IMPROVING AND SAFEGUARDING SOCIAL WELLBEING

A Strategy
for
Social Work
in
Northern Ireland

2012 – 2022

April 2012

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

The public expect high quality, responsive services delivered by well-trained and competent staff and rightly so. I am committed to bringing forward reforms in the whole health and social care system to create a new sustainable model of care that offers excellent services and promotes person-centred approaches. The primary focus in bringing forward reforms will be on improving both the outcomes and experiences of those who use our services.

Social workers work with some of the most vulnerable people in our society promoting their rights and independence and working to improve and safeguard their social wellbeing. They are also at the forefront in protecting children and vulnerable adults at risk of harm from neglect, abuse or exploitation. As such, social workers play a very important role in our society and will continue to do so.

Social work is however not well understood, public confidence is influenced by the media's handling of individual cases and it has been recognised there is a need to strengthen the profession across the UK.

Northern Ireland has been a leader in many developments to strengthen social work. The standard of our education and training is among the highest in the UK and the arrangements for professional governance have also been at the forefront of practice. I am therefore proud to commend this first Strategy for Social Work to you as the basis for the future direction of the profession in Northern Ireland.

This strategy for Social Work in Northern Ireland sets out a vision and agenda for action for social work and social workers in improving and safeguarding the social wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. It provides a framework for social work practice that reflects the role of social work in early intervention and prevention as well as in more targeted and specialist services for those in need of care or protection. It will support practitioners, commissioners, Trusts and other employers to strengthen and improve social work services for the future.

This strategy reflects my commitment to promoting and supporting social work as a valued and valuable profession. Through the implementation of this strategy it is my ambition to ensure that social work is recognised as a professional service contributing to making Northern Ireland a healthier, fairer, more prosperous, safer and peaceful society for all.

EDWIN POOTS
MINISTER FOR HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF SOCIAL SERVICES OFFICER

Social work is the living legacy of philanthropic and humanitarian ideals throughout the ages. Respect for individuals and their capacity to change, human rights, social justice and equality are the core values that have underpinned the profession from its beginnings and still do today. These values represent the DNA of social work and bind social workers together with the people and communities they serve. They should guide social workers in all that they do.

Many of the approaches and causes championed by social workers over the last decades are now mainstream activities throughout health and social care systems in the UK.   These include service-user involvement; promoting choice and independence; the importance of the service-user experience as a measure of quality; de-institutionalisation; normalisation; and anti-oppressive practice. This is a testimony to the pioneering spirit and effectiveness of social work in influencing societal norms and professional practice and services.

This strategy aims to support the profession to not only survive but to thrive in the coming years and to continue to be at the forefront of addressing new and emerging issues in our society. Issues that will impact on the social wellbeing and safety of children and vulnerable adults such as human trafficking; digital safety; sexual exploitation; care of older people; growth in self-directed care; and future models for the provision of social care.

Social work has been transformed over the past 10 years and is now a regulated, graduate profession. Northern Ireland has been at the forefront of many developments designed to support social workers in the workplace. We were the first devolved administration to introduce specific arrangements to support newly qualified social workers make the transition from student to independent practitioner[1] and to establish a principal social work practitioner grade. We led the way in the UK with the development and implementation of a model of social care governance.

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[1] The Assessed Year in Employment was introduced in 2006.

I believe this strategy, along with the core values of the profession, provides a framework for the future direction and further development of social work. We must develop and invest in effective social work practice and services that continues to put the individual at the centre of all we do. We must strengthen and develop our role in tackling social inequalities and disadvantage and championing the rights of those who are vulnerable or marginalised. And we must ensure social workers have the knowledge, skills and supports they need to work to the highest standards and to treat every person with respect, compassion and empathy.

SEAN HOLLAND
CHIEF SOCIAL SERVICES OFFICER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

We all aspire to live in a healthy, fair, tolerant, safe, prosperous and peaceful society. Social work makes an essential contribution to this goal by enabling and helping people, many of whom are vulnerable and marginalised, to play an active and productive part in society.

This is the first Strategy for Social Work (the strategy) in Northern Ireland (NI) and reflects the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's (the Department) commitment to social work as a valued and valuable profession. The strategy sets out a vision for social work in the context of the current political, economic and social challenges and their implications for social work. A number of strategic priorities and recommendations are made to help social work and social workers meet the challenges ahead. A framework for social work practice to support the delivery of the vision for social work is also set out.

The strategy does not, and is not intended, to replace the profession's own articulation of its role and contribution to society.

It has been developed in response to a number of key challenges for the profession including:

- growing and changing demand and need;
- major changes in the health and social care system;
- resource pressures and the need to make the best use of resources; and
- high, and at times unrealistic, expectations about what social work.

The report[2] of the review of the roles and tasks of social workers commissioned by the Department in 2008 and the final reports of the Social Work Taskforce[3] and the Munro Review[4] in England have informed the development of the strategy. It has

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2   People Work not just paperwork, NISCC, 2008
3   Building a Safe, Confident Future, The Social Work Taskforce, November 2009
4   The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report *A child-centred system,* Munro, May 2011

also been informed by work in Scotland[5] as well as the outcomes of inspections, inquiries and learning from Case Management Reviews (CMRs).

Some of the most useful information has come from key stakeholders, including service users and carers who are clear about what they value and expect from the profession. The feedback received from social work agencies and organisations as part of the consultation have also been very helpful.

Focus

The strategy has a particular focus on social work in the health and social care system which is where the majority of social workers are employed. Criminal justice, education, youth justice, voluntary and private organisations are also important employers of social workers and this strategy and its proposals will support social workers in these sectors. It should be read in conjunction with key government policies that set the strategic direction for social work services in different sectors and settings.

The strategy is intended as a guide for social workers, their employers, commissioners, education providers and regulators. It can be used to inform:

- the development and commissioning of social work services;
- the development of outcome measures/indicators for social work interventions;
- the development of professional practice and its evidence base;
- the training and development of social workers;
- workforce planning and the deployment of social workers; and
- the development of customised practice frameworks for specific areas of social work practice (e.g. mental health, education welfare, community development, older people, public health, probation, family support).

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5   Changing Lives: Report of the 21st Century Social Work Review, Scottish Executive, 2006

Overview of the Strategy

Section 1: An Introduction to Social Work

This section provides an introduction to social work and articulates the vision for social work in NI to improve and safeguard the social wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

Section 2: Social Work in Northern Ireland in the 21st Century

Society has changed and will continue to change as will the needs and expectations of people for social work services. This section outlines some of the key challenges and their implications for social work.

Section 3: A Strategy for Change

Ten strategic priorities to build a strong foundation for social work now and into the future are identified (Figure 1).   These are categorised under three inter-dependent themes as follows:

   a. *Strengthening the Capacity of the Workforce*
      The first 4 priorities aim to support the development of a modern, confident and forward-looking profession, equipped with the skills and knowledge to practise safely and effectively and to make a positive difference in peoples' lives.

   b. *Improving Social Work Services*
      The next 3 priorities aim to improve the accessibility and flexibility of services which are responsive to the needs of individuals and promote greater service user choice and control.

   c. *Building Leadership and Trust in the Profession*
      The final 3 priorities aim to build professional leadership, to promote public confidence and trust in social work and maximise the role and influence of the profession in policy, practice and service development.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Strengthening the capacity of the workforce

1. *Valuing the workforce/building confidence:* improve employer supports for social workers in carrying out their work;

2*.* *Building capacity/meeting demand:* improve workforce planning and deployment of social workers to meet demand;

3*.* *Adding value/delivering outcomes:* promote a culture of continuous improvement and a focus on demonstrating the outcomes and learning from practice; and

4. *Developing expertise/supporting accountability:* support the development of professional expertise and the individual accountability of social workers.

Improving social work services

5. *Person-centred services/flexible working:* design and deliver social work services around the needs of the people who use them making the best use of resources;

6. *Promoting effective partnerships/strengthening integrated working:* support partnership approaches in practice and service delivery and effective multi-disciplinary and inter-agency working; and

7. *Promoting high standards/managing risk:* ensure robust professional governance arrangements to support high standards and manage risks effectively.

Building leadership and trust

8. *Leading the profession/managing practice:* build management capacity and foster the development of a community of professional leaders;

9. *Promoting trust/fostering understanding:* promote understanding of the contribution of social work in improving and safeguarding social wellbeing; and

10. *Influencing policy/informing practice and service development:* strengthen the capability of social work to influence policy decisions and practice developments and service improvements.

Figure 1

Section 4: A Framework for Social Work Practice

The Framework for Social Work Practice (the framework) reflects the unique contribution and role of social work within the NI context.

The framework supports the delivery of the vision for social work in improving and safeguarding social wellbeing. It encompasses five social work roles of prevention, support, intervention, protection and control which contribute to meeting the needs of people of all ages and in diverse life circumstances.

Section 5: Making it Happen

A whole systems approach is needed to implement this strategy involving key players in the delivery system[6] for social workers as well as service users and carers.

This final section outlines the way forward and addresses the key components of successful implementation, including leadership, infrastructure, resources and workforce capacity.

Conclusion

Social work is a skilled profession that offers a unique service to individuals, families and communities. The implementation of this strategy will be a driver to improve outcomes for service users and strengthen the effectiveness and reputation of social work and social workers.

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6   Delivery system includes employers, commissioners, regulators, educators, relevant government departments, staff and professional organisations as well as service users and social workers.

SECTION 1:   AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL WORK

> *The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance wellbeing. 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.*
>
> *International Association of Social Workers*

The international definition of social work is a broad statement reflecting the diversity of social work as it is practised across the globe.

Social Work in Northern Ireland

Social workers work primarily, although not exclusively, with some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society. They work with people who may have difficulty living within the commonly accepted norms of society or who lack the means to do so and who may also have personal, social, physical or mental problems and are in need of support, care, protection or control. Social workers work in partnership with other public services, such as health, education, housing, police, probation and with the voluntary and independent sectors to promote and safeguard, and where appropriate to protect, the social wellbeing and safety of individuals, families and communities.

Social workers will seek to promote the autonomy and self-determination of those they work with. Where individuals are deemed unable or incapable of protecting themselves from harm, the State assumes responsibility for providing protection.

> *Parens patriae, or the 'state as parent', is a common law principle which authorises the State to act as a benevolent parent to protect its citizens who cannot protect themselves.*

Social work is one of the lead professions which assists the State in protecting children and vulnerable adults from harm through neglect, abuse or exploitation. Many of these responsibilities are enshrined in legislation and international conventions.

Social work involves balancing respect for the freedom of individuals to make choices and lead independent lives with the duty to take action to protect people from harming themselves or being harmed by others. Social workers are expected to intervene no more than is necessary to promote and safeguard a person's welfare and safety and to take the least restrictive action where an individual's personal freedom or civil liberties may be compromised.

Social workers are also expected to safeguard certain societal norms concerning children, families and other identified groups. In doing so they have to reconcile potentially conflicting care, protection and control functions through the exercise of professional judgement, informed by legislation and guided by agency policies and procedures.

Social workers occupy the 'space' between the individual and society, interpreting the actions of the individual to society and mediating the values, rules and requirements of society as they impact on the individual. This requires an understanding about the interaction between the individual and society and the impact of personal, social, economic and environmental factors on their life.

The role of social workers is not to take over from individuals, nor to undermine or reduce their responsibility for themselves and their own behavior. Rather they seek to support citizens in ways that enable them to live independently and safely and to draw from and contribute to their family, social group, community and wider society. This involves an emphasis on both the rights of individuals and on their social obligations and responsibilities.

A Vision for Social Work in Northern Ireland

> *Social workers will work to improve and safeguard the social wellbeing[7] of individuals, families and communities by promoting their independence, supporting their social inclusion and participation in society, empowering them to take control of their lives and helping them to keep safe.*

This vision is for every person who may need the support, help, protection or control that social workers provide. It is a vision that is based on what can be achieved through effective, targeted social work interventions and services based on evidence and professional standards and values.

Social Work and Social Wellbeing

Improving and safeguarding social wellbeing involves social workers working with people in pursuance of the following outcomes:

> - *keeping well and healthy and safe from harm;*
> - *having a home where they feel safe and have a sense of belonging;*
> - *having access to income and resources sufficient to meet their fundamental needs;*
> - *having supportive and trusting close relationships, including with family and friends;*
> - *having opportunities to enjoy positive life experiences, including engagement in social and community activities;*
> - *having opportunities to make a positive contribution, including participation in education, training, work or other purposeful activity;*
> - *exercising choice and control about their life and how they live it;*
> - *having the resilience and ability to cope when things change or go wrong;*
> - *having a sense of self-worth and self-efficacy; and*
> - *living a fulfilling life where their individual rights and personal dignity are respected.*

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7   Social wellbeing includes personal, social, emotional and physical wellbeing.

These outcomes provide a clear direction and focus for social work practice. Realising them is challenging and cannot be achieved through social work alone. Improving social wellbeing requires the collaboration and input of a wide range of professions, agencies and sectors. Working together, statutory, voluntary and private service providers along with a range of other professionals can more effectively meet the needs of the whole person in a seamless and co-ordinated way.

Key Principles for Social Work Practice
Social work practice and services should be based on professional principles and values.

These include:

- respect of the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals and the promotion of their right to autonomy and self-determination;
- the right of vulnerable and marginalized individuals and groups to be assisted and supported in overcoming barriers to inclusion in society;
- respect and protection of an individual's rights while at the same time having due regard to the rights and safety of others;
- the right of children and vulnerable adults to be protected from neglect, abuse or exploitation;
- transparency and fairness in professional decision-making and in the application of organization's eligibility criteria for access to services; and
- respect for diversity and the promotion of social justice.

SECTION 2: SOCIAL WORK IN NORTHERN IRELAND IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Introduction

Modern day social work is practised in a context of rapid and continuous change. Practising social work is now more complex, complicated, diverse and demanding than at any time in its history. Political, economic, social, technological and organisational changes are influencing and shaping the profession.
This section outlines key challenges and their implications for social work practice.

Political

The establishment of the NI Assembly in 1998, and more recently the devolution of criminal justice and policing in 2010, has re-established local democratic accountability. Decisions about the policy direction and budget for public services, including for social work, are determined by elected representatives in response to the needs of local people and local circumstances. The challenge for social work is to engage with, influence and support politicians in making these decisions.

> *Social workers need to be more effective in influencing policy decisions about the future direction and investment in social work services.*

The emerging public and political debate about the rights agenda, emerging notions of modern citizenship and the balance of responsibilities between the individual and the State will have a significant bearing on the social workers' role and their relationship with individuals and communities. The public, including service users, expect greater levels of choice and control in the design and delivery of services to meet their individual needs.

> *The social work role and approaches to practice will need to be redefined to reflect the shift in the power relationship between those who use services and those who provide them.*

> *Social workers need to develop and strengthen partnership and community development approaches in practice with individuals, families and communities.*

Economic

Constraint on the public purse means there is an imperative to maximise the return on investment in all public services and improve outcomes for all users. This will involve a greater emphasis on evidence-based practice, a greater focus on prevention and early intervention and a greater commitment to partnership approaches and alliances between professional groups, agencies and sectors in order to harness resources and expertise to meet the needs of people effectively and efficiently.

> *Social work practice must be based on evidence of what works.*

> *Social workers must be equipped with the knowledge, skills and expertise to deliver effective social work interventions and partnership approaches in service planning, commissioning and provision.*

The current economic recession is also impacting on peoples' lives. Growing rates of unemployment, salary freezes and reduced working hours are putting pressure on many families, in particular, those already on low incomes. There are concerns that the number of children and vulnerable adults living in poverty will grow, the gap between rich and poor will widen and social polarisation of disadvantaged groups will increase. Financial worries can lead to stress, can affect the stability of family life and relationships and can undermine an individual's mental health and ability to cope. Public services need to be able to respond to increased demand.

> *Social work must strengthen its role and contribution to the public health agenda addressing inequalities and reducing their impact on social wellbeing.*

> *Social work resources and expertise must be deployed to best effect and targeted at those who need them most.*

Social workers play an important role in assessing need, acting as gate keepers to finite resources, providing targeted social work services or signposting people to services that can help them. As gatekeepers, social workers need to maintain professional integrity in their assessments and decision-making; ensure transparency and fairness in decisions about access to services; and work within the relevant legal framework and organisational procedures. Social workers have an important role in identifying unmet need and should use this information to influence decisions about investment in and the development of services.

> *Social workers must work to recognised professional standards and ethics including the NISCC Code of Practice and be supported by their employers to do so.*

Social

At July 2011 the population of NI was some1.8m[8] and is the fastest growing in the UK with a rising birth rate and the number of older people projected to increase significantly over the next decades. Life expectancy is rising and greater numbers of people with disabilities or complex health needs are living longer.

Currently the largest resource providing care and support is unpaid carers, normally close family members. Carers too are becoming older and with changes in family life and structure this network of carers may decline in future years.

Proposals for a new sustainable model for health and social care to address changes in demographics and expectations of the public for high quality, responsive services are set out in Transforming Your Care[9] .

> *Social work has an important contribution to make in taking forward the reform agenda for health and social care, in particular, in promoting independence through the development of community based and person-centred practices.*

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8   As of July 2010, www.nisra.gov.uk
9   Transforming Your Care: A Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland, December 2011. HSC

As a result of the civil conflict in NI, between 1969 and the end of 1997, 3585 people were killed and greater numbers experienced physical injury and psychological trauma. Since the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, outbreaks of sectarian violence have continued to affect the lives of some individuals and communities. Social work services need to be responsive to people affected by both past and current violence.

The growing awareness about abuse of children and vulnerable adults within society, particularly about institutional abuse of children in the past, is enabling more people to come forward to seek help. Many of the children who come into the care of the State will have experienced some form of trauma in their childhood.

Understanding and responding effectively to the needs of those who have experienced trauma in their lives, of whatever nature, is essential in helping individuals towards recovery and living fulfilling lives in the future.

> *Social workers need the knowledge, skills and expertise to help all those who have experienced trauma in their lives.*

The number of people from different nationalities now living, working and studying in NI requires that public services develop and adapt to this increased diversity.

> *Social workers need to understand the legal frameworks, including Human Rights and Immigration legislation, which govern decisions about access to public services.*

> *Social workers need to be culturally competent.*

Technological

Technology is transforming how we communicate, how we live our lives and how we manage information. Technology offers opportunities to support and improve the lives of service users as well as opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of social workers.

Technology can be an aid to practice, an effective tool for recording and for keeping in touch with service users. It can also provide a forum for professional debate or as a gateway to the most up-to-date knowledge and research. Technology can also pose ethical dilemmas for social workers in respect of confidentiality, consent, disclosure and potentially reduce direct contact time with service users.

> *Social workers need to effectively exploit the benefits of technology in their work with service users with due regard to maintaining professional integrity and a person-centred approach in their practice.*

Technology also presents new challenges for social work practice. Social networking, as well as being a positive tool for communication, can increase the risk of grooming, bullying and peer on peer abuse for vulnerable young people and adults. Social networking also facilitates the sharing of information amongst communities of people who may pose a threat to children or vulnerable adults.

> *Social workers need to understand the role of technology in increasing risks of harm to vulnerable young people and adults and to develop the knowledge and skills to respond to and manage these risks effectively.*

Organisational

Social work in NI is organized and delivered within an integrated health and social care system covering both children's and adult services, a system unique within the UK. The Review of Public Administration represented the most significant change in the structures, organisation and management of the health and social care sector since the 1970s. The system will continue to face changes in respect of the organisation and provision of services as the agreed recommendations from Transforming Your Care[10] are implemented.

Within this context of organisational change, it is essential for social workers to maintain a focus on the needs and wishes of service users as new structures, roles and ways of working are introduced.

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10 Transforming Your Care: A Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland. 2011. HSC

> *Social workers need to ensure that those who use services have a stronger say in the way services are designed and delivered so that they are flexible and responsive to needs.*

> *Social workers need to be skilled and confident to work in a range of multi-disciplinary and inter-agency contexts.*

Professional

The profession has changed significantly over the past 30 years. It has adapted to changes in society, government, social trends and public expectations and will need to continue to do so if it is to remain relevant in the future.

> *Social workers need to be resilient to manage the challenges, pressures and uncertainties inherent in their work and able to adapt to and cope with change.*

In the past 10 years social work has become a regulated, graduate profession with a recognised career structure. Only those individuals who are registered with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) are entitled to practise as a social worker in NI.

While these developments have enhanced the profession, this has not been reflected in the understanding or status of social work in the public domain. This reinforces the need for a stronger voice for the profession, particularly in the media.

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW), is the UK-wide professional association for social work and has been in existence for over 40 years. It represents approximately 11% of the registered social work workforce in England and 9.5% in Northern Ireland[11]. As a member organisation, it plays an important role in representing the interests of its members in each of the devolved administrations[12], speaking out on their behalf to the public, employers and government. And in September 2011, established a Social Workers Union.

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11 Based on statistics provided by BASW, March 2012
12 Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers (NIASW) is the NI branch of BASW

The College of Social Work (TCSW) was established in England in January 2012. Its membership represents approximately 10% of the registered social work workforce in England[13]. It is expected that the TCSW will assume responsibility for specific functions of the General Social Care Council (GSCC), including professional training standards, when the GSCC is abolished and the registration of social workers transfers to the Health Professionals Council (HPC) in England[14]. The current policy in NI is that NISCC, along with the Social Care Councils in Wales and Scotland, will continue to register social workers in their respective countries as well as retaining responsibility for professional training standards.

Talks are ongoing between BASW and TCSW about the possibility of forming a single, united College of Social Work representing social workers across the whole of the UK. This would be a positive development for the profession.

The National Association of Probation Officers is a trade union, professional association and campaigning group. It represents probation officers and family court staff throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

It will be important for government in each devolved administration to promote and maintain relationships with the range of bodies across the UK, including membership-based organisations, which have the potential to shape and develop the future of the profession.

> *Those organisations that represent social work and social workers should work together to strengthen the influence and voice of the profession.*

Conclusion

This strategy seeks to provide direction for the future of social work, to strengthen the capacity of the workforce, improve social work services and build confidence and trust in the profession as well as promote an understanding of the role and positive contribution of social work within our society.

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13 Based on statistics provided by TCSW, March 2012
14 Transfer of registration of social workers from the GSCC to the HPC is planned to take place in July 2012.

SECTION 3: A STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

Introduction

The implementation of the vision for social work requires a strategic, co-ordinated approach to equip social workers to meet changing needs and expectations and ensure social work services can respond to future demand.

The ten strategic priorities will build a strong foundation for social work in the future. The commitment to strengthening social work as a valued public service recognises the important role it plays in helping create a healthy, fair, tolerant, safe, prosperous and inclusive society.

The priorities are presented under three inter-dependent themes:

- strengthening the capacity of the workforce;
- improving social work services; and
- building leadership and trust.

The priorities focus on social work practice and aim to maximise the contribution social workers can make in improving and safeguarding the social wellbeing and safety of individuals, families and communities.

> *"The Strategy provides clarity and direction for the social work profession and provides a valuable opportunity for social work to affirm its identify and reclaim its confidence."*
>
> *Chief Executive, Southern Trust*

STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF THE WORKFORCE

> **Strategic Priority 1: Valuing the Workforce, Building Confidence**
>
> **We will improve employer supports for social workers in carrying out their work.**

Employers have a responsibility to ensure all professionals, including social workers, have the right supports to practise effectively, to develop professionally and to discharge their duties safely to the required standards.

With the right supports, social workers feel valued and confident in their role and more resilient to deal with the pressures and risks associated with their work. This is important as the work undertaken by social workers is challenging, emotionally distressing and on occasion can be dangerous.

Ensuring access to professional supervision, providing opportunities for continuous professional development, creating time for reflection and de-briefing and supporting work-based audit and research are important professional supports.

Supporting social workers requires employers to ensure social work time and skills are used to best effect and that there is administrative back-up to support them in the professional task. Technology can play an important part in improving and supporting the efficiency and effectiveness of social workers.

> *"The 10 Year Strategy is a valuable statement by the NI Government of the important contribution social work makes to individuals, family and community wellbeing."*
>
> *Chief Executive, SCIE*

Supporting social workers requires:

- agreed standards for employers to ensure the appropriate professional supports are in place in the workplace;

- employers to support registered social workers to comply with the regulatory requirements of the NISCC;

- reducing unnecessary bureaucracy for social workers and ensuring a healthy working environment with appropriate administrative and technological supports; and

- investment in measures to tackle violence against social workers to ensure their safety.

First Steps:

- **develop standards for employers to promote regional consistency in professional supports for social workers in different settings and sectors;**

- **promote access to professional supervision to agreed standards for all social workers; and**

- **develop risk assessment and prevention strategies to support the safety of social workers in their daily practice.**

Strategic Priority 2: Building Capacity, Meeting Demand

We will improve workforce planning and deployment of social workers to meet demand.

Demand for social work services has been increasing and changing and is predicted to continue to do so. Robust information and planning models of service provision are required to ensure effective workforce planning and to predict future workforce needs.

It is important within the context of rising demand that social work workloads are managed effectively and safely and that social workers can be deployed flexibly to areas where their skills and expertise are needed most.

Recruitment and retention of high quality social workers is essential for a stable workforce. The introduction of a social work career structure with the establishment of both senior and principal practitioner grades is intended to retain experience and expertise in front-line practice. This career structure will strengthen professional practice and governance arrangements and ensure staff with relevant levels of expertise and at the appropriate grades are available to meet service demand.

Matching capacity with demand requires:

- more sophisticated workforce information and planning to ensure that the supply and deployment of social workers remains in step with projected demand;

- targeted approaches to support the retention and deployment of experienced staff in Children's and Adult Services and in specialist practice areas;

- effective and transparent workload weighting, allocation and management systems for social workers in the statutory sector; and

- a workforce which reflects the changes in the profile of the population of NI and the need for social work services.

First Steps:

- **review the role and deployment of senior and principal practitioners to inform future workforce planning in Children's and Adult Services; and**

- **introduce a workload weighting system for social work in adult services that builds on the experience in children's services.**

Strategic Priority 3: Adding Value, Delivering Outcomes

We will promote a culture of continuous improvement and a focus on demonstrating both the outcomes and learning from practice.

Expenditure on social work services is significant. It is important that this investment is targeted and used in ways that are effective in meeting people's needs. This requires social workers to keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date, to base their practice on evidence and research of what works, to be effective in their interventions and to be able to demonstrate the difference they make in people's lives.

The evaluation of social work interventions must actively involve service users. The evaluation process must demonstrate stronger links between inputs, outputs and outcomes as well as the effective use of resources.

All social work practitioners need access to up-to-date research and evidence to inform their practice decisions. They also need to be supported to reflect on, learn from and continuously improve their practice and to engage in both on-the-job learning and formal training. There needs to be more effective ways of linking and embedding the learning from research, inspections, CMRs, statutory inquiries and reviews into practice.

Building the capacity and creating the conditions for social work practitioners to undertake audits or research can help create a dynamic learning culture in the workplace.

Improving and evidencing outcomes requires:

- systems and tools to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of social work intervention and demonstrate outcomes and value for money;

- mechanisms for gathering feedback from people who use services;

- more effective 'learning loops' to ensure lessons are learned and embedded into practice;

- greater focus on the use of audit and research by practitioners to inform practice in the workplace; and

- support for social workers to engage in reflective practice and on-the-job learning.

First Steps:

- **develop tools to evaluate the outcomes of social work practice;**

- **build the capacity of social workers to undertake and use audit and research in the workplace; and**

- **pilot and evaluate different ways of reviewing the effectiveness of social work practice and promoting learning and continuous improvements in the workplace including peer review, team supervision, coaching and bite-sized learning approaches.**

Strategic Priority 4: Developing Expertise, Supporting Accountability

We will support the development of professional expertise and the individual accountability of social workers.

As society changes and as peoples' needs become more complex it is essential that social work practice continues to evolve and develop and that social workers are equipped with the right knowledge and skills to deliver an effective service.

High quality education and training linked to service needs is a key component in ensuring social workers develop the expertise necessary to improve outcomes for service users. There needs to be a better understanding of the level of competence and expertise that can be expected of practitioners at different points in their career. Social work education and training has to be planned in ways that support the progressive acquisition and development of skills and expertise, linked to changing needs, job roles and career structures.

"….. it is essential to pursue excellence in key social work tasks ….."- NIPSA

As a regulated profession, every social worker is accountable for the quality and standard of their practice, including the discharge of statutory functions, and for complying with the NISCC Code of Practice for Social Care Workers. Given the nature of decisions social workers make which may restrict people's liberties and affect the future course of their lives, it is imperative that their judgements are based on professional standards and values, are informed by knowledge and experience, reflect best practice guidance and comply with legal requirements.

It is important that social work expertise is deployed in ways that enable social workers to deliver greatest benefit. This requires intelligent service design, a greater focus on prevention and early intervention and ensuring that the time social workers spend working directly with service users is maximised.

Developing expertise and supporting accountability requires:

- planned purposeful education and training opportunities linked to job role and career progression;

- ensuring social workers understand their professional responsibilities and accountabilities as a registered social worker;

- professional standards and guidelines to support practice decisions; and

- appropriate skills mix in service design to maximise social workers' time in direct practice activity.

First Steps:

- **support the development and use of agreed professional standards and ethics for social work within the existing regulatory framework;**

- **develop an action plan to promote social workers' understanding of their professional responsibilities and accountabilities as a regulated profession;**

- **ensure effective and flexible arrangements are in place to support the progressive development of expertise of qualified social workers throughout their careers to meet service user needs; and**

- **review practice reporting requirements and opportunities to streamline processes and minimise duplication.**

IMPROVING SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

Strategic Priority 5: Person Centred Services, Flexible Working

We will design and deliver social work services with and around the needs of the people who use them, making the best use of resources.

Quality, safety, effectiveness and sustainability are at the heart of the reform agenda for health and social care. There is an increasing emphasis on service users and carers determining how they wish to be supported and on models of self-directed care. This emphasis reflects the profession's values and commitment to being person-centred and supporting peoples' autonomy and self determination.

People have high expectations of social workers and rightly so. They expect social workers to be available and accessible when they are needed. They expect social workers to provide a service of a consistently high quality.

Accessibility of services is about the balance between thresholds of need and levels of demand as well as the availability of alternative services to which people can be signposted.

The majority of community based social work services are based on traditional office opening hours of 9 am to 5 pm between Monday and Friday. Many service users, including school-age children, are unavailable during these hours.

Evidence confirms that personal or family crises, emergency admissions of children into care, attempts at self-harm, serious adverse incidents, emergency mental health assessments and applications for secure accommodation for young people can happen at any time, often at night or weekends. Under current provision, these crises are dealt with by an out-of-hours duty social worker often with little or no knowledge of the individual or their circumstances.

Responsive and flexible services require:

- more responsive services, including the development of an effective out-of-hours service and promotion of opportunities for self-directed care, based on the views of people who use and deliver services;

- more flexible working patterns to meet needs and changing expectations;

- pro-active use of technology to transform the delivery of services;

- promotion and development of person-centred approaches to social work practice and delivery of individualised care; and

- re-definition of the role of social work to reflect the shift in power between those who use services and those who provide them.

First Steps:

- **introduce a regional model for a dedicated out of hours social work service;**

- **establish pilot schemes to examine different ways of providing services including team models of working, extended opening hours, flexible working patterns and use of technology; and**

- **promote person-centred and inclusive approaches in assessment, planning, delivery and review of individualised care plans.**

Strategic Priority 6: Promoting Effective Partnerships, Strengthening Integrated Working.

We will support social workers to engage in partnership approaches to practice and service delivery and to work effectively within a multi-disciplinary, interagency context.

Social work at its best relies upon effective partnerships. Firstly, and most importantly, partnerships with service users and at a wider level with local communities. Partnerships with other professions, agencies and sectors are equally important in order to meet the multi-factoral nature of peoples' needs and improve and safeguard their social wellbeing.

Increasingly, services are being planned and delivered by multi-disciplinary teams or in collaboration with other agencies and sectors. On occasions, a social worker may be the sole representative of the profession within a multi-disciplinary context.

It is critical that social workers are properly equipped to work effectively in the full range of partnerships; at a practice level with service users and communities, at a team level with other disciplines, and operationally and strategically with other agencies and sectors. Employers need to ensure that professional governance arrangements are in place to support social workers in all of these circumstances.

Effective partnership and integrated working requires:

-   community development approaches to facilitate and strengthen local joint working and partnership arrangements;

-   training in skills of working effectively in multi-disciplinary and inter-agency work;

-   effective professional governance

arrangements to support social workers in partnership, multi-disciplinary and inter-agency working; and

- constructive working environments which maximise the contribution that all disciplines bring to service delivery.

First Steps:

- **review training requirements to support effective partnership and multi-disciplinary working and ensure availability of relevant training for social workers;**

- **audit professional governance arrangements for social workers in settings where they are not line-managed by a social worker; and**

- **promote and evaluate effective models of partnership working with service users in the planning and delivery of care.**

Strategic Priority 7: Promoting High Standards, Managing Risk

We will ensure that professional governance arrangements support social workers to work to consistently high standards and manage risks effectively.

Social work often involves managing risk. Social workers cannot guarantee that a child or vulnerable adult will never be harmed. Nor can they guarantee that individuals who are intent on harming themselves or others can be prevented from doing so. What social workers can do is to identify, minimise and manage the risk of individuals being harmed, harming themselves or harming others.

Employers need to ensure social workers are supported in managing such risks by having in place robust professional governance arrangements.

Effective social care governance requires clear lines of professional accountability from the front-line of practice to the boardroom. This includes regular supervision, robust arrangements to oversee the discharge of relevant statutory functions, effective performance management and the development and use of agreed standardised tools to support professional analysis and judgement regarding need and risk. Everyone has a part to play in ensuring a co-ordinated approach to social care governance including individuals, teams, senior managers and employers.

Governance and regulatory requirements have greatly increased over recent years with a commensurate increase in reporting and information requirements. It is important that duplication and unnecessary effort in information gathering is eliminated. Relevant information that is gathered should be collated, analysed and used to inform learning and decision-making to improve practice and service delivery.

Ensuring effective professional governance requires:

- clear professional accountability arrangements to oversee the operation of the Schemes for the Discharge of Delegated Statutory Functions;

- robust professional governance arrangements from frontline practice to the most senior levels in the organisation to ensure safe, high standards of practice and management of risk and to enable employers to discharge their duty of care;

- effective and efficient information gathering and reporting mechanisms;

- evidence based risk assessment, including positive risk assessment and management tools and training for staff in their application; and

- clarity about professional roles and responsibilities for social care governance within organisations.

First Steps:

- **review the implementation and effectiveness of social care governance arrangements in Children's and Adult Services;**

- **implement and review revised reporting and accountability arrangements for the discharge of the schemes of delegated statutory functions;**

- **review and update relevant DHSSPS Circulars on roles and responsibilities of the Executive Directors of Social Work to reflect changes in organisational structures;**

- **explore ways of supporting professional judgement including the use of standardised assessment and diagnostic tools which are informed by appropriate evidence;**

- **development of mechanisms to ensure learning from serious adverse incidents and near misses as well as from good practice is identified and actioned on a regular basis; and**

- **streamline information gathering and reporting mechanisms to ensure relevant information is gathered efficiently and effectively and is available in a useful format.**

BUILDING LEADERSHIP AND TRUST

Social work needs to be able to effectively discharge its responsibilities to those who are vulnerable and marginalised in society. Professional leadership and management of staff is essential if we are to achieve this.

Professional management is critical to ensuring safe, high standards of social work practice. First line managers play a particularly important role as the guardians of the standard of front-line practice as well as acting as the conduit for the implementation of new policies and procedures and the delivery of organisational change. Planning, preparation, development and ongoing supports are crucial to secure and retain a supply of high quality and high performing first line managers.

Professional leadership is critical to inspire, lead and represent the profession. We need to foster a community of leaders for social work who have the credibility and capability to influence the future direction of the profession, lead developments in practice and services and speak authoritatively on behalf of social workers.

Developing professional leadership and management requires:

- effective succession planning and promotion of social work management as an attractive career option;

- an agreed regional framework for the development and continuous professional development of social work managers at all levels;

- organisational, professional and administrative structures to support first line managers to effectively discharge their professional responsibilities; and

- opportunities that foster leadership qualities and capabilities of social workers from a wide range of backgrounds including those in practice, management, education and regulation.

First Steps:

- **promote professional management as an attractive and rewarding career option for experienced social workers;**

- **ensure access to effective learning, development and support opportunities training for first line managers of social workers;**

- **promote initiatives to develop and support a community of leaders for social work; and**

- **develop a structured programme of career development opportunities for middle and senior managers/professionals, including job rotation opportunities.**

> "*This model of job rotation is welcomed ….. and will support the concept of growing leaders/managers …..*"
>
> *Chief Executive, NISCC*

Strategic Priority 9: Promoting Trust, Fostering Understanding

We will promote a greater understanding of the contribution of social work in improving and safeguarding social wellbeing.

Public expectations of social work are high and political and media scrutiny has never been greater. While the majority of service users and their carers are satisfied with their experience of social workers, social workers are often represented negatively in the press as either interfering too much or not doing enough.

Public understanding of the profession is largely based on media coverage of the small number of cases where things have gone tragically wrong. The positive side of social work is rarely profiled and clearly this affects the public's perception and trust in the profession.

> *"Public trust and confidence in social work is at a crossroads. High profile cases where there have been tragic outcomes have given the press free rein to misrepresent and dismiss what social work achieves in bringing positive outcomes to people's lives."*
>
> *NIPSA*

The public needs to have an informed understanding about the role of social work, the challenges facing social workers in their day to day practice and the difference they can and do make in many people's lives. Social workers must be confident and articulate in explaining what they do and what can realistically be expected of them by society.

> *"Develop the skills and confidence amongst the profession to talk publicly about the job."*
>
> *Social Work Service User and Carers Group at NISCC*

Promoting trust and fostering understanding requires:

- the involvement of those who have direct experience of social work services in communicating the difference they make;

- initiatives that highlight good practice and the positive outcomes of social work practice;

- social workers with the competence and confidence to represent the profession to the media and general public; and

- an understanding of the broad scope of social work practice.

First Steps

- **develop the skills of social workers to effectively represent social work in the media and to the general public;**

- **promote and implement initiatives that show-case and promote the positive contribution of social work to people's lives, involving service users;**

- **involve people who use services in communicating the difference social work makes in people's lives; and**

> *"It is very important that the public are aware of what a social worker does and what can be expected from them."*
>
> *Assistant Director Social Work, Western Trust*

- **a clear articulation of the role of social work and its contribution to improving and safeguarding the social wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.**

Strategic Priority 10: Influencing policy, Informing service and practice development.

We will strengthen the capability of social work to influence policy decisions, practice developments and service improvements.

Those who deliver social work services and those who receive them have important roles in informing and influencing policy decisions as well as contributing to service improvements and practice developments.

Decisions about policy, service improvement or practice developments need to be informed by evidence as well as by people's experiences. Good decision-making requires information and analysis of the issues to be addressed as well as a critical analysis of the evidence about what has worked in other contexts and settings to inform the way forward.

The experience and knowledge of front line staff and service users must be used to identify trends in demand, needs and outcomes and to inform decisions about investment and development of services. Social workers need to be able to speak confidently about developments and research in social work at local, regional, national and international levels.

Other sources of information such as messages from inspections, inquiries, reviews, examples of best practice and data on outcomes for service users also need to be collated in ways that are useful for decision makers.

Influencing policy, service and practice development requires:

- a body of social work research across different areas of practice;

- an evidence-base of what works in social work practice;

- data that identifies trends in demand for services and facilitates benchmarking of activity locally, regionally and internationally; and

- collation and analysis of feedback from service users about their experience and outcomes of social work intervention.

First Steps:

- **a review into barriers to social care research activity in NI;**

- **measures to promote 'what works' in social work; and**

- **improvements in the consistency and collation of data to identify trends locally and regionally in key service areas to inform future development and investment.**

SECTION 4: A FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The Framework (framework) brings together, in a coherent manner, 5 key social work roles that will support the delivery of the vision for social work set out in this document. These roles include:

- Prevention: Empowerment;
- Support: Early intervention;
- Intervention: Person-centred social work practice;
- Protection: Investigation and Management of Risk; and
- Control: Restriction of the Exercise of Rights or Liberty

The framework is based on research, social workers' accounts of what their practice involves[15], on government and public expectations and on service users' views with regard to what they value about social workers.

It is not intended to be a definitive statement about the role of social work or the extent of the full range of social work interventions. It is recognised that expectations of social workers may vary across employers and sectors as well as being influenced by how social work is organised and managed in different contexts, prevailing social issues, government policies and public expectations.

The framework takes a thematic approach to describing key social work roles.

A hallmark of a maturing and self-confident profession is the ability to transcend a task-based approach to focus on broad themes and principles of professional practice[16]

It represents a continuum of practice reflecting the diversity of the personal circumstances, life situations and needs of individuals, families and communities and

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15 People Work not just paperwork, NISCC, 2008
16 People Work not just paperwork, NISCC, 2008

the broad scope of social work as it is practised across a wide range of settings and sectors.
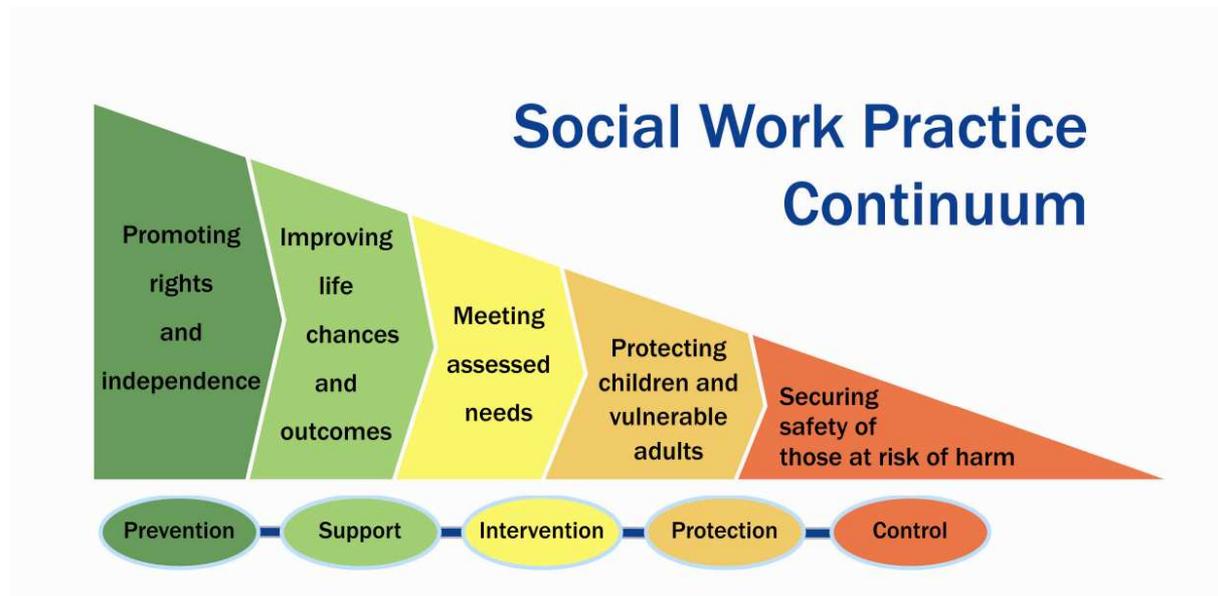
The practice continuum reflects the current emphasis on early intervention and prevention both as a means of improving the quality of life and outcomes for people but also in terms of reducing the need for more expensive targeted or specialist services in the immediate or longer term.

Presenting social work in this way has its limitations and is not intended to suggest that any stage or role along the continuum is mutually exclusive of the others. All social workers, irrespective of their job or work context, will adopt elements of each role in their day to day practice, reflecting their professional commitment to empowering and promoting the self-determination and rights of those they work with alongside their professional responsibility to safeguard and protect the most vulnerable in our society.

Overarching statements of purpose are identified to indicate the primary focus and desired outcome of social work practice against each specific role.

It will be important to demonstrate that social work interventions do lead to tangible benefits for individuals, families and communities in line with the statements of

purpose. It is therefore important that measures and outcome indicators are developed, linked to this framework, to demonstrate the effectiveness of social work intervention at individual, community and regional levels.

The overview of each role that follows is illustrative of the range of life circumstances where social workers are involved. It is not intended to be a comprehensive account of social work practice.

Prevention: Empowerment

> **Empowerment: promoting the rights and independence of the most vulnerable and marginalised in society.**

Everyone in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors has a role in prevention, working with people in the context of their environment.

Social workers work with some of the most vulnerable and socially marginalized people, many of whom experience personal or social barriers to living independently and being integrated within society.   A rights-based approach and principles of social justice and inclusion are key elements in the process of empowerment and underpin all of social work practice.

Empowerment involves social workers working alongside individuals and communities to address the challenges and barriers they face and to improve opportunities for their greater participation in society. Signposting and connecting people with local resources and supports can help develop peoples' capacity to solve their own problems.

Using models of practice based on strengths and resilience, social workers focus on the capabilities of individuals, groups or communities and help them to:

- develop the skills and confidence to express their needs and concerns;
- make decisions and achieve outcomes in ways that fit their circumstances and preferences;
- have greater control and responsibility over their lives; and
- prevent the need for statutory intervention.

Social workers will always work to empower those they work with, facilitating as much individual choice as possible over decisions, even within the context of exercising compulsory powers to protect or control vulnerable people at risk. Some people experience difficulties in accessing services and can also face

prejudice and discrimination. Social workers support those who encounter barriers in accessing services such as those with criminal records, who are homeless, people with mental health challenges and migrant families.

Where necessary, social workers will advocate alongside, or on behalf of people, to promote their individual rights, to facilitate their access to services, help to defend them against unjustified intervention, challenge policies and situations that contribute to their marginalisation and lobby for improvements in the availability of services.

Social workers in the voluntary and community sector are often involved in user-led organisations to support people to participate in decisions affecting their lives and to lobby and influence service providers, policy makers and government.

Using community development approaches and working alongside other agencies and organizations, social workers can help to build stronger, self-reliant communities and effective working relationships that promote people's rights, challenge inequalities and improve local supports.

Support: Early Intervention

Early intervention: working to improve life chances and outcomes and prevent the onset or escalation of problems at all ages and stages.

Social workers can support universal services such as health, education and early years to pick up and respond to early signs of problems as well as tackling specific personal or social problems of individuals or communities.

By being alert to indicators of neglect or abuse, social workers can intervene before situations deteriorate and become critical. They can connect people to appropriate services; they can help strengthen the supports available from family, friends and the wider community; and they can work with others to reduce or manage the risks.

There is a strong body of evidence that what happens to children in early childhood influences their future life as adults. Universal supports for all families ensure every child gets a good start in life while targeted interventions for vulnerable young children and their families can prevent the on-set of problems or prevent problems from escalating or becoming entrenched.[17]

> *Social work is the lead profession[18] with a statutory duty to co-ordinate inter-agency planning to support children in need. Children's Service Plans provide a framework for early intervention services targeted at supporting families and improving outcomes for all children, including the most vulnerable, in local areas.*

Research shows that children living in poverty are more likely to experience poorer educational attainment and poorer outcomes in life generally. Poor educational attainment is linked to mental health issues, greater exposure to criminal activity, social isolation and poverty. Looked after children are more likely to have poor academic outcomes when compared with children from any other background[19] .

Early interventions to keep young people in school and to achieve educationally by encouraging them to have higher aspirations for their future are important measures in improving outcomes, opportunities and future life chances for children. Social workers help to keep young people included at school and support them to benefit from their time in education.

The Education Welfare Service is a specialist education support service, which seeks to help young people of compulsory school age and their families get the best out of the education system. Social workers, working as Education Welfare Officers, also provide a Child Protection Support Services for Schools to help teachers and other professionals promote and safeguard the welfare of children and young people.

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17   Reaching Out: Think Family, 2007, Social Exclusion Task Force, Cabinet Office
18   Part IV, Schedule 2 Children Order (NI) 1995 reference
19   Care Matters, DHSSPS, March 2007

> **4,334 children were referred to the Education Welfare Service in 2010/11.**

Emerging evidence[20] suggests that early supports are also effective in adult services[21]. Befriending schemes, lunch clubs, out-reach or low intensity practical support as well as being cost-effective can reduce loneliness and depression. Services such as rapid response and re-ablement are effective ways of reducing on-going support needs and sustaining independent living.

Intervention: Person-Centred Social Work Practice

> **Person-centred social work practice: working with people in need and supporting their right to autonomy and self-management of their lives and/or care.**

A key role of social workers is to help individuals and families to:

- maintain independence and keep safe and well;
- deal with personal or social problems;
- cope in crisis situations; and
- recover from traumatic life events or distressing experiences.

> *Social workers will normally be in the lead role for individuals referred to social care services where there is one or more of the following:*
> - *a need for a comprehensive assessment of an individual's circumstances;*
> - *identified risks to social wellbeing or personal safety;*
> - *level of vulnerability, including capacity;*
> - *actual or potential interference with people's rights (including right to liberty, private or family life);*
> - *complexity of circumstances;*
> - *risk of breakdown/deterioration in personal or social circumstances;*

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20 Windle, Francis and Coomber (2011) Preventing loneliness and social isolation: interventions and outcomes Social Care Institute of Excellence
21 National Partnership for Older People Projects

> - *need for a co-ordinated multi-disciplinary or inter-agency response;*
> - *need for understanding of legislative requirements, including Human Rights;*
> - *discharge of relevant statutory functions.*

Social workers help people to find solutions that work for them and their unique circumstances and to have as much control over plans and decisions as possible. A person-centred approach to practice is key to achieving this.

Person-centred practice involves finding out what people want, the support they need and how they can get it. It requires social workers to be flexible in their approach and to use a range of skills, techniques and interventions that best suit individuals and their circumstances. Interventions can range from advice or information giving, problem solving, providing emotional support, advocacy, mediation, counselling, family support, family therapy, and group work to more specific social work interventions and therapeutic approaches to practice. Social workers also play an important role in signposting people to other specialist services that can best meet their needs.

Central to the effectiveness of any social work intervention is the quality of the relationship between the social worker and the person(s) they are working with and this is supported by service users' views[22].

> *People are positive about social workers who:*
> - *develop a meaningful relationship with them based on empathy;*
> - *can be trusted and treat them with respect and honesty;*
> - *put them at the centre;*
> - *focus on their abilities and strengths ;*
> - *support them to make informed choices and decisions;*
> - *help them get the services and benefits they are entitled to; and*
> - *are dependable and don't give up on them where others have.*

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22 People Work not just paperwork, NISCC, 2008

Social workers also help to promote the independence, safety and wellbeing of those who need ongoing support with daily living due to their age, infirmity, illness, disability or life circumstances.

> *In 2010/11in Northern Ireland there were:*
> - *15,683 persons designated mentally ill;*
> - *9,173 learning disabled persons; and*
> - *9,251 persons with physical disability or sensory impairment.*
>   *were in contact with HSC Trusts.*

Most people want to stay in their own homes even when they have complex care needs. Social workers work with individuals, their family and friends and other professionals to assess, plan and co-ordinate appropriate levels of care and support which are based on people's decisions about how their needs can best be met. Sometimes this will involve helping people to make their own care arrangements, for example through the use of Direct Payments. It can also involve supporting family or friends who have taken on the main caring role for an individual.

Working with adults involves a positive but measured approach to risk assessment and management whereby a person's right to make decisions about how they live their life has to be balanced against their capacity to consent and the protection of the rights of others. This can require social workers to support individuals to live in situations where there are risks to their safety or wellbeing. In these circumstances social workers will work with others to find ways to help reduce and manage the risks.

When someone can no longer be cared for safely at home, social workers help individuals and their families make positive choices about their future care arrangements.

> *12,356 care packages were in place in Adult Services in 2010/11*

Wherever care is provided - in a person's home or in a day care or residential setting - social workers, along with others, play an important role in monitoring the standard of care through routine visits and regular reviews which should involve feedback from the service user and his/her family or friends.

Trusts have a statutory duty to register and inspect child-minding and day care services to ensure they provide good, safe, quality childcare. Social workers make an important contribution in ensuring minimum standards of care, including arrangements for child protection, are in place and complied within these settings.

> *34,447 referrals were made to Children's Services in 2010/11.*

Social workers also work with people who have experienced traumatic events such as abuse, death of a loved one, acquired disability or diagnosis of a life-limiting illness. They also co-operate with other essential services in emergency situations where there is major disruption in people's lives because of natural disaster, violence or intimidation.

Protection: Investigation and Management of Risk

> **Investigation and management of risk: working to protect children and adults who are at risk of harm from neglect, abuse or exploitation.**

Protecting children and adults from harm or the risk of harm is a very specific social work role within the wider safeguarding agenda. The nature of harm caused to victims can be physical, sexual, psychological, financial, or harm through neglect, that is, the withholding of, or failure to provide, adequate care or support.

Harm can be deliberate, or as a result of a lack of knowledge or awareness. It can be the consequence of a single act; of repeated acts; or of multiple acts (e.g. a person may be the subject of neglect and also be financially exploited); or, indeed, by a failure to act.

Harm can be caused in family, institutional or community settings, by those known to the individual, or more rarely by a stranger. Harm also manifests in other ways such as domestic violence, forced marriage, so called honour-based violence, hate crime, self neglect or human trafficking. There is an increasing incidence of children (some of whom may be unaccompanied) and adults being brought to NI against their will as victims of human trafficking for sexual or labour exploitation or domestic servitude. More recently, there is evidence emerging about individuals being trafficked within and out of the United Kingdom (UK) for similar purposes.

The risk of harm crosses all socio-economic, racial and ethnic groups, but some people may be at increased risk of exposure to harm solely because of their situation or life circumstances. Examples include: children living in families where there is domestic violence or alcohol or drug abuse or there are individuals with mental health needs, learning disabilities or who are older and dependant on others. Some individuals place themselves at risk of harm through their own risky behaviours or because of their lifestyle choices.

2,401 children were on the NI Child Protection Register at 31 March 2011

The primary responsibility for protecting children rests with their parents, who should ensure that their children are properly cared for, safe from danger in the home and free from risk from others. Adults too should be enabled to minimise their exposure to risk of harm. However, many adults also depend on care givers (informal or paid) to look after them and to help keep them safe. Some parents and care givers are not always able to ensure this degree of safety and some may even contribute to the risk of harm to those they are supposed to be caring for.

1,936 adult protection referrals were made in NI in 2010/11, of which 1,031 (53%) related to older people

In these situations it is the vigilance of extended family members, neighbours, friends as well as other professionals who can help identify and report concerns

about those they believe to be at risk. Failure to report concerns or share information, however small, can delay the provision of necessary help and leave individuals exposed to prolonged and sustained risk of significant harm and, in extreme circumstances, loss of life.

But recognising the signs that harm has or is at risk of occurring, and reporting concerns is not straightforward. People worry about getting it wrong; are concerned about possible consequences for the individual or family; sometimes fear a damaged relationship; or, simply, do not know who to talk to. Even when a concern is reported, fear, misguided loyalty to, or dependence on, the perpetrator can keep victims silent while perpetrators themselves can be skilled in denial, cover-up, secrecy and manipulation, making detection and intervention difficult.

Although the public is often ambivalent about intervention (their own or the State's) in the private lives of others they are, at the same time, highly critical when a child or adult at risk is harmed. This, coupled with an unrealistic expectation held by some that social workers know about and can prevent harm occurring to every child or adult at risk, contributes to protection work being one of the most stressful and challenging areas of social work practice - a fact often reflected in high workforce absence and turnover rates.

> *Key messages from research[23] confirm that effective protection practice requires:*
> - *all professionals recognising and responding to early warning signs of abuse or neglect;*
> - *co-ordination and co-operation between services;*
> - *timely and effective information sharing between professionals and agencies; and*
> - *identified individual(s) with lead responsibility for individual case(s).*

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23 Safeguarding Children Across Services: Messages from research on identifying and responding to child maltreatment available at http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RBX-10-09.pdf

Research[24] also highlights the importance of a child-centred approach in child protection practice including listening carefully to what a child has to say[25], observing how they are and taking seriously their views in planning how to support and protect them. Similarly, the need to ensure a person-centred approach, which is respectful of human rights and achieves the balance between the right of the individual to be protected with, among other things, their right to self-determination is at the core of adult protection.

The social work role in protection practice involves investigating situations where individuals are suspected of suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. Social work inquiries may run concurrently with police investigations (joint protocol investigations[26]) and good communication between both agencies is essential.

> ***3,840 child protection investigations were completed during 2010/11, of which 810 were joint protocol investigations with the PSNI.***

Where risk of harm, or evidence of actual harm is substantiated, social workers, with the victim at the centre of the process, work with others to plan and agree how to protect the individual(s) concerned and promote their welfare by preventing, reducing or managing the risks, in order to promote the best possible outcome for victims. At the same time social workers will strive to support families and care givers; work to achieve improvement of relationships; and seek opportunities to help perpetrators (some of whom may themselves be children or adults at risk) address their behaviour.

In virtually every case where a child or adult has been identified as being at risk, there will be family members or others who may resent the intrusion of social workers into their lives. Parents, relatives and even those who are at risk or who have been harmed may be hostile or obstructive to professional involvement. While

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24 Http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/voice-of-child-learning-lessons-serious-case-reviews

25 Http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/safeguarding/files/safeguarding_knowledge_review.pdf

26 http://www.rcpc.hscni.net/Publications/ProtocolVideoEvidence.pdf (Joint Protocol for Child Abuse)
    http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/consult/Policies/index.html#P-1_0 (Joint Protocol for Abuse of Vulnerable Adults)

endeavouring to build and maintain constructive relationships with those who feel their right to a private family life, or their 'entitlement' to impose their will on others, are being challenged, the social worker must keep the welfare, safety and best interests of the child or adult at risk as their primary focus and concern.

Social workers need to be tenacious in pursuing their inquiries in these circumstances; knowledgeable about what the law permits; skilful in balancing competing rights in the context of the individual, the family and wider society; confident in initiating the required protective measures in a timely way as well as being skilled in managing difficult relationships and conflict in what are complex and challenging situations.

Responses to risks should always be proportionate and balance the need to protect people without unnecessary intrusion into the lives of individuals and their families. There are risks for social workers in both overestimating and underestimating dangers in situations[27] and they need to be rigorous in testing that their assessment of the risks is accurate and realistic. It is crucial that those in greatest danger get an immediate response and those whose needs can be safely met within the nuclear or extended family circle through a co-ordinated care and protection plan are identified.

> ### *928 adult care and protection plans were in place at 31 March 2011.*

For those assessed at risk, there needs to be ongoing involvement and vigilance to ensure situations are to be closely monitored and any changes in the levels of risk are quickly identified and appropriate action, including the use of legal powers, taken in a timely way. Linked to this is the importance of there being realistic expectations of the ability of social workers to fully predict the future in what are often chaotic and volatile situations.

When it is no longer possible for a child to live at home with his or her parents, social workers will continue to work with families using techniques such as Family Group Conferencing to explore all options for alternative care including kinship care.

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27 The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report *A child-centred system,* Munro, May 2011

Where possible, decisions about alternative care on a temporary or permanent basis are made in partnership with parents and with their consent and co-operation. However, there is always the need for professional judgement about the need to make a timely authoritative intervention to ensure the protection of the child even when the parents are co-operating. Where parental consent is not forthcoming social workers should always act in the best interests of the child and, where appropriate, make a timely legal application for a Care Order.

At 31 March 2011, there were 2,511 looked after children in NI.

In relation to adults at risk, consideration of consent is central to decision-making about protective interventions, for example, in determining the ability of the adult at risk to make lifestyle choices, such as choosing to remain in a situation where they risk being harmed; determining whether a particular act or transaction is harmful or consensual; and determining to what extent the adult can and should be asked to take decisions about how best to deal with a potentially harmful situation. *As a general rule*, consent should be present before an adult protective intervention is made. For consent to be valid, the decision needs to be informed, made by an individual with capacity and made free from coercion. The absence of capacity or the presence of coercion or undue influence, are likely to render consent invalid; in these circumstances a protective intervention is likely to be necessary.

In a situation where an individual is considered capable of giving consent but chooses to withhold it, it may be possible for a social worker to intervene where:

- the restriction of the individual's rights is lawful;
- there is a permissible aim, for example, the protection of health, wellbeing, the prevention of crime, or the protection of the rights of others; and
- the intervention is relevant, sufficient and proportionate to identified need.

In all such circumstances, the social worker will be guided by what is in the best interests of the adult at risk.

Social workers also play a key role in the Public Protection Arrangements for NI[28] (PPANI). Social workers are co-located in Public Protection Units with police officers. Each Trust employs a social worker at a senior level to oversee the implementation of the PPANI arrangements in their local area and to provide advice to staff throughout the Trust. These arrangements require criminal justice agencies, social services and others to work together and share information to effectively assess and manage the risk posed by sexual and violent offenders in the community.

Control: Restriction of the Exercise of Rights or Liberty

Restriction of the Exercise of Rights or Liberty: working to secure the safety of children and adults who are at risk of harm or of harming others and helping to protect the public.

Removing or restricting an individual's rights or liberty is highly sensitive and complex and involves:

- acting in the best interests of the individual;
- ensuring the individual's rights are respected and protected while at the same time having regard to the rights and safety of others;
- seeking the least restrictive method of intervention;
- exercising statutory powers;
- making judgements about consent and capacity;
- gathering and presenting evidence; and
- participating in court proceedings where required.

In discharging their statutory responsibilities, social workers have to be skilled in advocating for the best interests and welfare of service users in formal decision making forums, such as care conferences, tribunals and courts. They must be confident and able to withstand challenge and, in turn, challenge others such as the legal profession, medical experts, parents, carers, and, on occasion, their employer

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28 Information about the Public Protection Arrangements for NI can be accessed through: http://www.publicprotectionni.com/

when they believe decisions or plans are not, in their professional opinion, in the best interests of either the service user or the protection of the public.

Social workers initiate legal proceedings where harm has already occurred or where failure to do so would result in significant harm. Social workers do not and cannot make these decisions in isolation and the majority of these decisions the authorization of the judiciary or are subject to other safeguards.

The decision to remove a child from the care of his/her parents to a safe place requires the authorisation of the judiciary.

> ***At 31 March 2011, the Courts made 1263 children full Care Orders and 334 Interim Care Order. 858 children were voluntarily accommodated under Article 21 of the Children (NI) Order.***

Safeguards to protect the interests of children who are subject of Court proceedings, such as adoption or Care proceedings, include the 'guardian ad litem' who is an independent officer of the Court experienced in working with children and young people.

> ***Social Workers acting as Guardian ad litems represented 451 children in Court in 2010/11.***

In some situations where it is unlikely that the child's family will ever be able to provide a stable and loving home, social workers may decide, with the approval of the family courts to place the child for adoption.

> ***In 2010/11:***
> - ***92 domestic adoptions, 25 step parent/family adoption and 11 inter-country adoption applications were processed***
> - ***56 Freeing Orders were granted[29]***

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29 A Freeing Order granted by the court permits a Trust to place a child for adoption, in the majority of cases, without parental consent. Freeing applications are normally heard by the High Court and are amongst the most contested public care proceedings in which social workers are involved.

Social workers who practice in family and child care may be required to restrict the liberty of a looked after child by placing him/her in Secure Accommodation. This can only happen if the criteria, as laid out in the Children (NI) Order 1995, have been met. Usually, this will be because the social worker's concerns about the risks to the safety and wellbeing of the child are so great that no other form of accommodation would provide sufficient protection for the child. Such admissions to secure accommodation must be considered and approved by a Family Proceeding's Court, are strictly time bound, and must be reviewed regularly.

No child under the age of 13 years may be placed in secure accommodation without the prior approval of the Office of Social Services within the Department.

> *62 looked after children were admitted to secure accommodation (2010/11).*

Securing the admission of an individual to a psychiatric hospital for assessment without their consent is undertaken in partnership with the medical profession.

> *In 2010/1, 1,259 applications for compulsory admission to hospital for an assessment of mental condition were made.*

Social workers employed in the Probation Board for NI (PBNI) and the Youth Justice Agency (YJA) play an important role in working with offenders to prevent offending or re-offending through the discharge of statutory duties and powers under criminal justice legislation and through the delivery of a range of services.
Social workers in the PBNI prepare assessments for Courts, Parole Commissioners and other decision makers, work in prisons to assist in the assessment and preparation of prisoners for release and supervise offenders in the community on court orders and licenses.

> *PBNI prepare over 9,000 assessments each year for Courts, Parole Commissioners and other decision-making bodies.*

The PBNI supervise offenders released from prison on life license. They monitor the person in the community and using approved assessment instruments assess and manage risks of re-offending and/or harm to the public.

On any given day social workers, employed as probation officers, supervise 4,000 people who are subject to court orders or licenses.

In situations where an offender engages in behavior, such as excessive alcohol consumption, that increases the risk of re-offending or harm to others, the Probation Officer can make a recommendation to the Secretary of State to recall an offender to prison in order to protect the public.

On recall, further therapeutic intervention may be undertaken to rehabilitate and return the offender to the community. In undertaking this work Probation Officers help prevent further crimes; minimise risk to potential victims; and assist and challenge the offender to recognise and manage the situations and behaviours that increase the risks of re-offending.

In 2011, 295 children were remanded or sentenced by the Courts to the Juvenile Justice Centre.

The Youth Justice Agency (YJA) supervise young people subject to Youth Conference Orders, Community Responsibility Orders, Juvenile Justice Centre Orders, Attendance Centre Orders and Reparation Orders.

The YJA prepare approximately 1850 Youth Conference Reports for the Youth Courts each year.

Working with people to manage risky or offending behaviour involves elements of prevention, support, social work intervention, protection and control. It requires social workers to be skilled in understanding and assessing human behaviour and in making professional judgements about situations and risks that may have serious or life-threatening consequences for individuals.

SECTION 5:   MAKING IT HAPPEN

Introduction

This is the first strategy for social work in NI. It reflects the commitment of the DHSSPS to social work and social workers in the delivery of its policy to improve and safeguard the social wellbeing of the people of NI. It also has the endorsement of the Department of Justice and the Department of Education as a strategy to strengthen and support the profession.

> "Implementation of the Strategy requires outcomes that are clear, measurable and have real meaning for service users and carers." – *Social Work Service User and Carers Group at NISCC*

The strategic priorities and the framework for practice set out a challenging and ambitious agenda. Together they provide a framework against which all those with an involvement in social work services in NI can plan responses which will support social workers to further develop effective interventions and services. The key messages address a range of issues and achieving them is likely to mean that changes and developments will be needed to the organisation of social work services, in the education and training of social workers, career opportunities, workforce planning and the role and deployment of social workers.

It will be important to recognise the building blocks already in place that can support implementation and, where possible, to build on these. It will also be important to ensure existing good practice and effective models of service delivery are identified, replicated and rolled out across NI.

Successful implementation will require engagement and collaboration between government departments, employers, commissioners, social work regulators, education providers, staff and professional organisations as well as social workers and service users.

Leadership

Successful implementation of the strategy will require dedicated and strong leadership and sustained effort and drive over the next number of years in order to realise its full potential.

Given the importance of the strategy for the profession, implementation will be brought under the leadership of the Department. A Steering Group will be established which will include senior representatives from all key stakeholder constituencies reflecting the need for collective ownership and action across all parts of the social work delivery system in NI.

Infrastructure

An overarching implementation plan with timescales will be developed which will be reviewed and updated annually with a focus on achieving outcomes and monitoring the impact of the strategy.   This process will be overseen by the Steering Group.

It is envisaged that a number of workstreams will be established to progress agreed priorities for action, or where appropriate, work will be commissioned to take forward specific projects. Each workstream will be chaired by a senior professional from within the system who will be accountable to the Steering Group for the progress and delivery of outcomes against agreed actions. Action plans with targets and timelines for specific priorities will be developed by each workstream.

Harnessing the perspectives and experiences of social workers and service users, alongside the evidence base of what works, will also be important if the future shape of social work in NI is to reflect the way people want services to be delivered, and ensure barriers to delivery are identified and addressed.

Resources

While some of the actions required can be achieved by doing things differently, other actions will require dedicated resources to be committed to support the development and/or implementation stages. It has been negotiated and agreed that resources already committed to the profession within the HSC will be reconfigured and rediverted to support the implementation of the strategy.

Workforce Capacity

Key to the success of the strategy will be the capacity of the workforce to contribute to its implementation as well as to adopt new ways of working and changes in practice and service delivery.

Social workers may also need to develop new skills and knowledge to meet different expectations and to practise effectively across the practice continuum. They may also need practice toolkits and support to develop professional expertise in specific areas of practice.

Workforce development will therefore be a critical building block in ensuring social workers have access to relevant learning and development opportunities at key stages to support the implementation of agreed priorities and the delivery of effective social work practice.

The ongoing implementation of the PSS Education and Training Strategy 2006 – 2016 provides the mechanism for the planning and delivery of education and training of social workers and should be used to support the development of the workforce in implementing the social work strategy and agreed priorities.

Where appropriate, approved post qualifying courses will be commissioned to support the development of specific professional expertise in agreed practice areas and consideration will be given to any implications for the curriculum for the Degree in Social Work.

Monitoring and evaluation

It is proposed that the impact of implementing the strategy will be monitored and evaluated. Baseline markers will be established for key priority areas and progress against these will be monitored and measured.

There will be an annual report to chart progress and achievements against agreed actions.

Engagement with Staff and Professional Organisations

There is a commitment to working with staff and professional organisations and their representatives in taking forward the strategy.

Communication

A Communication Strategy will be an integral element of the implementation plan to ensure the progress, achievements and impact of the strategy are charted and shared.

Conclusion

Improving and Safeguarding Social Wellbeing: A Strategy for Social Work in NI has been informed by the views of a wide range of stakeholders, including frontline workers, service users and carers. It has also been informed by government policy and the current and emerging issues impacting on public services.

The Strategy for Change sets out priorities and recommended first steps that, taken together, will help build on the significant advances that have been made in social work in NI over the past decades. It will support social workers to provide the best help and protection they can to the people they serve and to meet the challenges and changes ahead.

The Framework for Practice sets out the range of roles and responsibilities social workers can play in working with individuals, families and communities. The framework is intended to reflect the broad scope and contribution of social workers in improving and safeguarding social wellbeing. Social work education and training will need to support the ability of the workforce to deliver against this framework.

This is an opportunity for everyone[30] working together to address the challenges facing social workers and to maximise their contribution in making a difference to people's lives in NI.

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30 Delivery system includes employers, commissioners, regulators, educators, relevant government departments, staff and professional organisations as well as service users and social workers.