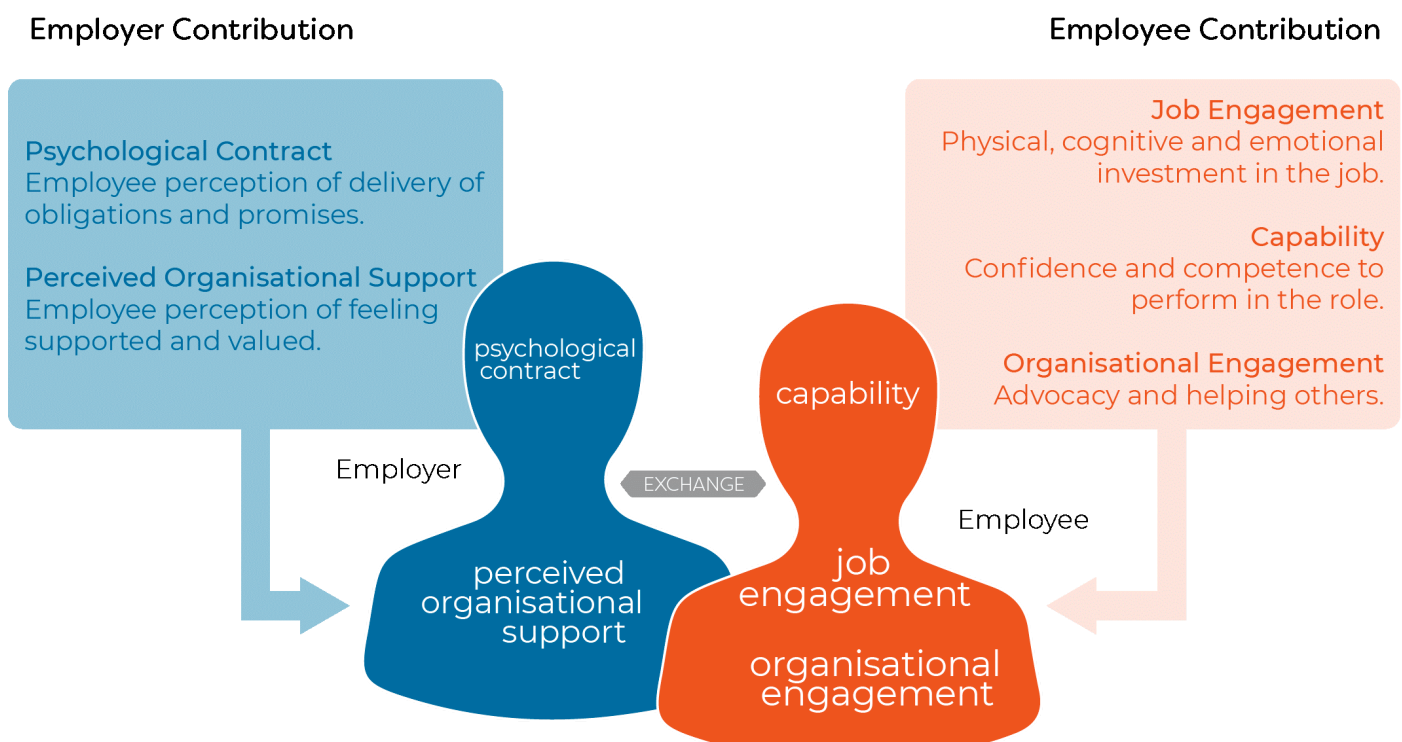


Figure 16: The Employment Relationship

The survey comprised the following elements:

- a. 59 rateable items using a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Agree' through 'Strongly Disagree' covering perceptions of the 8 Employer standards, the impact of Covid-19 and job/ organisational engagement.
- b. Respondents had an opportunity to enhance their answers to the rateable questions with free text.
- c. A single free text item specifically requested a one-word answer about the 'personality' of the organisation.
- d. Demographics seeking information about a respondent's job role, length of service, employment status, work location, age, gender and ethnicity.

The survey question set can be found in appendix 2.

The data collection phase for social services provider organisations in England was initiated through an email campaign managed by the LGA. These emails were sent out between 16th – 20th November, before the official launch date of the survey on 23 November. Further email reminders were sent out until the closing date on 22nd December 2020 to all contacts that had given permission via GDPR to be approached for marketing purposes. The emails were sent out centrally, region-by-region. Various social media channels were also used to raise awareness of the exercise, supplemented by newsletters (such as Social Work England).

All of these initiatives were designed to drive enquiries to a specific LGA workforce email address. The LGA team assumed ownership of the relationship with each participating organisation and provided further support and guidance to facilitate participation in the project, supported by the Kinetiq research team as appropriate.

All organisations that expressed a willingness to participate were checked for eligibility to do so by the LGA and the successful ones were then provided with a link to an online survey home page and a unique code that would allow more granular analytics to be performed on the data.

The LGA published regular response level updates to encourage maximum engagement with the exercise.

Appendix 1

The quantitative (numeric) data was exposed to a variety of statistical analysis techniques:

- Cronbach's Alpha – a test for internal consistency and reliability of the responses.
- Test for Significance – a formal procedure for assessing the confidence of claims made from the analysis of the data
- Multiple Regression - a formal procedure to predict the value of a variable based on the value of two or more other variables. This is the basis of key driver analysis, explained in more detail on page 22.

The results for the rateable items were calculated using mean values, as illustrated below. The thematic analysis of the qualitative data (free text) was conducted individually then collectively by the research team. Numeration (i.e. the frequency in which a theme appears within the data) was used to pull together the final set of themes, since numeration is one way of indicating their relative importance (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) and is widely used by researchers where this type of evidence is a significant source. The other technique used was sentiment weighting. Employees' responses to the free-text questions were analysed using NVivo (a qualitative software analysis package), which helped to identify and extract opinions, emotions and attitudes from the qualitative data.

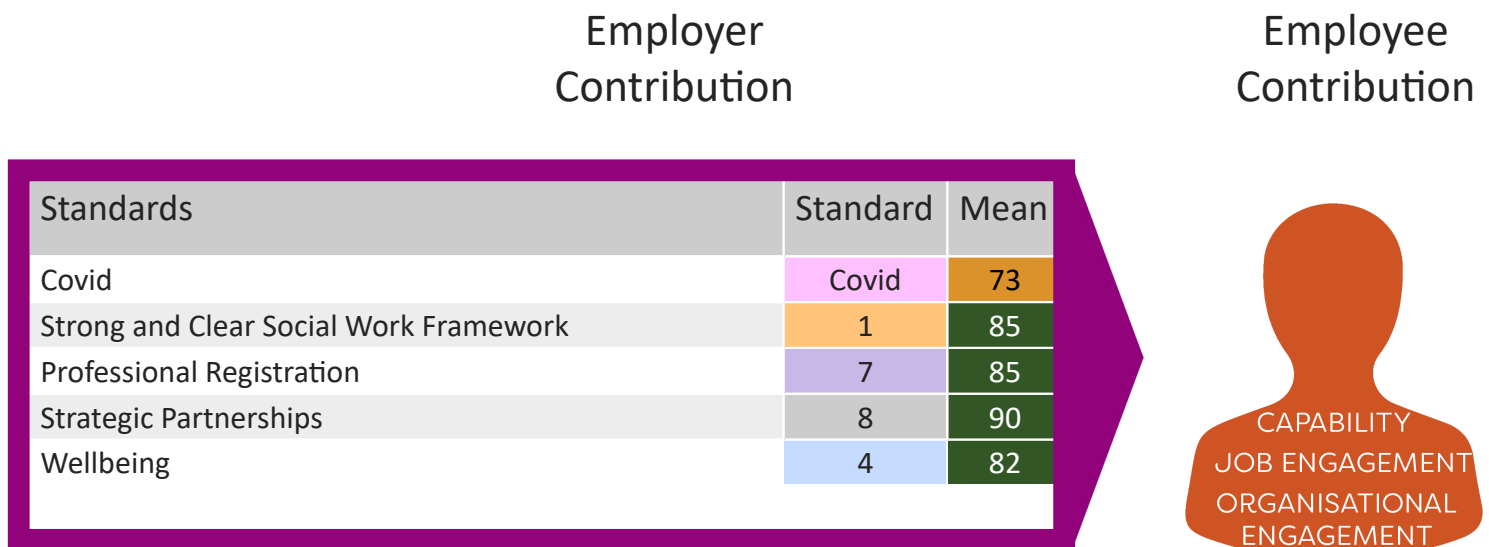
The research team were then able to blend statistical and free-text data to provide an enriched interpretation, with the relative importance of the different themes revealed when matched with the key drivers.

Example Survey Question:					
My supervisor and/or manager encourage and motivate me in my career development.					
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
100	75	50	25	0	
✓					Score
				✓	100
			✓		0
	✓				25
	✓				75
		✓			75
					50
					Total = 325
					Divided by total respondents (6)
					$325 \div 6 = 54$

Key Driver Analysis

Key Driver Analysis (KDA) helps to focus on those features of the employment relationship that have the greatest impact on how employees contribute at work, expressed as job engagement, organisational engagement and capability – see figure 18 below. Using an analysis technique known as multiple regression, the key drivers (predictor variables) are shown as questions from the survey with their associated mean scores and arranged in descending order of potency on employee contribution (outcome variable). The relevance of these results is explained in more detail in the discussion section of this report.

Figure 18: Illustration of Key Drivers impacting Employee Contribution



(75+)

Good score / outcome to be celebrated.



(51-74)

Moderate score / outcome. Capable of improvement.



(50 or less)

Relatively poor score / outcome A clear sign to take steps to improve.

Appendix 2

The tables below outline the scores for each question.

Strong and Clear Social Work Framework

Questions	Score
1. My organisation has a well-defined framework/approach to social work practice so I am clear about my role and accountability	83
2. I am able to use my professional judgement, creativity and autonomous decision making where appropriate	89
3. I receive an appropriate balance of professional support and reflective challenge (e.g. through supervision) to keep learning and developing my practice.	81
4. I have access to support and advice from senior social work leader/s within my organisation (e.g. Principal Social Worker or Senior Managers)	88

Effective workforce planning systems

Questions	Score
1. Through my organisation, I can access the post-qualifying training and development support I need to do my role and keep progressing	91
2. My supervisor and/or manager encourage and motivate me in my career development.	82
3. My organisation ensures fair and equal treatment of all staff.	69

Safe Workloads and Case Allocation

Questions	Score
1. I am usually allocated (or otherwise pick up) work through a fair process that takes account of my workload, my capabilities/skills and my health and wellbeing.	76
2. I can discuss workload and stress issues helpfully with my supervisor or manager and agree satisfactory ways forward	83
3. I know where to go to get help in my organisation if I am concerned about my wellbeing in respect of amount or nature of work I am expected to do	80
4. I would feel able to contact my Professional Association and/or Trade Union if I am concerned about safe working	83
5. I usually have a satisfactory level of control over my workload and the resources I need to fulfil my responsibilities	80



(75+)

Good score / outcome to be celebrated.



(51-74)

Moderate score / outcome. Capable of improvement.



(50 or less)

Relatively poor score / outcome A clear sign to take steps to improve.

Appendix 2

Wellbeing

Questions	Score
1. I am encouraged and empowered by my organisation to make time for my own self-care and wellbeing activities	76
2. I have time and space for supportive peer to peer and team discussion	73
3. My organisation recognises the emotional demands of social work and provides me with the supervision, support and tools I need to deal with this	78
4. My organisation takes appropriate action to prevent and deal with risks of violence, bullying and harassment in any aspect of my work.	82
5. My organisation is actively committed to anti-racism and a positive, inclusive culture of opportunity for members of staff of all backgrounds and protected characteristics	91
6. My organisation facilitates my access to my Professional Association, Trade Union and other supportive organisations.	89
7. I feel cared for by my managers and/or supervisor.	83
8. I feel safe in my role & the work I am expected to do.	80
9. I have access to private, quality space in order to meet my supervisor & people I work with.	82
10. My employer has in place caring and effective systems for reporting and responding to concerns I raise, and will act to ensure I am able to work safely.	83

Supervision

Questions	Score
1. I have uninterrupted, scheduled supervision at a suitable frequency with an appropriately skilled social work supervisor	85
2. Supervision helps me critically reflect on my work including working relationships, emotions and use of evidence	80
3. I identify my learning needs and access professional development opportunities and training through supervision	83
4. Supervision helps me reflect on how I meet professional regulatory standards	74
5. My supervisor coaches me in the development my professional judgement, creativity and autonomous decision making	85
6. I can raise concerns about the quality and suitability of my supervision with an appropriate person in the organisation if I need to	85

**(75+)**

Good score / outcome
to be celebrated.

**(51-74)**

Moderate score / outcome.
Capable of improvement.

**(50 or less)**

Relatively poor score / outcome A
clear sign to take steps to improve.

Appendix 2

CPD - Continuous Professional Development

Questions	Score
1. My organisation provides effective induction for all social workers when they join the organisation	88
2. (If you completed the ASYE in the last three years in your current organisation) My ASYE programme was effective in helping me learn and develop as a social worker and be more confident.	66
3. My organisation provides regular/annual appraisals (or performance reviews) that are relevant for social workers.	52
4. Within my organisation, I have an up to date plan of my professional development needs and how I and my employer will contribute to them (review)	49
5. I have dedicated time, resources, opportunities and support to carry out my CPD and record my learning in line with regulatory requirements	72
6. My organisation has non-discriminatory and transparent systems to enable all social workers to develop their professional skills, knowledge, specialisms and careers including access to accredited courses	85
7. I take action to ensure I am up to date with my CPD	93

Professional Registration

Questions	Score
1. I have found the registration/re-registration process with Social Work England straightforward	89
2. My organisation supports me in keeping my CPD record up to date on the Social Work England website	83
3. My organisation understands, supports and provides conditions for social work practice that help me meet my professional standards	83
4. My organisation promotes a working environment that upholds ethical practice and quality standards	84
5. I am aware of the circumstances under which I could be referred to the regulator	90
6. I am confident my organisation would support me if I challenged unsafe practice or reported other concerns about services	83

Strategic Partnerships

Questions	Score
1. I have good and effective relationships with key partners such as in the NHS, wider social care, education, housing, the third sector etc	90
2. My employer has a clear policy for recruiting, training and supporting social workers to train as practice educators, and practice supervisors.	91

**(75+)**

Good score / outcome
to be celebrated.

**(51-74)**

Moderate score / outcome.
Capable of improvement.

**(50 or less)**

Relatively poor score / outcome A
clear sign to take steps to improve.

Appendix 2

Covid

Questions	Score
1. I have been supported by my organisation to continue to work safely and effectively within a clear social work practice framework.	83
2. I have had access to the practice guidance and technology I have needed to work online/remotely with people using services and colleagues	83
3. 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.	85
4. I have been able to maintain enough, high quality, safe contact with the people I work with to ensure their welfare and to meet my statutory and/or organisational responsibilities	87
5. I have experienced an increase in severity of need in people being referred to me and/or my team*	83
6. I have felt positive and able to cope with work most of the time	75
7. I have continued to have satisfactory one to one supervision	82
8. My supervisor has helped me manage my overall wellbeing and work life balance.	76
9. I have been able to continue to access relevant learning opportunities and training through my organisation	81
10. Changes during the pandemic have enabled me to work in a more strength based way with my clients.	57

Employee contribution

Questions	Score
1. I am confident in carrying out my role	89
2. I feel a sense of pride about my job	83
3. I would recommend my employer to a friend	74

Tensions

Questions	Score
1. I am often required to do more with less resources*	86

Desire to stay

Questions	Score
1. As I see currently see things, I do not intend to leave my employer over the next 12 months	77

Overall satisfaction

Questions	Score
1. Overall, I am satisfied with my employment 'deal' – what my employer provides for me and what I am expected to provide in return	73

(75+)

(51-74)

(50 or less)

Good score / outcome to be celebrated.

Moderate score / outcome.
Capable of improvement.Relatively poor score / outcome A clear sign to
take steps to improve.*Indicates reverse logic i.e. a higher score is a relatively poor outcome.
(50 or less)

(51-74)

(75+)

Appendix 3

The following tables outline the scores across different types of demographics.

Note that demographic categories with less than 10 respondents are hidden from the tables.

Standard scores by Gender

Standard	Female
Strong and Clear Social Work Framework	84
Effective workforce planning systems	79
Safe Workloads and Case Allocation	79
Wellbeing	80
Supervision	81
CPD - Continuous Professional Development	72
Professional Registration	83
Strategic Partnerships	90

Standard scores by Ethnicity

Standard	White
Strong and Clear Social Work Framework	85
Effective workforce planning systems	81
Safe Workloads and Case Allocation	80
Wellbeing	82
Supervision	82
CPD - Continuous Professional Development	72
Professional Registration	85
Strategic Partnerships	90



(75+)

Good score / outcome
to be celebrated.



(51-74)

Moderate score / outcome.
Capable of improvement.



(50 or less)

Relatively poor score / outcome A
clear sign to take steps to improve.