



THE VISION OF THE SOCIAL WORKER IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The Report of the Role of the Social Worker Sub-Group

Introduction

The Role of the Social Worker Sub-Group (RSW) has based its recommendations to the Review Group on evidence gathered, commissioned research, evidence presented to the Review Group and on its own experience. Its substantive conclusions about the role of the social worker in the 21st Century are set out at the end of its recommendations.

The RSW has come to the firm view that social work is and should remain a generalist profession with a strong common value, skills and knowledge base.

It sees the social worker in the 21st century as a confident and competent professional working with and along side people who use social work services, their advocates and other professionals to help them achieve the best possible outcomes in their lives.

It considers that the Scottish Executive and employing organisations have a responsibility to ensure that social workers are properly equipped and supported to undertake their roles and functions. This includes promoting a positive public message of support for social workers as well as creating a working environment which encourages and enables social workers to reflect critically on their practice.

Social workers must uphold public trust and confidence in social work services. Their primary responsibility is to protect and provide the welfare and well being of children, vulnerable adults and communities.

For these reasons the Role of the Social Worker sub-group makes the following Recommendations:

- 1. Social work is and should remain a generalist profession, with a strong common value, skills and knowledge base.**
- 2. Certain functions should be reserved to social workers and should be set out in Regulations. This is to ensure the protection of the public.**
- 3. All organisations employing social workers and social workers professional organisations should adhere to and promote the Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers of Social Service Workers (The Codes).**
- 4. A national framework for post registration, training and learning of social workers should be established by the Council, be resourced by the Scottish Executive and organisations held to account for their provision of appropriate arrangements.**
- 5. The Review Group should define the role, responsibility and status of the Chief Social Work Officer and require organisations to locate the post appropriately to safeguard the public.**

6. The level of complexity and responsibility carried by social workers should be reflected in the career structures and remuneration available to them.
7. Employing organisations must have arrangements in place to ensure the workload of social workers is commensurate with the tasks required of them. This will include ensuring sufficient time is made available to allow the development of helping relationships which is an essential part of social work practice.
8. Social workers must have access to professional consultation, support and advice from appropriate, experienced social workers. This consultation and management should focus on assisting social workers to reflect critically on their practice, use their powers effectively and make complex decisions.
9. All organisations employing social workers must have in place formal arrangements which define the status of line management and professional consultation and clearly set out their parameters.
10. All organisations employing social workers must implement development and appraisal processes that give due recognition to service requirements and individual development needs.
11. All organisations employing social workers must ensure effective workforce planning and development at local level to meet emerging need, maintain a competent and effective workforce and contribute to workforce planning at a national level.
12. Scottish Executive must have in place an effective mechanism to create a coherent overview of policy development relevant to social work and to monitor and evaluate this properly.
13. Scottish Executive must take account of workforce issues and resource allocation at local level when introducing national initiatives.
14. Employers must provide social workers with access to appropriate, skilled professional and administrative support, within an organisation fit for purpose.
15. Employers and social workers must work together to develop a culture of learning, valued and promoted throughout agencies and organisations which reinforces the importance of being aware of current research and putting this into practice.
16. Social workers should intervene earlier with complex cases to avert crises but simple early interventions and preventive work should be the role primarily of universal services and/or social work services/social care.
17. Easily accessible and available social work services should not require complex assessment processes. All organisations require a

shared understanding and agreed protocols which define the roles and responsibilities of different professionals at different stages of intervention and articulate how to access more specialist services, across agency boundaries, as people move through the stages and tiers.

18. Scottish Executive should invest in research to provide evidence on which social worker knowledge and practice would be developed.

Leadership at all levels is necessary, at the frontline and politically – both locally and nationally. The Scottish executive should support and ensure this

THE SOCIAL WORKER IN THE 21st CENTURY

1. UNDERPINNING PRINCIPLES

The social worker in the 21st century is a confident and competent professional committed to working with and along side people who use social work services, their advocates and other professionals to help them achieve the best possible outcomes in their lives. The primary responsibility of the social worker will remain the protection and promotion of the welfare and well being of children, vulnerable adults and communities.

Social workers operate within the Codes of Practice for Social Services Workers and Employers¹ and subscribe to the value base most recently set out in the International Federation of Social work Code of Ethics as "...based on respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people, and the rights that follow from this. Social workers should uphold and defend each person's physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual integrity and well-being. They will work holistically taking account of the individual, their family and their community. They will build supportive relationships with people in order to help them effect change in their lives and work collaboratively with other professionals. They are committed to continuously developing their own professional skills, knowledge and expertise.

Social workers are skilled in coordinating complex networks of integrated service delivery particularly in those situations of uncertainty where relationships are complex and where there is a high degree of risk to the person using social work services and to the wider community. Social work will continue to be a demanding profession. Social workers must possess the maturity and strength of character to confront challenging and complex situations; the emotional intelligence to establish relationships with people in these situations and the intellectual curiosity to acquire and use research evidence to achieve better outcomes for people who use services. Their employing organisations must recognise the importance of the social worker's role and ensure they are properly equipped and supported to operate effectively.

Social workers constantly manage the twin roles of care and control in discharging their duties in a varied and complex environment. It is important service users and the general public understand the complexity of balancing the two roles. This means there must be a robust evidence base for the decision making process, for example through using consistent approaches to risk assessment. The ability to identify acceptable levels of risk and put in place appropriate risk management mechanisms is a highly skilled task. This involves respecting individuals rights while balancing these with public safety. There must also be collaboration, transparency and openness with clients particularly in relation to using statutory powers.

Social workers must uphold public trust and confidence in social services.² They must be aware of society's values and operate in accordance with legal obligations. They must be able to balance need in the risk in the face of constant

¹ see Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers; Scottish Social Services Council

² see Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers; Scottish Social Services Council

uncertainty and competing demands. Communities will always include people who are vulnerable and who pose challenges for themselves and others. Social workers intervene in situations where not to do so could lead to a continuation or escalation of harm. They may work with people who have no wish to use social work services as well as people whose needs and demands challenge stretched resources. Social Workers have a role to play in promoting social justice and in identifying and addressing obstacles to social inclusion.

In seeking to achieve the best possible outcomes for people who use social work services, social workers will use the knowledge and skills and understanding which are set out in the Standards in Social Work Education³ in order to:

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

They must also contribute to the development of effective policy, practice and research within social work services and in the context of partnership working.

Social workers already work in statutory, voluntary and private settings and as independent practitioners. While this will continue to be the case, the evolving nature of service delivery will inevitably have an impact on where social workers are located. Given the nature of the complexities, interactions and risks involved in the lives of people using social services social workers do not and must not work in isolation from their colleagues in health, education, housing, employment and justice services as well as with voluntary and private sector providers. Increasingly services are being integrated around the individual needs of people who use services in order to produce better outcomes for children and adults. Integrated service delivery requires a high level of sharing of skills, knowledge and roles, involving a wide variety of professionals in working with, assessing, recommending and reviewing action plans for vulnerable children and adults. This in turn requires professionals to have a clear and well developed understanding of their own distinctive contribution and those of others.

Seeing people's situations in the round includes recognising the effects on them of having to engage with a variety of agencies, and assessing where action or change by other agencies may open up opportunities, remove barriers to achieving the outcomes they seek. Social work skills are often deployed to good effect in collaborative work with other professionals, either in on-going multi-disciplinary teams or in ad hoc joint work around the needs of an individual or family. The distinctive social work contribution combines a developing body of knowledge and skills, a set of core values and priorities, and a range of personal

³ the framework for Social Work education in Scotland, Scottish Executive 2003

qualities and includes working through the medium of a qualitative personal relationship.

The commencement of Protection of the Title “social worker” has in turn led to the definition of a ‘social worker’ as someone who meets the registration requirements of the Scottish Social Services Council and has a live and current registration as a social worker with the Council. Following the introduction of protection of title, these will be the only people entitled to call themselves social workers.

The professional practice of social workers should always be underpinned by the following principles:

- The primary responsibility of the social worker is the protection and promotion of the welfare and well being of children, vulnerable adults and communities.
- social workers should use their professional knowledge and expertise to make judgements and decisions for which they are professionally accountable.
- social workers must have access to professional consultation through line management arrangements which provides support and advice from appropriate, experienced social workers. This consultation should focus on assisting practitioners to reflect on their practice, use their powers effectively and make complex decisions for which they are personally and professionally accountable.
- The level of complexity and responsibility carried by social workers should be reflected in the career structures and remuneration available to them, and the continuing professional development they undertake.
- Leadership within local government for social workers undertaking protected functions should be exercised by the Chief Social Work Officer.

Recommendations

- 1. Social work is and should remain a generalist profession, with a strong common value, skills and knowledge base.**
- 2. Certain functions should be reserved to social workers and should be set out in Regulations. This is to ensure the protection of the public.**
- 3. All organisations employing social workers and social workers professional organisations should adhere to and promote the Scottish Social Services Council (the Council) Code of Practice for Employers and Social Service Workers (the Code).**
- 4. A national framework for post registration, training and learning of social workers should be established by the Council, be resourced by the Scottish Executive and organisations held**

to account for their provision of appropriate arrangements.

- 5. The Review Group should define the role, responsibility and status of the Chief Social Work Officer and require organisations to locate the post appropriately to safeguard the public.**
- 6. The level of complexity and responsibility carried by social workers should be reflected in the career structures and remuneration available to them.**

2. SOCIAL WORKERS' ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

2.1 Developing effective relationships

Adopting a holistic approach and forging therapeutic relationships are not unique to social work. What makes the role of the social worker distinct is that it combines both. The social worker seeks to understand the person's entire situation (the holistic approach) and to work with this. Developing an effective helping relationship with people who use services is central to the role of the social worker in order to ensure better outcomes. Social workers need sufficient time to combine knowledge of skills and values and demonstrate the effective listening, respect and sensitive engagement which this involves. The ability to form and maintain such relationships can be eroded by a workload which exceeds resources, by over management of risks and by increasing expectations from people who use services of the social worker's capacity to meet their needs.

The development of a staged and tiered approach to social work intervention should ensure that the time and skills of social workers are invested appropriately in supporting those with the most complex needs, i.e. where there are multiple risk factors and vulnerability.

Social workers may not be the only professionals engaged in care management but will be the most appropriate professionals in complex care management where adults are in need of protection, are in danger of exploitation or significant harm and are at risk of causing significant harm to themselves or others. This role is being further clarified and developed, in light of care management guidance issued by Scottish Executive in August 2004. Such care management arrangements must be predicated on a continuing therapeutic relationship.

Social workers have a key role in working alongside people to help them take more control of their lives where this is possible and appropriate. Social workers should always aim to promote independence for users, even if this is a long-term goal. However, it will always be the case that for some people, creating a long term supportive relationship with social work services may be an appropriate response to managing risk and promoting the well-being of vulnerable children

or adults. Some people will need high levels of support throughout their lives in order to achieve their full potential.

Social workers may work with people who have no wish to engage with social services but who are required to do so in the interests of the protection of their own or other's safety. In these circumstances, the development of a therapeutic relationship or working alliance with the involuntary service user is an essential element in bringing about the achievement of positive change in their lives.

Recommendations

7. Employing organisations must have arrangements in place to ensure the workload of social workers is commensurate with the tasks required of them. This will include ensuring sufficient time is made available to allow the development of helping relationships which is an essential part of social work practice.

3. GENERALIST OR SPECIALIST

Social work services work alongside a range of universally provided services. There are many points of entry to these universal services. Part of the social worker's task is to assist people maximise the opportunities available to them from universal services e.g. education and health and to advocate for them with these services.

Not every person looking for assistance from social services will need the level of intensity or duration of contact central to developing a therapeutic relationship with a social worker. For some, engagement with social services is purely a means of accessing a necessary service or resource. For this group of people, any necessary support may be more appropriately delegated to another social services worker.

Social work is and should remain a generalist profession, with a strong common values, skills and knowledge base. Individuals' social problems are often multi faceted and vulnerable people should expect to find continuity of service from their allocated social worker and be confident that that worker will in turn be able to draw on the specialist knowledge and expertise of colleagues.

Generalist professionals need the back up of specialist expertise and knowledge. A good generalist service depends on good supporting specialist services. However, we also recognise that social workers need to build up their knowledge, skills and expertise in specific areas (for instance, substance misuse, autism, bereavement counselling) as they operate in increasingly specialist environments. Their knowledge and expertise must be available to people who use services as well as to colleagues elsewhere in social work services and within other professions.

In order to do this:

- Teams and organisations need a comprehensive knowledge base about the skills and expertise of the workforce, both to provide ready access for advice and consultancy and to identify and fill any gaps.
- Individual professionals need to know the limit of their own competence. Professional consultation should provide a vehicle to support this and encourage practitioners to seek expertise when and where they need it.
- We must clearly define accountabilities in this process and the parameters within which this happens.
- We should recognise that there may increasingly be sharing of expertise across sectors, both in terms of sharing good practice and in providing access to particularly scarce specialist expertise.
- Organisations should ensure access to specialist expertise when and where that is required. This may be in giving advice to a practitioner or in taking over responsibility for users with particular needs.
- We should promote the development of generalists with specialist interests – similar to the model increasingly developing in general medical practice.
- If we are to maintain social work as a generalist profession, whilst ensuring that each social worker has the necessary competence to fulfil their current role effectively, then we will need to undertake the following actions:
 - Provide the necessary training opportunities to allow social workers to develop excellent knowledge and skills.
 - Develop a contemporary and relevant educational framework that allows people to develop the competence to undertake their current role and to add additional competencies required for new roles.
 - Build development appraisal processes that ensure matching between service requirements and individual development needs.
 - Promote the Scottish Social Services Council Code of Practice for Employers and Social Service workers.
 - Organisations need to encourage workers to expand and develop their knowledge and skills.
 - Ensure effective workforce planning at local level to meet emerging need, maintain a competent and effective workforce and contribute to workforce planning at a national level.

Recommendations

- 8. Social workers must have access to professional consultation, support and advice from appropriate, experienced social workers. This consultation and management should focus on assisting social workers to reflect critically on their practice, use their powers effectively and make complex decisions.**
- 9. All organisations employing social workers must have in place formal arrangements which define the status of line management and**

professional consultation and clearly set out their parameters.

- 10. All organisations employing social workers must implement development and appraisal processes that give due recognition to service requirements and individual development needs.**
- 11. All organisations employing social workers must ensure effective workforce planning and development at local level to meet emerging need, maintain a competent and effective workforce and contribute to workforce planning at a national level.**
- 12. Scottish Executive must have in place an effective mechanism to create a coherent overview of policy development relevant to social work and to monitor and evaluate this properly.**
- 13. Scottish Executive must take account of workforce issues and resource allocation at local level when introducing national initiatives.**

4. ACCESS TO SERVICES

We will always deliver services within finite resources. Social workers are legitimately involved in making decisions about how these are deployed. However, we recognise that social workers and users can see this “gate-keeping” function as a barrier to building effective therapeutic relationships. In order to make this function more effective, a number of actions are proposed:

- Develop more effective collaborative approaches to decision making with service users and carers which are built on openness and transparency and develop individual and community capacity.
- Ensure that the provision of services is fair and equitable through effective communication between front line staff and finance and strategy leads, including influencing where resources are inadequate and recommending where resources could more effectively meet need.
- Devolve budget responsibilities nearer to the front line, with a proportionate approach, recognising that costly scarce resources may need agreement by senior managers. To support this, organisations should ensure that all staff have a good understanding of the big picture in financial terms and corporate spending priorities.

All of this requires effective communication, financial controls and sound governance which the review group will need to address in considering systems and processes.

5. ROLE BOUNDARIES IN INTEGRATION

We anticipate that social workers will work in integrated settings and teams reflecting the skill mix needed to produce the best possible outcomes for service users. There are examples of integrated work between partner agencies at strategic and operational level across the country. They include Community Mental Health Teams, Rapid Response Teams (to achieve early discharge from hospital) Integrated Community Schools. Good integration however also needs to take place across social work services e.g. expertise in services in addiction and mental health supporting children and families work or criminal justice social work and vice versa. Key features of successful integrated team working involve an understanding of different role, a willingness and capacity to work across role boundaries and a shared understanding of the desired outcomes. This approach is fully taken into account in the draft paper describing the reserved functions of the social worker. This paper also identifies the circumstances in which the social worker will be the designated 'Lead Officer' responsible for the management and co-ordination of services in cases requiring complex arrangements among different workers or agencies.

Integration of services means integration around the needs of the service user, i.e., that the service user experiences a service in which their individual needs are met in a coherent way with clarity around lines of accountability. Integrated teams may be "real" i.e. they are a group of people working together to meet the needs of a particular group of users, or "virtual" i.e. a group of professionals who are brought together around one or more particular service users needs. The make up of teams may be variable and will change over time according to the task. Effective team work will not happen simply by putting people together. Creating new teams may simply result in new boundaries elsewhere. It also requires the investment of time and effort in supporting the development of teams with proper accountability and management. In order to be effective in integrated team's social workers must be competent, confident practitioners able to articulate their roles and responsibilities and locate these within a theoretical framework based on up-to-date research about effective practice. Team members and agencies must define their common goals and clarify the contributions of individual team members.

Recommendations

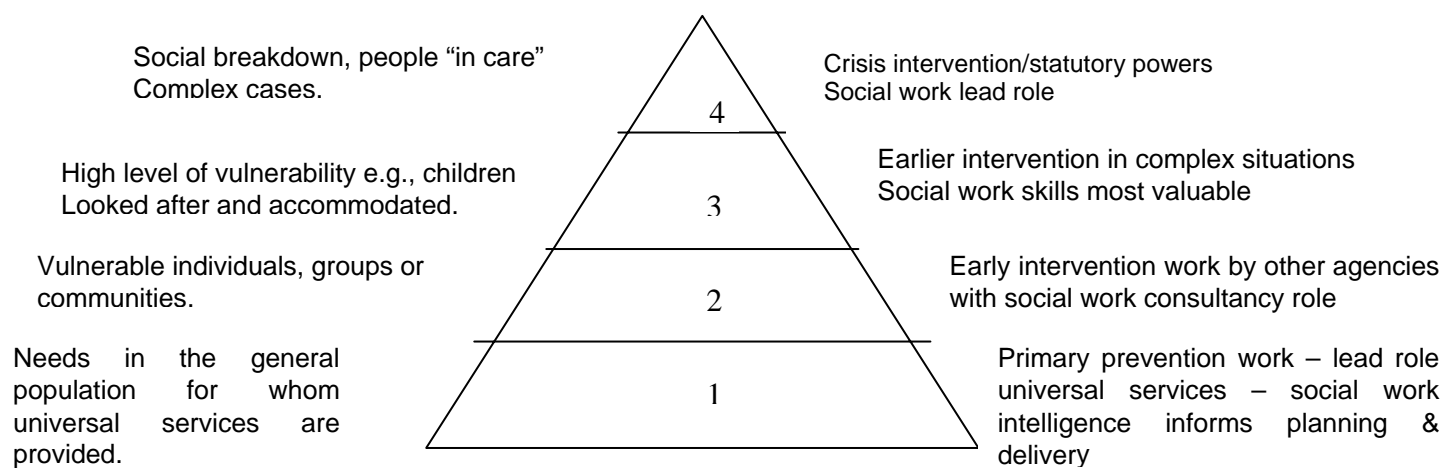
- 14. Employers must provide social workers with access to appropriate, skilled professional and administrative support, within an organisation fit for purpose.**
- 15. Employers and social workers must work together to develop a culture of learning, valued and promoted throughout agencies and organisations which reinforces the importance of being aware of current research and putting this into practice.**

6. PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Although often used in tandem, these are separate concepts which are relevant to all aspects of well-being and health, at individual and community level, for all ages and service users. There are many ways of defining these concepts, but in effect, 'prevention' refers to activities designed to stop a problem arising and early intervention is activity aimed at halting the development of a problem which is already evident.

There are economic as well as professional arguments in favour of these approaches. They are closely linked to developing community capacity as well as individual capacity. The skills and knowledge possessed by social workers can add to local intelligence of services and resources needed to strengthen and develop communities. They can influence universal service providers in developing preventative strategies and services. Their particular skills and knowledge when used in relation to assessment of individual service users can determine where prevention and/or early intervention will be most effective in preventing escalation of problems and risk.

Using this approach, the point of intervention will be on a continuum from prevention to crisis management, to long term, complex, care management. This tiered and staged approach to intervention is described on the next page as a pyramid, with the tip being those areas where a social worker should always be involved. This includes managing crises, complex cases and those cases where statutory powers may be invoked. The base is the responsibility primarily of universal services, but where social workers may have a role in contributing intelligence and advising universal services.



At each point of intervention there is a need to differentiate between the role of social workers in prevention and that of other workers or services. While level 4 of the pyramid will always involve social workers, other professionals may be involved at other levels and other social services workers might more appropriately undertake work at levels one and two.

In this model, the stages of the triangle represent the correlation between the level of need and level of intervention linked to the appropriateness of social

work support. What it can't demonstrate, as a static model, is the movement and inter-action between the stages and personnel involved. Social workers will be mostly likely to be deployed at levels 4 and 3. Social workers should always be involved at level 4. They may not always be the only professional at this level but will be carrying out particular tasks (for instance - in providing a Social Enquiry Report, risk assessment and monitoring of current offenders). Social workers may also be involved with other professionals at level 3 (for instance – in joint working in youth justice to target offenders still within the Panel system at risk of becoming adult offenders) and at level 2 with professionals and other workers (for instance– in setting up or running drug advice/employability schemes) and at level 1 (for instance - providing intelligence about location and types of offender into community planning fora.). We see simple interventions being the responsibility of universal services. The children's hearings review is one example where we anticipate more work being done by universal services. This may require social workers taking a consultancy and advisory role in supporting those services. Similarly, if skill mix were developed, there would be a role for other social work staff in some simple crisis interventions leaving social workers free to intervene earlier with complex cases to avert crises.⁴

Recommendations

- 16. Social workers should intervene earlier with complex cases to avert crises but simple early interventions and preventive work should be the role primarily of universal services and/or social work services/social care.**
- 17. Easily accessible and available social work services should not require complex assessment processes. All organisations require a shared understanding and agreed protocols which define the roles and responsibilities of different professionals at different stages of intervention and articulate how to access more specialist services, across agency boundaries, as people move through the stages and tiers.**
- 18. Scottish Executive should invest in research to provide evidence on which social worker knowledge and practice would be developed.**

⁴ We are defining a simple crises as meaning unexpected circumstances which can be better met by universal services, e.g. if a grandmother breaks her leg she requires health services not social services. If this grandmother is a kinship carer for a dependent grandchild whose parents are unable to look after him/her then this becomes a complex case which may require social work intervention; similarly, if a child is not picked up after school the education service would be the appropriate authority to contact their carer, if something had happened to the carer such that there was no one else to look after this child then this may also become a case for social work intervention.

7. ACCOUNTABILITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

We have set out our understanding of what is meant by accountability in our paper describing the reserved functions of the social worker as follows:

When a case is allocated to a social worker he/she is directly responsible through their line management arrangements for the management and delivery of care to the user. In addition, as lead professionals they may receive information and assistance from colleagues and other professionals in meeting their responsibilities. They will retain professional accountability for their own contribution and for the overall coordination and management of cases allocated to them.

We have defined autonomy as meaning the exercise of professional judgement by competent and confident professionals within a framework of accountability.

There is a need to ensure that social work professional practice is based upon evidence of effectiveness, promotes professional autonomy within a legislative and organisational framework with access to professional consultation. This means that individual social workers will exercise and act on professional judgement.

Organisations need to be able to support the practice of social workers within a clear framework of accountability, ensuring that the organisation is able to deliver its statutory duties, whilst giving practitioners sufficient flexibility to practice innovatively. This requires clear, well developed and user friendly practice guidelines, policies and procedures as well as a sound professional understanding of accountability at all levels within the organisation. There must also be a proactive approach to professional consultation and management which promotes reflective practice explores and where appropriate, challenges decision making and identifies development needs. Newly qualified social workers require an approach which allows them to grow professionally and promotes confidence and independence whilst allowing their practice to be closely supervised during the development phase.

Social workers are responsible for the assessment and management of complex and inter-connecting risks rather than simply risk avoidance. This requires social workers to work with individuals to help them assess the risks they face and may present to others and to promote the independence of service users while helping to protect them as far as possible from danger or harm. At the same time they must respect their rights while seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people.

Social workers need to be able to develop and maintain their skills in this field throughout their careers, and in all settings. They should also have a range of methods to assess and manage risk, based on evidence that can be used to support professional judgement and where necessary, to explain it.

While managing risk is a key skill of social workers, other professionals are required to accept shared responsibility also. They need to improve their skills in addressing the needs of individuals who challenge their services.

Recommendations

- 19. Leadership at all levels is necessary, at the frontline and politically – both locally and nationally. The Scottish Executive should support and ensure this**

CONCLUSION

Social workers do a job which is spiritually, ethically and physically daunting, a job which is a permanent test of character and intelligence, a job which requires rare determination and commitment". *Jonathan Dimbleby*

At its heart, social work is about real people living real lives. Lives that are uniquely different; each bringing its own complexity and adversity, hope and frustration. Some people will never need a social worker but others will rely on social workers to help them deal with the challenges, threats and disadvantages they face throughout their lives. Some will seek the help of a social worker, others will have no option but to accept their involvement because their actions pose a threat to themselves or others.

The social worker's task is to work alongside people to help them build resilience, maintain hope and optimism and develop their strengths and abilities. It is also to confront and challenge behaviour and manage situations of danger and uncertainty. Social workers must meet people on their own terms, in their own environment whilst retaining the professional detachment needed to help service users to understand, come to terms with or change their behaviour.

Scotland today faces its own challenges and opportunities - changing demography and employment patterns, continuing inequality and growing expectations of public services. It is in this complex and ever changing environment that social workers must function. Their contribution to making a Scotland a healthy and thriving society is vast, but can only be realised if we recognise and strengthen the role of the social worker in the context of a modern Scotland. The intention of this paper is to set out a new vision for social work, based on existing values and to strengthen social workers' capacity to practice efficiently and effectively and ultimately bring about better outcomes for people who use their services.