



# **ADULT SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL CARE**

## **THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER**

**Second Edition**

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## PREFACE

### 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This paper describes the unique role of the Social Worker within a new, integrated Health and Social Care service in Highland as well as in the context of wider change. It also informs how we enable and support Social Workers to fulfil their unique role.
- 1.2 In April 2012, a major shift towards establishing integrated Health and Social Care services in Highland was marked with the signing of a partnership agreement between The Highland Council and NHS Highland. Notably, this agreement confirmed the responsibility of NHS Highland for delivering adult social care services on behalf of the partnership, with The Highland Council having responsibility for delivering children's services.
- 1.3 This change has taken place against a backdrop of significant new legislation and local and national policy that promotes the following:
- personalisation;
  - an assets-based, outcomes-focus approach to assessment and care planning;
  - person-centred practice;
  - co-production;
  - reduction in hospital admissions;
  - a targeted, reablement approach that prevents inappropriate hospital and care home admissions and facilitates early discharge from hospital;
  - maximisation of individuals' independence and potential;
  - working alongside carers as partners in care;
  - empowerment and protection of vulnerable children and adults; and
  - the Scottish Government's programme of integrated Health and Social Care across Scotland and the passage earlier this year of the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014.
- 1.4 This document has been informed by the following:
- Changing Lives: Report of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Work Review (2006)<sup>1</sup>;
  - the Changing Lives Practice Governance Framework (2011)<sup>2</sup>;
  - the SSSC Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers<sup>3</sup>; and
  - the Framework for Continuous Learning in Social Services<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [Changing Lives: Report of the 21st Century Social Work Review \(2006\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Changing Lives Practice Governance Framework \(2011\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [SSSC Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Framework for Continuous Learning in Social Services](#)

## 2 THE UNIQUE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER

2.1 Whilst the Social Worker role may include some key care management tasks, it is important to stress that the role of the Social Worker is not synonymous with that of the Care Manager. Indeed, all of the above points to the need for Social Workers to move away from a Care Management<sup>5</sup> role to that of the autonomous practitioner that is helpfully described in 'Changing Lives'<sup>6</sup>.

2.2 In describing the unique character of Social Work, 'Changing Lives' quotes the following International Association of Social Work definition:

*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 that people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.*<sup>7</sup>

2.3 It is also helpful when thinking about the role of the Social Worker to consider the six Standards for Social Work Education<sup>8</sup>, published in 2003, and which underpin the Honours Degree in Social Work, the requisite qualification for the registered Social Worker<sup>9</sup> in Scotland:

1. Prepare for, and work with, individuals, families, carers, groups and communities to assess their needs and circumstances;
2. Plan, carry out, review and evaluate social work practice with individuals, families, carers, groups, communities and other professionals;
3. Assess and manage individuals, families, carers, groups, communities, self and colleagues;
4. Demonstrate professional competence in social work practice;
5. Manage and be accountable, with supervision and support, for their own Social Work practice within their organisation;
6. Support individuals to represent and manage their needs, views and circumstances

2.4 Taking these as our starting point, the Social Worker's task is to: work alongside others to help build resilience; help address inequalities; maximise individuals' potential; and contribute to the realisation of citizenship, inclusivity and fairness for individuals and families. The Social Worker also has a key role in contributing to

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<sup>5</sup> In 2006, the Scottish Government defined care management and assessment as constituting "one one integrated process for identifying and addressing the needs of individuals within available resources"

[National Training Framework for Care Management: Practitioner's Guide \(March 2006\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Changing Lives: Report of the 21st Century Social Work Review \(2006\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> International Association of Social Work (2001)

<sup>8</sup> [The Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland \(2003\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> See paragraph 8 for detailed information about registration.

local policy and promoting high standards of practice and continuous service improvement.

- 2.5 To make changes in their lives, people assess how to meet need, recognise and manage risk to themselves and others and do this in the context of balancing rights and responsibilities that are often competing. Through their relationships with individuals and families, Social Workers help people to analyse where they are, what they want or need to be, and can act as a major catalyst for change.
- 2.6 Alongside other key professions, Social Work has an important contribution to make in realising notions of citizenship, inclusivity, fairness and service improvement embedded in the National Performance Framework<sup>10</sup>. Whilst Social Work can justifiably claim to play some part in all of the National Outcomes, there are some where the contribution of Social Work is central. One such outcome would be National Outcome 6: *We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk.*
- 2.7 Effective Social Work requires a range of professional skills, in particular the ability to make and contribute to holistic, often multi-agency assessments of the circumstances of people and their families. It also requires co-operation and close working relationships between Social Workers, people who use services, carers, Health professionals, care and support providers in the third and independent sectors and criminal justice services.
- 2.8 The ability to draw together a diverse range of opinions, develop and agree solutions that both promote the wellbeing of the individual and manage the risk to an individual and/or the public, particularly where risks and needs are complex, is a key skill of the Social Worker. It is essential that an appropriate balance is struck between managing risk and encouraging self-determination. Whilst the former is critical, it is also vital that individuals are offered the support that encourages them to realise their potential.
- 2.9 Whilst not exclusive to Social Work, promotion of personalised solutions has always been important; engaging with people who require support, carers, families and communities being the hallmark of effective Social Work practice. The personalisation agenda has been growing in recent years and is significant for Social Work in that it represents an opportunity to re-evaluate and reclaim Social Work's purpose and direction. The implementation earlier this year of new advent of Self Directed Support legislation in Scotland<sup>11</sup> points to an agenda that is radical, inclusive and underpinned by sound Social Work values. In order that personalisation becomes a meaningful transformation, there has to be a fundamental shift in power away from institutions, services and professionals to service users and their carers.

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<sup>10</sup> [The Role of the Registered Social Worker in Contributing to Better Outcomes for Scotland: Guidance for Local Authorities](#) (2009)

<sup>11</sup> [Social Care \(Self-directed Support\) \(Scotland\) Act 2013](#)

### 3 CORE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

- 3.1 The maintenance of core values and principles is central to professional identity and, despite the many organisational and structural changes which have impacted on Social Work over the years; the core values of Social Work have remained relatively constant.
- 3.2 It is useful here to restate commitment to key values and principles. 'Changing Lives'<sup>12</sup> talks about the importance of the Social Work value base where Social Work is based on respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people, and the rights that follow from this.
- 3.3 Social workers play a key role in upholding and defending each person's physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual integrity and well-being. This means:
1. Respecting the right of individuals to self-determination;
  2. Promoting the full involvement and participation of people using their services in ways that enable them to be empowered in all aspects of decisions and actions affecting their lives;
  3. Promoting anti-discriminatory practice and challenging stigma; and
  4. Treating each person as a whole, recognising all aspects of a person's life and identifying and developing strengths.
- 3.3 Social Workers are also encouraged to see the individual holistically, located within the context of family, friendships and the wider community.
- 3.4 The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) bases its Code of Practice<sup>13</sup> for social service workers similarly (see 5.6).

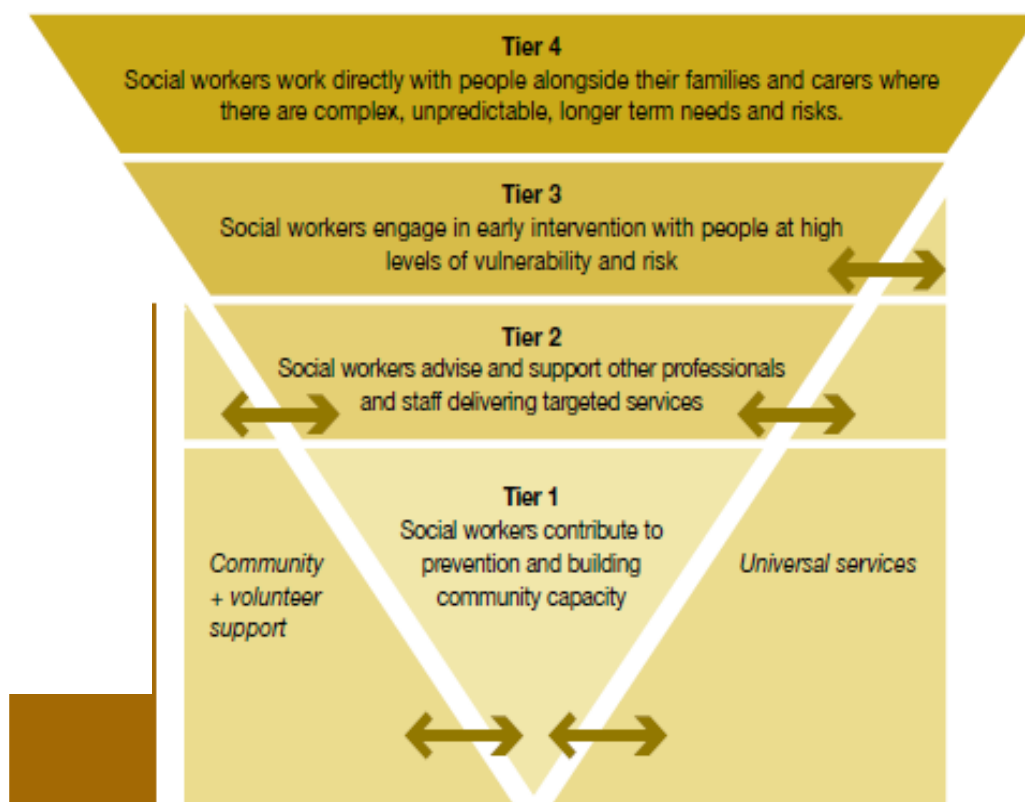
### 4 MAXIMISING THE BENEFITS OF THE SOCIAL WORKER'S UNIQUENESS

- 4.1 Social Workers are a relatively scarce specialist resource, making up only around 5% of the total social service workforce in Highland. It is therefore essential that optimum use is made of the knowledge and skills that are unique to this group. That means that Social Workers undertake only those tasks that require a high level of skill and expertise and do not routinely undertake tasks which would be far more appropriately undertaken by others in the workforce such as administrative and support staff.
- 4.2 'Changing Lives' proposes a tiered approach to help us to define how Social Workers should be deployed. This is depicted in **Figure 1** below.

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<sup>12</sup> [Changing Lives: Report of the 21st Century Social Work Review \(2006\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> [SSSC Codes of Practice](#)



**Figure 1**

- 4.3 Taking account of the reserved functions of the Social Worker that are set out in 5.1 below, the tiers of the pyramid represent the distribution of how a Social Worker’s time is allocated within the context of a multi-disciplinary team approach. Intervention increases between the tiers as need, level of complexity and risk increases.
- 4.4 At tier 4, the Social Worker may occupy the role of the Lead Professional, sometimes also fulfilling roles that only a Social Worker can do, negotiating a careful balance between care and control. In order to maximise the benefits of their professional expertise, it makes best sense that the Social Worker’s efforts and time be spent at tiers 3 and 4.
- 4.5 The intention in Highland is to carefully develop the interconnections between Social Workers, other social service workers, Health colleagues and staff of other disciplines and other agencies across the tiers and to ensure that these are clearly understood.

## **5 THE RESERVED FUNCTIONS OF THE SOCIAL WORKER**

- 5.1 'Changing Lives' sets out a number of functions that are reserved only for the Social Worker<sup>14</sup>. It states that the Social Worker should assess, plan, manage the delivery of care and safeguard the well-being of adults and children who are most vulnerable; in particular, those who:
- are in need of protection; and/or
  - are in danger of exploitation or significant harm; and/or
  - are at risk of causing significant harm to themselves or others; and/or
  - are unable to provide informed consent.
- 5.2 To do this, the Social Worker must:
- carry out enquiries and make recommendations when necessary as to whether or not a person requires to be the subject of protection procedures; and
  - be responsible for the development, monitoring and implementation of a plan to protect the person, in particular, identify and respond appropriately to any risks to the achievement of the plan and/or any need for the plan to be revised because of changing circumstances.
- 5.3 Highly skilled and knowledgeable Social Workers make specific contributions to a range of complex circumstances which may or not require formal statutory intervention. It is important to recognise that statutory intervention does not mean that Social Workers are constrained in their practice or that they cannot work creatively alongside service users, families and other professionals in early intervention and preventing risk factors developing into crises.
- 5.4 Social workers also act as agents of social control and must confront and challenge behaviour and manage situations of danger and uncertainty. In this role, they have statutory powers to act to protect individuals or communities. Hence, risk assessment, risk management and risk enablement are all central to the effective practice of the Social Worker. It may indeed be argued that the balance between care and control is the defining feature of Social Work and provides a dynamic tension which influences workload, priorities and public perceptions of the role.
- 5.5 The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 introduced much-welcomed regulation of services and the social service workforce. In particular, it makes it an offence for someone to call themselves a Social Worker if they are not so registered. Registration criteria for social service workers were introduced based on qualification and function, and to be registered on the Social Worker part of the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) Register, the worker must have completed the

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<sup>14</sup> [Changing Lives: Summary Report of the 21st Century Social Work Review \(2006\)](#)



requisite Honours Degree in Social Work<sup>15</sup>, whereby both academic and practice competence is demonstrated.

5.6 A Social Worker is accountable for his or her own professional practice and for maintaining professional standards. Practice must adhere to the SSSC Code of Practice for Workers<sup>16</sup> which requires all social service workers to:

- protect the rights and promote the interests of service users and carers
- strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers
- promote the independence of service users while protecting them as far as possible from danger or harm
- respect the rights of service users while seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people
- uphold public trust and confidence in social services
- be accountable for the quality of their work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills

5.7 Furthermore, in order to retain registration as a Social Worker, s/he needs to evidence learning that amounts to 15 days or 90 hours over the three year registration period. This must include specific learning relating to child and adult protection.

## **6 IMPORTANCE AND RELEVANCE OF THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP**

6.1 In work undertaken to inform the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Review of Social Work, the quality of the therapeutic relationship between Social Worker, individuals and families was carefully explored and shown to be critical to achieving successful outcomes<sup>17</sup>. Whilst the specific research that informed the Review focussed on offenders and older people, there is no reason to doubt that the findings would not apply equally well to all areas of social work.

6.2 The therapeutic approach and the inherent partnership between the worker and the citizen are key elements in developing a personalised approach to helping those with the most complex needs gain greater control of their lives and find acceptable solutions to their problems. Crucially, this is as important in compulsory aspects of practice as it is in non-statutory interventions.

## **7 SOCIAL WORK IN AN INTEGRATED HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SERVICE**

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<sup>15</sup> The Honours Degree in Social or SSSC-recognised predecessor qualification

<sup>16</sup> [SSSC Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers](#)

<sup>17</sup> McNeill, F. et al (2005) 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Work. Reducing Re-offending: Key Practice Skills; Kerr, B. et al (2005) Effective Social Work with Older People

- 7.1 The Highland Council's Director of Care and Learning retains the role of Chief Social Work Officer in Highland and is ultimately responsible for ensuring that Social Workers working in both The Highland Council and NHS Highland practise competently within the law.
- 7.2 The vision for Adult Social Care in Highland was initially espoused in the Community Care Plan published in 2011<sup>18</sup> in the lead up to the integration of Health and Social Care. In April 2012, 93 Social Workers<sup>19</sup> transferred from the Council to NHS Highland under the integration arrangements; just 5% of the total Adult Social Care workforce. Work is well underway to establish new multi-disciplinary, Integrated District Teams, which will enable Social Workers to work alongside Health professionals to support individuals to identify and achieve the personal outcomes that have been jointly agreed with service users, carers and families.

## **8 PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION TO SUPPORT SOCIAL WORKERS TO FULFIL THEIR ROLE**

- 8.1 Professional supervision is recognised within the Social Work profession as essential in terms of enabling and supporting Social Workers to fulfil their role. In the last eight years or so, Social Workers in Highland have enjoyed Professional Supervision as of right<sup>20</sup>. The Highland Council's Supervision Policy and Standards (which continue to apply in the new integrated service) were first adopted in 2006 and stated:

*"The Highland Council Social Work Service is unequivocal in its belief that the provision of high quality supervision for its staff is a right and not a privilege. The Social Work Management Team firmly believes that staff across the Service can expect to receive good, regular supervision from those who line manage and supervise them. It therefore regards the provision of high quality supervision to be a key priority for the Service."*

- 8.2 The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)'s Code of Practice for Employers states an expectation that all employers will have in place policies and procedures that enable social service staff to meet the SSSC's Code of Practice for Employees by *"Effectively managing and supervising staff to support effective practice and good conduct and supporting staff to address deficiencies in this."*<sup>21</sup>
- 8.3 Furthermore, 'Changing Lives' states that employing organisations should:
- trust their employees to practise safely and effectively;
  - support the development of the whole workforce;

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<sup>18</sup> Joint Community Care Plan for Highland 2010-13

<sup>19</sup> This equates to 86.7 full-time equivalent Social Workers

<sup>20</sup> Highland Council Work Service (updated 2008) Supervision Policy and Standards

<sup>21</sup> [SSSC Codes of Practice for Employers](#)

- promote and celebrate excellence, learning from good practice and from mistakes; and
- resource employees to deliver a first class service.

Professional supervision provides a means to ensure all of the above.

- 8.4 The Supervision Policy and Standards document has been updated to set professional supervision within the context of the new integrated service<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, we should recognise that the Social Work model of professional supervision is largely unfamiliar to our Health colleagues. Hence there is a need to assist their understanding of the Supervision model as it pertains to Social Work.
- 8.5 Our Social Workers have told us that professional supervision is valued and is important to them and that:
- supervision offers an opportunity to take stock and reflect on practice – considering where things have gone well and not so well;
  - having a supervisor or manager take time to talk to them about their practice, any issues they have and their professional development makes them feel a valued professional; and
  - feedback is important in order to validate practice and build confidence;
- 8.6 We tend to talk of professional Supervision as if this is exclusively confined to one-to-one sessions between the Social Worker and his or her manager. The Supervision Policy and Standards encourage us to make use of Group Supervision and explore group methodology such as the use of learning sets to build and consolidate practice skills, find solutions and problem-solve.

## **9 THE PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP MODEL IN NHS HIGHLAND**

- 9.1 The move to NHS Highland has resulted in Adult Care Social Workers experiencing new structures of leadership and management. NHS Highland operates a Professional Leadership model; for Social Work, this has seen the creation of new Lead Social Work Officer roles, for example.
- 9.2 Whereas previously Social Workers could normally expect to be managed and supervised by another Social Worker, line management may now be provided by a member of staff whose professional background is not Social Work. Hence the role of the Lead Social Work Officer, or the newly introduced role of role of Advanced Practitioner, becomes key to ensuring robust decision-making and promoting high quality practice.

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<sup>22</sup> Framework for Professional Supervision – September 2014

## **10 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, APPRAISAL AND THE CONTINUOUS LEARNING FRAMEWORK**

- 10.1 Local and national regulatory activity have demonstrated that organisations that have well-developed workforce management strategies are likely to provide high quality services.
- 10.2 As Highland Council employees, Social Workers were part of the corporate Professional Development Planning (PDP) process. This was not a formal appraisal process as such, but the PDP framework provided a means by which a worker, in conjunction with his or her manager, could plan and review professional development objectives. It was recognised that whilst the generic tools that supported the process were not always the most relevant for Social Workers, the opportunity to regularly meet with managers to plan and review professional development was generally valued by staff.
- 10.3 The Framework for Continuous Learning in Social Services will be used in conjunction with the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (eKSF) for all Social Service employees in Highland. It details personal and organisational capabilities and sets out what people in the Social Service workforce need to be able to do their job well now and into the future. Importantly, it also sets out what employers need to do to support them.
- 10.4 Managers and staff are being introduced to the Framework and additional work is ongoing in updating Personal Development Planning (PDP) profiles to ensure they reflect the capabilities as set out in the Framework.
- 10.5 The Framework will be used as a tool to support Professional Supervision, to ensure that workers are aware of the level at which they should be working, and the standards they should achieve. It will also be an important tool in identifying knowledge and skills gaps and should directly link to individual training activities and programmes.
- 10.6 The Framework will also inform a process of staff appraisal where it will be used to evaluate current practice and competence as well as inform discussion around future development and professional pathways, training, experience and competency.