

# **GUIDANCE for Local Practitioner Forums**

## Introduction

*This guidance replaces the LPF Toolkit 2 published in April 2007.*

*This paper is to be used as a guide only and may be adapted to suit each local area.*

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## 1. The Background

### 1.1 What is *Changing Lives*?

During 2004 and 2005 an independent review group chaired by Willy Roe enquired into the responsibilities, functioning and future of social work services in Scotland – the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Review of Social Work. Their report *Changing Lives* was published in February 2006 and the Scottish Government committed itself to implementing its recommendations. The Workforce & Capacity Issues Division have been leading on this within the Scottish Government.

A *Changing Lives* implementation plan was published in June 2006 which included the intention to establish five change programmes to drive this work forward, each led by a chair from a service delivery agency. The implementation plan itself was indicative and actions have developed and changed as the work of the change groups has progressed.

### 1.2 What is a Local Practitioner Forum?

*Changing Lives* proposed that the implementation process should harness the active involvement of frontline professional practitioners in the development of social work, and Local Practitioner Forums (LPFs) were the vehicle proposed to deliver this.

A LPF offers front line practitioners the opportunity to meet and discuss local and national issues relating to *Changing Lives* in particular, and social work services in general, and consider how these issues relate to their day to day work. It brings practitioners together from across the social work services workforce, enabling them to share ideas and experiences and reflect on social work developments in their local area, influencing change through sharing ideas and conclusions.

LPFs operate at local level and are encouraged to include staff from the statutory, voluntary, independent and private sectors operating in that local authority area to ensure that effective partnerships are established which will strengthen and enhance services. Each LPF is encouraged to nominate a Chair who may act as representative for their respective area. This Chair would have a role in ensuring a two way flow of information with other LPFs and with local and, where appropriate, national leaders.

### 1.3 What is the purpose of Local Practitioner Forums?

The main purpose of a LPF is to provide front line practitioners with an opportunity to ensure changes to local practice are informed by front line experience, by contributing to local and national debates and discussions. Whilst LPFs were proposed in *Changing Lives*, they are seen as a means for front line staff to have a continuing and effective influence on the future development of social work services. In order for this to happen, it will be important for senior managers locally to ensure that they establish good communication with their LPF on a regular basis.

Whilst the subject matter for LPF discussions is firmly the responsibility of each individual forum, LPFs should have a clear focus on improving outcomes and promoting change in practice and organisational culture. It should look at examples of good practice and make links to issues across sectors and services. Its discussions should be solution focused.

LPFs might also identify stressors, enablers and barriers within local practice and policies, and provide an opportunity to consider professional issues relating to recruitment, retention and deployment of staff.

Issues such as pay and conditions remain primarily a matter for employers' and workers' representatives. Local domestic issues raised should be noted by the Chair and forwarded to the appropriate local contact/area of responsibility.

*It is at the discretion of each LPF to decide on issues for its agenda. However, it may be that, from time-to-time, local managers, ADSW or the Scottish Government ask LPFs to consider and contribute to certain issues relating to current local or national developments.*

## 2. Setting up a Local Practitioner Forum

There is no precise template to follow in setting up a LPF, and those LPFs in existence are set up in a number of different ways, reflecting local circumstances. Following discussions with your own senior management, we recommend that you make contact with other established LPFs, or an ADSW Professional Development Manager (contact details included at 2.11), to identify what type of LPF structure would suit your needs best.

### 2.1 Membership

Membership for each LPF is at the discretion of each local area.

It has proved through engagement with those involved in setting up LPFs that it is beneficial to include members from the wider social work services workforce. For example, where social work services are delivered through CHCPs, this may also include colleagues from the health sector.

The LPF would therefore be open to any member of the workforce – whether in the local authority, voluntary, private or independent sector - who works directly with service users in the delivery of social work services.

This approach has enabled more members to join LPFs and benefits the LPF with a greater variety of views, ideas and experiences..

### 2.2 How does a LPF relate to bodies like Unison/BASW/COT?

LPFs should complement rather than compete with existing bodies. Their unique value is to give a voice to practitioners on developments within social work, including those who are not necessarily members of existing groups, and to consider local practice based issues in relation to *Changing Lives*.

### 2.3 What sort of meeting schedule and other activities should be undertaken?

This is at the discretion of each LPF.

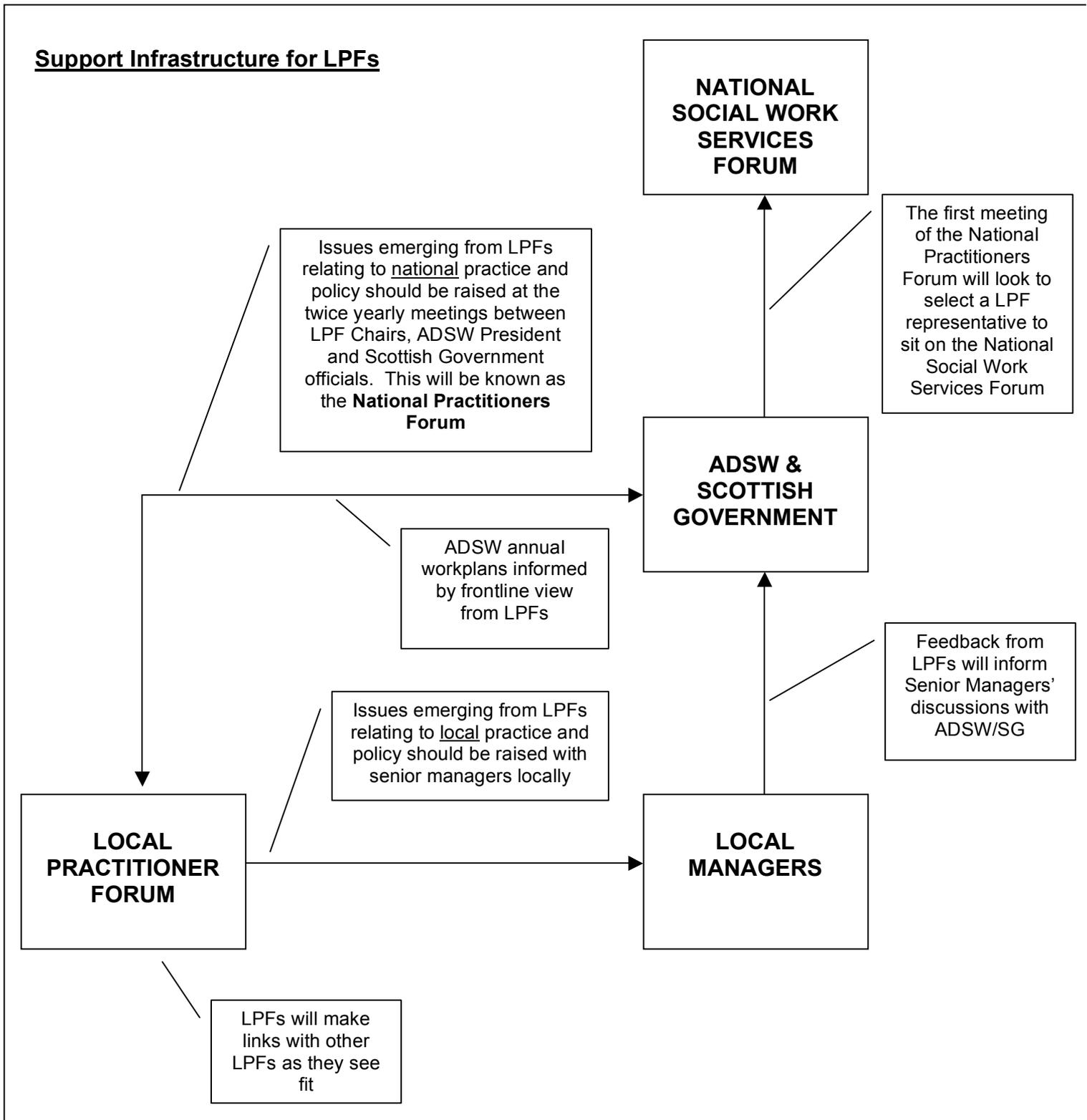
### 2.4 Is there any funding available for my LPF?

There is no money available from the Scottish Government for LPFs. The modest costs associated with running a LPF should be financed at a local level.

### 2.5 How will my LPF be supported and administered?

The support and administration of a LPF is the responsibility of each local area. LPFs should look to open up a chain of communication with local managers to provide feedback on issues emerging from LPFs relating to local policy and practice. ADSW and Scottish Government officials will meet with LPF Chairs twice yearly to discuss issues relating to

national policy. This meeting will be known as the National Practitioners Forum. The diagram below sets out the support infrastructure for LPFs:



As part of this structure, ADSW and the Scottish Government will provide additional support to LPFs:

## ADSW:

- Will contact LPFs to arrange bi-annual National Practitioner Forum meetings between the Chair of each LPF and the President of ADSW and invite suggestions for agenda items. This provides a vehicle for LPFs to influence the development of national policy and practice.
- Will encourage Directors of Social Work/Chief Social Work Officers to support the LPF within their area and ensure that channels of communication exist, creating a mechanism for views and suggestions emerging from LPFs to influence policy at the local level.
- Will advise LPFs of key ADSW agendas and seek their contribution to informing and progressing these agendas.

## Scottish Government:

- Will ensure emerging work on the Changing Lives products is distributed to LPFs
- Will distribute policy updates via eBulletin and *Changing Lives* Newsletter. Latest news will also be available on the website [www.socialworkscotland.org.uk](http://www.socialworkscotland.org.uk).
- Will distribute LPF contact list
- Will provide presentations on *Changing Lives* developments

### 2.6 Who do I inform that I am setting up a LPF in my area?

In the first instance you should look to discuss your intention to set up a LPF with your Director of Social Work/Chief Social Work Officer with a view to setting up a communication mechanism between your LPF and local management.

Please also contact the *Changing Lives* Team in the Scottish Government (see contact details below) who will add your details to their contacts list, which appears on the website [www.socialworkscotland.org.uk](http://www.socialworkscotland.org.uk). This will mean that you receive the latest information relating to *Changing Lives*, via the eBulletin, *Changing Lives* Newsletter or other means.

Inclusion on the contacts list will also ensure that the Chair of your LPF is invited to the bi-annual National Practitioner Forum, and involved in any other LPF-related work emerging from ADSW.

### 2.7 Who should I keep informed of progress of my LPF?

You should keep your local Director of Social Work and the relevant ADSW contact for your area (see contact details below) updated with details of latest developments with your LPF.

You should alert the Scottish Government to any changes to the contact details of your LPF.

### 2.8 How do I share views and suggestions from my LPF?

The diagram above sets out the mechanism for providing feedback to the most appropriate bodies on the discussions emerging from your LPF.

Views and suggestions regarding local issues should be shared with local managers.

Views and suggestions regarding national issues should be shared with local managers and/or the National Practitioner Forum, unless otherwise directed (for example where the Scottish Government has requested direct contact, such as during a public consultation period).

## 2.9 How do I get in touch with other LPFs?

There is currently a list of LPF contacts available on the LPF page of the socialworkscotland website <http://www.socialworkscotland.org.uk/forum2.php>.

## 2.10 What is the National Social Work Services Forum (NSWSF)?

The NSWSF, chaired by the Minister for Children & Early Years, consists of a wide range of stakeholders who provide an informed body of opinion to support the implementation of the *Changing Lives* agenda. The Forum meets quarterly and the membership includes a LPF representative. A LPF representative to sit on the National Social Work Services Forum will be selected at the first meeting of the National Practitioners Forum.

## 2.11 Contacts

**Scottish Government** (for issues relating to *Changing Lives*):

Ben Coburn – [ben.coburn@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ben.coburn@scotland.gsi.gov.uk); 0131 244 7683

Catherine Rainey – [catherine.rainey@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:catherine.rainey@scotland.gsi.gov.uk); 0131 244 0661

**ADSW** (for issues relating to the development of your LPF):

Yvonne Robson - [yvonne.robson@adsw.org.uk](mailto:yvonne.robson@adsw.org.uk); 07786 026 804  
(for Moray, Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen, Angus, Dundee, Perth & Kinross, Fife, Clackmannanshire, Stirling, Falkirk, East Dunbartonshire, West Lothian, Midlothian, East Lothian, Scottish Borders)

Wendy Harrington - [wendy.harrington@adsw.org.uk](mailto:wendy.harrington@adsw.org.uk) 07785 763064  
(for West Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, Argyll & Bute, Glasgow, East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway, Shetland, Orkney, Western Isles, Highland, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Edinburgh)