

Summary of Changing Lives: The Report of the 21st Century Review of Social Work

“Doing more of the same won’t work... Tomorrow’s solutions will need to engage people as active participants, delivering accessible, responsive services of the highest quality and promoting wellbeing.”

Introduction

The 21st Century Review of Social Work was commissioned by Scottish Ministers in summer 2004. It aims to take a fundamental look at all aspects of social work services in order to strengthen their contribution to the delivery of integrated services.

The Review has six main objectives:

- To clearly define the role & purpose of social workers & the social work profession
- To identify improvements in the organisation and delivery of social work services
- To develop a strong quality improvement framework and culture, supported by robust inspection
- To strengthen leadership and management giving clear direction to the service
- To ensure a competent and confident workforce
- To review and if necessary to modernise legislation

The Review assesses the role of social work within the wider context of social work services (both those provided by local authorities, and commissioned services provided by the private and voluntary sectors), and therefore has implications for the whole of social services.

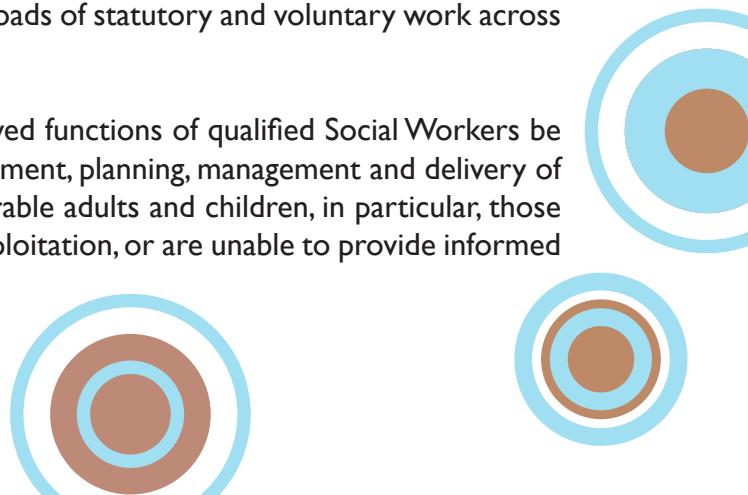
This paper focuses on the key implications for the voluntary sector.

The Role of the Social Worker

Social Workers account for approximately 5% of the total social service workforce, with about a quarter of these working in the voluntary sector. The current situation does not make the best use of these relatively rare social work skills, with many Social Workers routinely undertaking tasks better suited to other members of the workforce, including administrative and support staff. In order to change this, social work services will need much more flexibility to develop new roles, new ways of working, new career pathways to keep skilled social workers at the front line, and take opportunities to cross structural and organisational boundaries. There is also scope for the voluntary and private sectors to undertake statutory Social Work duties:

“There are no legislative restrictions preventing local authorities delegating statutory responsibilities to a social worker in the voluntary or private sector. Enabling voluntary and private sector social workers to fulfill statutory functions could reduce duplication of effort, result in better informed assessment and review and create more balanced caseloads of statutory and voluntary work across social workers working in the different sectors.” P48

The Review also recommends that a number of reserved functions of qualified Social Workers be enshrined in regulation. These duties include the assessment, planning, management and delivery of care and safeguarding the wellbeing of the most vulnerable adults and children, in particular, those who are in need of protection, in danger of harm or exploitation, or are unable to provide informed consent.



New career pathways and roles must be developed to enable social workers to stay at the front line while developing their professional skills and combining this with professional leadership, research or teaching.

New Paraprofessional Role

The development of a new paraprofessional role is recommended. Paraprofessionals would work across service boundaries and with other professions, enabling sharing of skills and expertise and creating a more integrated approach to services. The new role would also create new career pathways within social work and other professions, and could present new opportunities for development within the voluntary sector workforce.

New Ways of Commissioning Services

“Social work services must recognise and effectively manage the mixed economy of care in the delivery of services.” P46

Currently, national voluntary organisations have service level agreements containing the same information in different formats for numerous local authorities. The Review recommends that: “A new approach to commissioning must be developed on a national basis and implemented locally. This will allow for local flexibility, while reflecting the fact that many providers work across Scotland.”

The expertise that voluntary sector service providers have in meeting the needs of people and communities must also be recognised, making providers true partners in the commissioning process, and ensuring their expertise is brought to the table throughout the entire process: “Essentially this requires a strategic partnership, where the expertise of all partners is brought to the table, rather than a traditional purchaser/provider arrangement.” P48

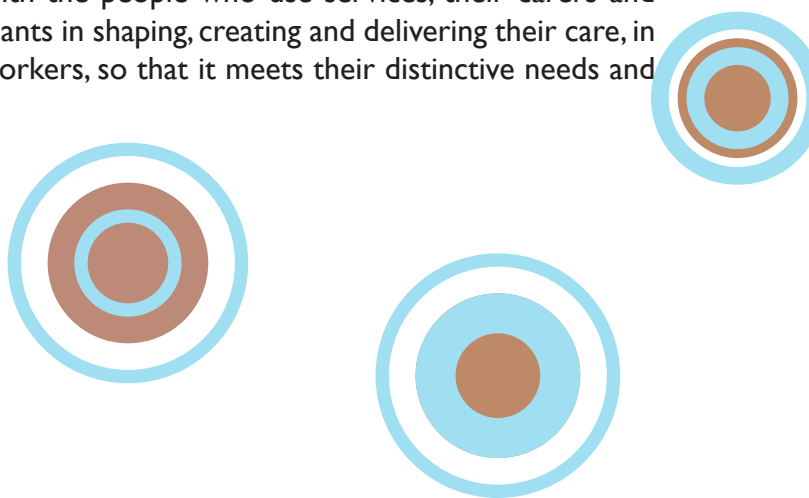
Prevention

“Social work services must become an integral part of a whole public sector approach to supporting vulnerable people and promoting social well-being.” p92

Prevention must be part of everyone’s job, but social work services must also play a full and active part in a public sector wide approach to prevention and earlier intervention. As well as maximising communication with areas such as health and education, this will require the development of community capacity. Volunteering, self help groups, and peer support must also be recognised as important preventative measures. “Supporting people in setting up self help groups can also generate a new service for people with similar needs and give them a voice in influencing the way services are designed and delivered.” P41

More Say for Service Users and Carers

“Approaches should be developed in partnership with the people who use services, their carers and workers, thus ensuring that people are active participants in shaping, creating and delivering their care, in conjunction with their paid and unpaid carers and workers, so that it meets their distinctive needs and their hopes for themselves.” P34



Developing a Learning Culture & Optimising Technology

“Social work services must develop a learning culture that commits all individuals and organisations to lifelong learning and development.”

Maximising learning across sector and service boundaries is also highlighted, with suggestions including exchanges and secondments between voluntary and statutory sectors as a way of sharing learning and expertise.

Supervision, or professional consultation, should include the three core elements of performance management, staff development and staff support, and all workers should maintain a personal portfolio as an up to date record of their skills and competence.

The sector must optimise the use of technology, however, “the challenge is to use technology to enhance rather than replace human relationships, to help worker ‘work smarter’, to promote social inclusion and to ensure the protection of the vulnerable.”p20

Leadership & Management

A framework for leadership and management must be developed. This would identify the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed in a number of settings and levels, across public, voluntary and private sectors. It should place emphasis on professional and practice leadership, political leadership, strategic leadership, operational management, academic leadership and citizen leadership.

Forum for Social Work Development

The Review recommends a new structure of social work fora which will provide a way to improve practice and help develop policy. The structure should enable the voluntary sector to play a full part in the development of social work policy, and share practice across service and sector boundaries.

The following fora will be established:

- Local Practitioner Forum
- National Practitioner Forum
- National Social Work Leaders Forum
- Overarching Social work Forum, chaired by the Minister for Education & Young People

New Legislation

The Review concludes that although none of the recommendations require new legislation to make them happen, legislation would be a powerful statement and set a landmark in the development of social work in Scotland.

New legislation should:

- Provide a new foundation for personalised services
- Embed performance improvement
- Enshrine citizen leadership
- Implement new governance arrangements
- Develop social work practice

Changing Lives, the Report of the 21st Century Social Work Review can be downloaded from www.21csocialwork.org.uk . The Scottish Executive’s Response is also available from this website.

