



**Report on Chief Social Work Officer Workshop
25th August 2005
Stirling Highland Hotel**

Introduction

The workshop was organised by the Management and Leadership Sub Group of the 21st Century Social Work Review. The subject of the workshop was the future role of the Chief Social Work Officer the aim being *“to debate senior professional leadership in social work and seek consensus on the development of future requirements, principles and standards”*.

Invitations were sent out to a range of leaders from different backgrounds along with social work leaders to debate some of the issues around the current and potential future role of the Chief Social Work Officer. In total eighteen delegates attended the event from a range of agencies including CoSLA, local authorities, SOLACE, voluntary organisations, ADSW, SWIA, the Scottish Leadership Foundation, and the Review’s Leadership and Management Group.

Summary of Main Findings

The principles for future leadership

- Principles and functions need to be clear
- Clarity on rights and responsibilities.
- CSWO needs to be credible, visible, powerful
- Promotes professional development and quality assurance.
- Workforce planning – needs influence, credibility and knowledge about the ground level.
- Partnership working and maintenance.
- Strengthening and Clarity of role – 1st tier or equivalent position.

Developing the Model

- A minimum default position of CSWO responsibilities required but important that the minimum is not only what a CSWO can deliver.
- Allow for different ways of delivering.
- Direct relationship between CSWO and CE with elected member’s involvement on particular issues.
- Professional functions need to have sufficient time resources etc set aside.
- Idea – national group/forum of CSWO’s professional issues, i.e. good practice etc. Any new forum has to be ‘owned’ by agencies rather than seen as an SE invention. There should be National forum – chaired by a minister with overall responsibility for social work – development of social work plan for Scotland, standards, outcomes etc.
- Should CSWO be out with line management structures/functions?
- Issues around succession planning.
- Structure of professional support by social workers for social workers.
- Professional leadership required at all levels.
- Consideration of preservation of title has to include consideration of CSWO.
- Duties, rights and responsibilities – not necessarily in legislation?
- CSWO role should focus on codes of conduct/codes of practice and line management responsibility, managing resources including people, performance improvement and report to LA regularly plus inspection reporting, covers commissioned/contracted services overview.
- Take future focus – not looking back e.g. community planning

- National Leadership – best use of existing cornerstones such as SWIA, centres for excellence contribute to national leadership.
- If national plan for SW – should this get rid of other 'plans' – streamlining of strategic plans.
- There should be a CSWO in the SE, similar to the Chief Nursing Officer or Chief Medical Officer, to pull all the different policy interests together.

Michael closing statement

Some commonality but divergence around structural issues. What needs pulling out are the principles and functions of the CSWO role – it is then up to LAs to get this to work.

Main Report of the Analysis of Workshop Sessions

During registration all delegates were given a question sheet to aid discussion. The questions were:

1. Can professional leadership of Social Work in any local authority area be effectively invested in one person? How should that person be selected? What are the necessary qualifications and what continuing professional development should they undertake?
2. How can the credibility of the CSWO be maintained in respect of areas of social work practice out with their recent direct experience? Is there a case for 3 CSWOs for adult care, child-care and CJS?
3. Should the post holder provide leadership only to local government employees in that council area or should there be links to professional social work in the voluntary and independent sectors?
4. What are the needs of Chief Executives in terms of professional leadership of Social Work?
5. What added value does the Chief Social Work officer currently bring to service provision and what would we wish the post or equivalent to bring?
6. Is it necessary, or desirable, for the CSWO to have powers in respect of budgetary and resource allocation?
7. What should the relationship be to elected members both in councils with a dedicated social work committee and in others? Should the CSWO have direct access to elected members without going through a service director or chief executive? Should there be a statutory requirement for a lead elected member for social work?
8. How will the registration of Social Workers and the obligations of councils under SSSC codes of conduct, change the demands on the CSWO? Do the duties of the CSWO to Registered Social Workers differ from those to other staff?
9. How should those in CSWO posts across Scotland relate to one another? What links should be made?
10. In exercising statutory duties how should the CSWO balance civil liberties and community safety? Is the current system for decision making on restriction of liberty workable or are further safeguards required?

Programme of the day

The eighteen delegates were split into three groups which were each facilitated by a Scottish Executive (SE) Social Work Advisor. The first workshop session examined the principles for future leadership. The second session looked at developing the model. Finally there was a plenary feedback session whereby group facilitators fed back what the main points from their groups were.

Background

All three of the workshop groups outlined how they felt that perceived weaknesses in the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) could only be fully appreciated when looked at in the context of the historical perspective. It was generally felt that there had been a 'devaluing' of the CSWO role since 1994 and that it did not achieve what was intended. There was a feeling that the focus of the 1994 legislation was wrong and that it should be on what was trying to be achieved and outcomes. There was a feeling that the creation of the CSWO had

resulted in the overall knowledge base of Social Work being diminished. Further participants felt that the CSWO was not providing the social work profession with adequate voice and leadership. In order to address these perceived problems there was felt to be a need for CSWOs to be placed at a senior position at a more appropriate tier, having responsibility and accountability.

Function not structure

Across the groups there was a strong disagreement that the definition of the CSWO role should focus on function and principles rather than structures within individual local authorities e.g. should place a duty/set a minimum default position on LAs to put appropriate arrangements in place rather than say they must have a CSWO. The breadth of the post being determined by the individual LA. Where the groups diverged in their opinions was whether the CSWO role should be explicitly located within or out with local authorities e.g. debate about whether to return to an earlier department of social work model or to a more flexible model – CSWO role not being the Director of SW but rather working more independently between local authorities.

The consensus that function was what was key appears to result from the recognition that the 32 local authorities operated with very different types of management structures and that structures were not answers in themselves to improving service delivery since there was no one perfect model. It was deemed down to individual authorities to determine what structure would work best for them. Such adaptability was seen as key to meeting the needs of the changed and constantly evolving mixed economy of care of the public service environment.

Accountability and reporting arrangements

Participants felt that the CSWO should have direct access to Directors, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and councillors. The reporting arrangements to the CEO did not have to necessarily be a direct reporting arrangement but rather it could be a “dotted line”. The CE should ensure that they both depend and hold accountable the CSWO – ensuring that they provide the oversight. CEO must have a role in taking decisions about appointment of statutory officers like CSWO. Needs to be able to select then give elected members choice between acceptable candidates. Further to this relationship they also needed to be able to advise/inform elected members in order to help them make strategic decisions.

Scope, rights and responsibilities of the CSWO

Participants felt that the arguments which had led to the creation of the CSWO post in 1994 still held true and that what was required in terms of moving forward was the clarification and strengthening of the role focusing on responsibilities and duties. The role primarily needed to be about SW and social care services as defined by the SW Act.

The issue that created the most debate was whether the CSWO post should occupy a joint manager/leader role. There were concerns noted around a danger in separating people leading/advising on practice from those doing it and how a CSWO maintained oversight of delivery if not line managing would need to be clear. Conversely other participants felt that expertise could not be updated whilst doing the managerial role - day to day involvement in casework acting to disempower the strategic role. This is the tension that any improved model

would need to address. However ultimately there was some agreement that again this should be left for individual LAs to decide.

The range of suggestions as to the scope, rights and responsibilities were:

- Need to be able to have right to direct access at all levels and have rights to information – including from the voluntary sector.
- Should be part of the management team.
- Role should include Professional governance, maintaining/developing standards of practice, workforce planning and quality assurance.
- Should build a culture of professional support in LAs.
- Right to intervene where appropriate anywhere in organisation.
- Responsibility to manage risk – discharged by governance role.
- Need to have advisory and policy making role – decision making at the strategic level.
- Needs the authority to take full responsibility - Also a legal perspective as CSWO can be called to account in court.
- Need to advise council on their broad range of duties, rights and responsibilities. Advice on real cost of providing these also needs to be included.
- Advising and ensuring compliance with Codes and Conduct and Practice.
- CSWO should be visible in terms of setting values, standards and understanding of professional decision making.

Professional leadership

The discussions around professional leadership from the CSWO role focused around the question of whether it was currently good enough or whether it needed developing and strengthening. Participants stated that they felt the CSWO role was often a management post with a professional leadership bit tagged on. There was therefore some consensus of a need to develop the professional leadership role.

Some of the key aspects that were teased out of what this professional leadership should look like were:

- Professional leadership should challenge professionals and confront poor practice – needs to be properly articulated in terms of responsibilities.
- Need a clear relationship between professional leadership at the top and front line staff. Social work staff needs to know leader is there and what they stand for.
- Shared leadership – Social workers have expertise yet do not have the power to influence administrative staff etc. They need to be able to influence more – have more shared leadership.
- In an integrated service structure social work does need to be able to advise its own professional staff. There is something specific to social work – need to manage decision making not just decisions.
- There was felt to be a significant gap in leadership in the academic sector.

Governance

In terms of governance the CSWO role needed to Recognise tensions between budgets, risk and professional advice. They needed to be clear about responsibilities/accountabilities – e.g. an expensive package NHS example – GM/director would take the hit for the budget, but would seek advice from professional leader both to inform decision and to make decisions about how the impact of the cost could be managed by making savings elsewhere. Making

decisions about resources and acting as an external quality check was seen to be a healthy tension and to make for better decisions. CSWO responsibility should be to give a professional judgement to the budget manager/director. If director chooses to over-ride it then they would be responsible. Similar approach to clinical governance, where CEO is ultimately responsible for governance.

Professional Governance for Social Work

One of the workshop groups distinguished the following features of the professional governance role of the CSWO:

- Advising LA on levels of need for social work, related to statutory duties of LA.
- Keeper of professional standards/ethos.
- Setting & maintaining professional standards/standards of behaviour: Audit, Evaluation, Evidence based practice and Education/CPD.
- Manpower planning: taking decisions on future needs and skills/knowledge/expertise required in workforce.
- Interface with HEIs – managing the relationship to meet needs rather than simply responding to what HEIs decide to offer.
- Understanding of SW task and ability to articulate it adequately.

Competencies

It was felt key to the success of the CSWO post that the individual had and maintained professional credibility. Across the groups there was broad consensus surrounding the competencies that CSWOs should have in order to gain the confidence of staff and service users. Some of the different aspects discussed were:

- Should be qualified social worker and have responsibility for CPD.
- Could look at a similar courses to police command course and testing.
- Add other conditions to qualifications to show what CSWOs should have in way of qualifications and experience.
- Links to CPD and accreditation framework.

It was stated that CSWOs needed the right professional advice/leaders at lower levels, so that they had the big picture and knew where to go to get the detail. Of concern for the future was the issue of Succession planning, especially as it was felt to be getting more difficult for people to get experience across the whole range of SW practice. Leaders of the future would need to be identified earlier.

Voluntary Sector and CSWO

There was some discussion about potentially widening out the CSWO role to encompass the voluntary sector. Where it was felt that this could and should occur participants felt that some of the key aspects of this role should be:

- To support professional staff in voluntary organisations
- To play a role in contracting e.g. Contracting is informed by community planning – should make clear the competencies and expectations of the contractor, which CSWO has a role to set and monitor relating to professional standards.

National collaboration/leadership

There was widespread strong consensus surrounding the need for increased visibility of social work speaking with a coherent voice. All of the three workshop groups felt that there was great potential for this through the development of

some sort of national forum for CSWOs. Such a forum would need to look at services across the public and independent sector. It was also seen as being able to provide a space for CSWOs to come together to learn from both best practice and mistakes. The forum would need to be owned by all LAs and major providers.

In terms of leading on both social work generally and leading the forum participants felt that this would be most effectively achieved through a single minister. The National Group would only need to be concerned with strategy and policy. There then would need to be clarity about what happens at the local level.

At the Scottish Executive (SE) level participants felt that conflicting advice was often provided. Two of the three workshop groups suggested that one way of tackling this perceived problem could be through the creation of a CSWO within the SE like chief medical, chief nursing officers in SE. This was seen as having the potential to bring together all relevant SE policy areas and inspection. They could also provide advice to LA CSWOs.

Legislation

The group was not convinced that statutory accountability for social work was needed. However there were areas of concern e.g. currently no legal requirement for CSWOs to be registered with the Scottish Social Services Council.

Concern that being done in isolation – CHP working needs to be considered in terms of role of CSWO – clarity issue – no legislation that outlines who does what.

Need to get clear governance arrangements for the profession into primary legislation if we want it to happen.

Statute has to be about adding value and should only be done when there is no other way. CSWO can be dealt with by secondary legislation.

The support and guidance for the CSWO is what the Review needs to consider – the 95 legislation needs improvement.