

**SPEAKING NOTE: ADAM INGRAM TO EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE. 11 MARCH 2009**

I'd like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to come here today to talk about social work and social care.

I particularly welcome your support for the people who undertake this work. And who are often only heard of, certainly in the media, when things go wrong.

Our crucial resource in this often complex and difficult area is the workforce. So, along with personalisation of services, a key ambition we have been pursuing through *Changing Lives* and elsewhere, is to ensure we have a confident, competent and valued workforce.

In Scottish local authorities, around 57,000 people are employed in social work services. 64% provided services for adults, 16.5% provide services for children and 4% provide services for offenders – the balance being in management or administration (8.6%) or providing services to more than one client group (7%).

Vacancies amongst social workers – which reached a high of 13% in 2003 – are down to 7.4%. The numbers of social workers has increased by some 28% from 2001, to just under 5,000.

And it is encouraging that numbers of social work students is on the increase and the number of undergraduates should rise by around 40% over the next 3 years (from 338 to 491).

These are the people who day in and day out deal with dysfunctional families, substance misusers, offenders, people who are vulnerable and need support, care and protection. And they do this on our behalf – not only for the people they support, their local authority, Government or Parliament, but society as a whole.

The picture around recruitment and retention is improving – though we recognise there can be variations in locations and within particular functions. But that people are willing to enter the workforce and take on this challenging responsibility is encouraging.

I believe we have an important role in supporting them. We need to be quick to recognise the important contribution they make, and measured, though not afraid to challenge, where there are problems.

Too often I see media coverage of incidents laced with speculation and inaccuracies. Where things are wrong, the facts should be established and learning should be shared to fix it. Clearly, it's not always possible to respond publicly to allegations of why certain things happened or didn't happen when dealing with delicate, complex, personal situations. Morale is dented and the reaction can be one of blame.

I have been heartened by the response of parliamentary colleagues across the chamber to the tragic case of Brandon Muir and that we are giving the authorities space to have a full review of what happened. I will consider the outcome of the review and any action that may be appropriate, as I've done before where shortfalls have been identified, such as through the inspections done by HMIE,

Those in social work and the social care sector make a real difference to the life chances and life choices of many people in Scotland. SWIA reports have shown that level of spend is not a guarantee of good performance. High morale and confidence flow from leadership, support and clarity of vision and role - and that is reflected in performance.

As well as being confident, competent practitioners, people need to know they are valued. I hope we can all agree the need to support our social work services – not blindly, but constructively and positively.