

THE ROLE OF CHIEF SOCIAL WORK OFFICER

PRINCIPLES, REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDANCE

pursuant to Section 5(1) of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968

Introduction

1. The Purpose of the Scottish Government is to focus government and public services on creating a more successful country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth. Five Strategic Objectives - Wealthier & Fairer, Smarter, Healthier, Safer & Stronger and Greener – support delivery of the Purpose and these, in turn, are supported by 15 National Outcomes, which describe in more detail what the Government wants to achieve over the next 10 years.
2. The Scottish Government's Concordat with Scottish local government, agreed with COSLA in November 2007, and its new National Performance Framework, integrated into its 2007 Spending Review, signaled a new relationship between national and local government and a fundamental shift to focus the whole of government on an outcomes focused approach to performance. The Government has set the direction and indicated the outcomes that need to be delivered for Scotland's people. It is for each local authority and its partners, including those in the third sector, to deliver these through Single Outcome Agreements, based on the national outcomes and agreed with the Government which reflect local needs and priorities.
3. Social work and social care services are essential to the delivery of good outcomes, particularly but not exclusively, to the most vulnerable in our communities. Social work makes an important contribution to the public domain; working with people and helping them achieve change in their lives and helping them to contribute through the social relationship. This requires a particular balance of need, risk and rights.
4. The 21st Century Social Work Review, *Changing Lives*, described the changing social environment in which we operate and the complexities, challenges and expectations this brings. Engaging with people in developing the solutions which best meet their needs in line with local priorities will make a significant contribution to improved outcomes for individuals and communities. This requires a confident, competent and valued social care workforce, capable of working flexibly in a variety of settings. Particular challenges are raised for staff working in integrated service delivery arrangements whether they be internal, inter-departmental settings or multi agency partnerships with NHS or Police partners. While these matrix arrangements can carry great benefits for effective service delivery, they do re-emphasise the need for clarity of accountability and professional leadership.
5. Clarification of the role and function of the Chief Social Work Officer will support local authorities and elected members in ensuring that this statutory post not only enhances professional leadership and accountability, but provides a key support and added value to a local authority and its partners in delivering positive outcomes locally.

Background

6. The requirement for every local authority to appoint a professionally qualified Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) is contained within Section 3 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. The particular qualifications are set down in regulations. This is one of a number of statutory requirements in relation to posts, roles or duties, with which local authorities must comply.

7. The overall objective of the CSWO post is to ensure the provision of effective, professional advice to local authorities – elected members and officers – in the authorities’ provision of social work services. The post should assist authorities in understanding the complexities of social work service delivery – including in relation to particular issues such as corporate parenting, child protection, adult protection and the management of high risk offenders - and the key role social work plays in contributing to the achievement of national and local outcomes. The CSWO also has a role to play in overall performance improvement and the identification and management of corporate risk insofar as they relate to social work services. Clarity and consistency as to the purpose and contribution of the CSWO is particularly important given the diversity of organisational structures that exist.

8. *Changing Lives* concluded that there was a need to strengthen the governance and professional leadership roles of the CSWO to oversee social work services and ensure the delivery of safe, effective and innovative practice. In doing this, there are a number of key issues to be clarified and addressed:

- (a) Role and function
- (b) Competencies, scope and responsibilities
- (c) Accountability and reporting arrangements

9. This guidance:

- (a) will assist local authorities in the discharge of their social work responsibilities;
- (b) will help local authorities maximise the added value of the CSWO – both at a corporate and professional level;
- (c) acknowledges that local authorities operate with very different management and organisational structures;
- (d) provides advice on how best to locate the CSWO role within operational structures to maximise its effectiveness;
- (e) is sufficiently generic to remain relevant in the event of future management or organisational structural change.

Role and Function

10. The CSWO is required to ensure the provision of appropriate professional advice in the discharge of local authorities’ statutory social work duties. For the role to be effective in the varying circumstances and configurations of Scottish local authorities, a focus on role and function rather than position or structures is appropriate. However, the CSWO should be positioned at a level of seniority commensurate with being able to advise the local authority and undertake the complex duties described in this guidance.

11. The CSWO is a ‘proper officer’ in relation to the social work function: an officer given particular responsibility on behalf of a local authority, where the law requires the function to be discharged by a specified post holder.

Competencies, Scope and Responsibilities of the CSWO

12. Clarification of competence, scope, responsibilities and access, should maximise the effectiveness of the post and the corporate and professional contribution it makes.

12.1 Competencies

The qualifications of the CSWO are set down in regulations¹. The post holder must be a qualified social worker, registered with the Scottish Social Services Council. Local authorities will want to ensure that the CSWO can demonstrate extensive experience at a senior level of both operational and strategic management of social work and social care services.

12.2 Scope

The scope of the role relates to all social work and social care services, whether provided directly by the local authority or in partnership with other agencies. Where services are purchased on behalf of the authority, including from the private and voluntary sector, the CSWO has a responsibility to advise on the specification, quality and standards of services commissioned.

12.3 Responsibility for values and standards

The CSWO should:

- (a) promote values and standards of professional practice, including relevant National Standards, and provide a clear statement of expectation of social services workers and employers (consistent with the SSSC Codes of Practice) to be agreed with the Chief Executive and elected members;
- (b) ensure that these values and standards are communicated on a regular basis, adhered to and reviewed periodically;
- (c) work with Human Resources (or equivalent support function) to ensure that all social service workers meet the requirements of the SSSC's Code of Practice and that all registered workers meet the requirements of their regulatory body;
- (d) support and advise managers in maintaining and developing high standards of practice and supervision;
- (e) ensure that only registered social workers undertake those functions reserved in legislation or are accountable for those functions described in guidance;
- (f) ensure that there are effective governance arrangements for the management of the complex balance of need, risk and civil liberties, in accordance with professional standards. Where the council's corporate policy on risk does not reflect this balance, the CSWO is required to bring this to the attention of the Chief Executive and to contribute to the development of appropriate governance arrangements;
- (g) ensure appropriate advice is provided on corporate workforce planning and quality assurance, including safe recruitment practice, probation/mentoring arrangements, managing poor performance and promoting continuous learning and development for staff;
- (h) actively promote continuous improvement, raising standards and evidence-informed good practice, including the development of person-centred services that are focussed on the needs of the service user;

¹ **1996 No. 515 (S.49)** The Qualifications of Chief Social Work Officers (Scotland) Regulations 1996 HMSO

- (i) oversee the quality of practice learning experiences for social work students and effective workplace assessment arrangements, in accordance with the SSSC Code of Practice for Employers of Social Service Workers;
- (j) ensure that appropriate systems are in place both to promote good practice and to identify and address weak and poor practice. The CSWO should work with managers to ensure these systems are effective and, where this is not the case, the CSWO has the responsibility for bringing this to the attention of the Chief Executive and contributing to the development or improvement of such systems;
- (k) ensure that significant case reviews are undertaken into all critical incidents either resulting in - or which may have resulted in - death or serious harm;
- (l) take final decisions on behalf of the local authority in relation to a range of social work matters, including adoption, secure accommodation, guardianship and other statutory decisions required from time to time;
- (m) contribute to reports to the Chief Executive and elected members – providing independent comment where necessary - on the findings of relevant performance reports, setting out:
 - i. implications for the local authority, for services, for service users and carers, for individual teams/members of staff/partners as appropriate;
 - ii. implications for delivery of national and local outcomes;
 - iii. proposals for remedial action;
 - iv. means for sharing good practice and learning;
 - v. monitoring and reporting arrangements for identified improvement activity;
- (n) report to the local authority on any other social work related issues;
- (o) prepare an annual report to the local authority on all of the statutory, governance and leadership functions of the role;

12.4 **Access**

To discharge these responsibilities effectively, the CSWO needs:

- (a) **access** to people and information across the local authority, including the Chief Executive, elected members, managers and frontline practitioners, partner services and agencies. These arrangements will vary according to individual councils, but should be clearly articulated;
- (b) to be able to bring matters to the attention of the Chief Executive to ensure that professional standards and values are maintained;
- (c) to **be visible and available** to any social services worker and ensure the availability of professional advice and guidance;
- (d) to provide professional advice as required to senior managers across the authority in support of corporate agendas.

12.5 **Leadership Responsibilities**

The CSWO is responsible for providing professional leadership. The CSWO should:

- (a) support and contribute to evidence-informed decision making and practice – at professional or corporate level – by providing appropriate professional advice;
- (b) seek to enhance professional leadership and accountability throughout the organisation to support the quality of service and delivery;
- (c) support the delivery of social work’s contribution to achieving local
- (d) promote partnership working across professions and agencies to support the delivery of suitably integrated social work services;
- (e) promote social work values across corporate agendas.

Accountability and Reporting Arrangements

13. Local authorities will need to agree:

- (a) how the CSWO is enabled to influence corporate issues, such as managing risk, setting budget priorities and public service reform;
- (b) access arrangements for the CSWO to the Chief Executive and elected members;
- (c) how the CSWO reports to the Chief Executive;
- (d) a statement on how any potential conflict of interest will be recognised and resolved;
- (e) the relationships, responsibilities and respective accountabilities of managers and the CSWO;
- (f) a mechanism to include an independent, professional perspective to the appointment of the CSWO;
- (g) procedures for removal of a CSWO postholder, bearing in mind the need for continuity in the provision of the CSWO functions, the value of independent professional advice and the arrangements for the appointment and removal of the local authority’s other proper officers;
- (h) formal deputising arrangements to cover any period of absence by the CSWO.

Conclusion

14. This document complements the body of guidance being developed under *Changing Lives* to ensure the delivery of safe, accountable and effective social work practice. It should be taken forward in conjunction with two further guidance documents scheduled for publication in 2009 - the Contribution of the Social Work Profession to Delivering Better Outcomes for Scotland and a Practice Governance Framework for Social Work Services.

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