

The Future of Social Work in Adult Social Services in England

This statement has been produced jointly by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, the Department of Health, Skills for Care and the British Association of Social Workers. In order to produce it, we have consulted with social workers, the Social Care Association, the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee, the General Social Care Council and the Social Care Institute for Excellence. January 2010

Social Work has a key role in the future of Adult Social Services. The purpose of adult social services and social work is to achieve better outcomes with adults of all ages who need services, support or protection. Social work is focussed on supporting independence, promoting choice and control for people facing difficulties due to disability, mental health problems, effects of age and other circumstances

The world in which social work and social care operates is changing. It needs to reflect people's aspirations to be active citizens, to be in control of the services and supports they need and only to be deprived of their liberty when there are no other options.

Social Work's distinct contribution is to make sure that services are personalised and that people's human rights are safeguarded through:

- Building professional relationships and empowering people as individuals in their families and in communities
- working through conflict and supporting people to manage their own risks
- Knowing and applying legislation
- Doing all of the above and also accessing practical support and services
- Working with other professionals to achieve best outcomes for people

Social workers bring together knowledge, skills and values and put these into practice, according to the experiences, relationships and social circumstances of the people they work with.

Social workers are an important resource to councils and other organisations in working with individuals and families most in need of support. Social workers contribute to better outcomes when people are "made vulnerable by poverty, bereavement, addiction, isolation, mental distress, disability, neglect, abuse or other circumstances". They work with families where mental health, substance misuse, disability, criminal justice and domestic violence affects the safeguarding of adults and children. In a time of recession the demand for social workers may rise as the number of referrals increases in areas such as mental health and adult safeguarding.

The social work contribution to better outcomes for people

Social Work is an international profession with a set of core values and a diverse knowledge and skills base. The International Federation of Social Workers' definition states:

"The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work."

Social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideals, and its values are based on respect for the equality, worth and dignity of all people...the profession strives to alleviate poverty and to liberate vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion. Social Work Values are embodied in the profession's national and international code of ethics."

Giving people control of their own resources and determining how their needs are met is transforming social services. Services are being personalised. Many people will want to organise all their supports and services themselves, based on good information. Others will want help from peers and user and carer led organisations. However, many will want social work to support them when they feel most vulnerable, to manage risks and benefits, and to build their self esteem and aspirations so that they can take control or make difficult decisions. Key outcomes for people are:

- Choice and control
- Dignity and respect
- Economic well being
- Improved quality of life
- Health and emotional well being
- Making a positive contribution
- Freedom from discrimination and harassment

Social work is a regulated graduate profession with a Code of Practice and a constantly developing knowledge-base, and has a key role in public protection. Social work skills are vital to:

- i. Support people with the assessment of their needs, circumstances and options.
- ii. Work with families to improve well being and safeguard vulnerable family members.
- iii. Contribute to early intervention and preventative services, inclusion, and helping to build capacity, social enterprise and social cohesion.

Social work is important when people face life changing circumstances. This may include the onset of disability or dementia, the transition to adulthood, the end of life, the death of a carer or going in to hospital and losing capacities and abilities. These all affect individuals and their families deeply, and they may need both psycho-social and practical supports.

Social workers also have an important role in working with people whose rights may be undermined through abuse or neglect, or where the law requires some deprivation of liberty. Social workers can assess and manage risk and balance competing rights in order to protect those in need. Social workers make sure that legal action is taken only where necessary, for the shortest time and with the least restriction.

This distinct approach provides an important contribution to multi-disciplinary teams, to support better outcomes. It also complements the contribution of other professions. Social workers in multi-disciplinary teams bring a perspective of the whole person, rather than just their symptoms or circumstances. Seeing the individual in the context of their family, friends and community, and reflecting their hopes and fears for their own future is where social work can bring an important contribution to the work of the team.

Shaping Our Lives, **the National User Network said that:** *“People value a social work approach based on challenging the broader barriers they face; they place particular value on social work’s social approach, the social work relationship and the personal qualities they associate with social work. These include warmth, respect, being non judgmental, listening, treating people with equality, being trustworthy, open, honest and*

reliable and communicating well. People value the support that social workers offer as well as their ability to help them to access and deal with other services and agencies.”

Building Social Work practice for better outcomes in the future

What social workers told us: DH, ADASS and Skills for Care held two events and undertook an on-line survey about the roles and tasks of social work over the summer of 2009 and BASW met hundreds of social workers on its “Listening Tour”. By far the majority of social workers felt that social work had a role to play in all of the dimensions of Putting People First: universal services, prevention and early intervention, building social capital, choice and control.

There is a role for social work in a transformed world, where new roles can be developed as well as existing ones strengthened. Social work skills will continue to be important contributions to assessment, care planning and review, but social workers may do more direct social work with a stronger therapeutic element.

Social work and its values could be important in shaping the responses of all the workforce. Listening, empowering individuals, being alert to conflict, safeguarding needs and the capacity of individuals, being sensitive to diversity and putting people in control should be part of the behaviours of all staff and services, from the very first contact. Social workers could have a leadership role here, particularly in the career structure envisaged by the Social Work Task Force, with advanced practitioners and consultant social workers.

These are areas that social work may develop into:

Social Work and interpersonal support: With the development of information, advice and advocacy services, support planning and brokerage, there may be new roles for social workers alongside services led by people using services and their families. This may include services for people who fund their own social care.

Social work and safeguarding rights: Social work could have an important role in community development work and promoting social cohesion, for example where disabled, mentally ill or substance misusing people are victims of hate crime.

Social work with families: Social workers already help to break the cycle of families where generations of individuals are trapped in abusive relationships, crime, substance misuse, poor health, unemployment and other factors. Their role in this work could be strengthened to support the current priorities for local authorities to create safe, healthy and prosperous communities.

We will need to develop together a broader set of activities and methodologies that social workers, and the organisations they work in, use to address social issues and challenges. As policy develops, we will need to keep this statement under review and change it to reflect the changing policy context.

In order to make this a reality we need to concentrate on the issues highlighted by the Social Work Task Force in their report *Building a safe confident future*, to help social workers develop even greater skills and knowledge for the future, on qualifying and throughout their careers. We need to develop career structures that keep and reward social workers who stay in practice and continue their professional development. Employers should talk to their social workers and provide opportunities for them to

influence policy and practice. We need to raise standards of social work education, regulation, practice and supervision to meet future social challenges. Employers must make sure they have good supports in place for social workers.

We are committed to taking this and the detailed work of the Social Work Task Force forward together and as individual organisations. DH, ADASS, BASW and Skills for Care will support the development of social work in adult social services. In response to the report of the Social Work Task Force, the Government has committed to publish an Implementation plan for reform of adult and children's social work early in 2010. ADASS will develop advice to help Directors to commission their social work workforce. Together we will promote the distinct contribution of social work in adult services, now and in the future.